



Mr Koh Boon Chin watching over his seven-year-old son Ethan (seated next to him) on his first day of school at St Hilda's Primary yesterday. His daughter is in Primary 4 at the same school. ST PHOTOS: RAJ NADARAJAN

# First day of Primary 1 for 40,000 kids

Parents turn up to show support; 7 new schools take in first P1 batches

By KEZIA TOH

LECTURER Mark Singh had a busy day yesterday but all his attention was taken up by just one pupil - his own son who was attending Primary 1 for the first time yesterday.

He, like many other anxious parents keeping an eye on their children making the big switch from kindergarten, was eagerly observing his son Christian from the sidelines, and hoping that nothing would go awry.

When Mr Singh, 37, saw his seven-year-old son giving him a wave and tucking into chicken rice during recess at St Andrew's Junior School, he heaved a sigh of relief.

"It was nerve-wrecking as it was a new chapter in his life and he was moving into a more formal curriculum," said the father who took a day off from work at Singapore Polytechnic yesterday.

"At times, it felt as if I was more excited and worried than him," said Mr Singh, who took Christian to school at 7am, before returning for recess at 10am, and then picking him up at 1.30pm after classes ended.

His wife is a teacher and Christian is their first child.

Mr Koh Boon Chin, 42, a manager, also took time out to accompany his son Ethan, seven, to school at St Hilda's Primary.

"I wanted to give him confidence so that he does not feel that he is starting this new journey on his own," said Mr Koh, whose daughter is in Primary 4 at the same school.

This year's cohort of Primary 1

pupils is 40,000-strong.

Yesterday was also momentous for seven new primary schools which took in their first batches of Primary 1 pupils.

Palm View Primary, Punggol Green Primary, Punggol View Primary, Sengkang Green Primary and Springdale Primary are in the newer estates of Punggol and Sengkang, while Westwood Primary is in Jurong West and Riverside Primary is in Woodlands.

It was generally smooth sailing

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## NERVE-WRECKING

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— Lecturer Mark Singh, 37, whose son Christian was starting Primary 1 at St Andrew's Junior School yesterday. He took a day off from work at Singapore Polytechnic to take Christian to school at 7am, and returned for recess at 10am, and picked him up at 1.30pm after classes ended.

## CONFIDENCE BOOSTER

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— Manager Koh Boon Chin, 42, who accompanied his son Ethan for his first day of school at St Hilda's Primary yesterday.

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Parents looking on as their children assemble in the school hall at St Hilda's Primary yesterday. Schools held activities to ease Primary 1 pupils into formal schooling.

yesterday as the schools, staked out by many parents, held activities to ease the seven-year-olds into formal schooling.

At Punggol Green Primary, vice-principal James Goh said the academic curriculum will start only on Monday.

"It gives time for children to get used to the routine of school," he added.

This week, pupils will try their hand at activities such as crafting their own name tags and creating finger puppets.

Parents are free to move around the school and participate in its flag-raising ceremony and a morning workout activity.

Minister for the Environment and Water Resources Vivian Balakrishnan posted a Facebook picture of him taking his youngest son to school to start Primary 1 yesterday.

He wrote: "A new beginning for all our children - and may they fulfil all their dreams and destinies along the 'path of the infinite'."

His son attends ACS (Junior). Some schools are also mindful that their own teachers may have children starting Primary 1.

At Anglo-Chinese School (Independent), teachers who have a child entering Primary 1 or pre-school can take the day off to accompany him or her to school.

This initiative was introduced last year, and about three teachers took up the offer.

Principal Winston Hodge said: "Many teachers are also parents, and while there are many 'first days' in school for them as teachers, there is only one first day for their own children as parents.

"We want to support our teachers in creating a memorable and happy first day at school for their own young child."

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## Taking pains to make sure first day goes well

By JANICE TAI

WHEN Sherman Ho boarded the school bus for his first day of school at the National University of Singapore (NUS) High School yesterday, his parents followed the bus closely in their car.

"I was afraid he would create a commotion in the bus," said Sherman's mother, Mrs Alice Wee, 41.

The 12-year-old, formerly from Pathlight School, which takes in children with autism, has attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and Asperger syndrome, a mild form of autism.

The nervous mother had taken pains to make sure her son was well-adjusted and well-prepared for school, because his place there had been hard-won.

Though Sherman is deeply interested in maths and science - he emerged fourth in the Asia-Pacific at a recent maths olympiad - he had failed to secure a spot at the school on the first try.

After he topped his cohort with a PSLE score of 273 in November last year, he tried again and was accepted. His score is the highest so far in Pathlight's eight-year history.

In the days leading up to his first day of school, Mrs Wee took Sherman to the NUS High School and taught him how to make his way back home using a street directory app.

The app tracks his location so that he is able to get to a bus stop. It also indicates the



Sherman Ho, 12, has attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and Asperger syndrome, a mild form of autism. He topped his cohort at Pathlight School with a PSLE score of 273 in November last year. ST PHOTO: DESMOND WEE

estimated time of arrival of the next bus.

Staff from the school also met Sherman and Mrs Wee to discuss his condition, to see how his learning can be better supported.

As Sherman gets anxious whenever he misses out on what is taught in class, the school showed him where and how to go about getting extra help.

These preparations put Sherman in good stead for his orientation yesterday.

He had told his psychologist that he was looking forward to making new friends, as he had found it difficult to maintain

friendships in the past.

Sherman told The Straits Times: "I am in the process of making new friends. I want to go beyond my comfort zone but it gets overwhelming sometimes as there is too much information."

"But I want to remove the barrier between myself and those who do not have autism."

Yesterday, he learnt cheers and mass dance moves with his peers, and clarified with his teachers on how to use the school's e-mail account.

When asked if he enjoyed his first day at school, he gave a succinct reply: "Obviously."

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# After-school care centres get top marks from parents

By STACEY CHIA

IT WAS a long first day at school for seven-year-old Jayden Soh.

The day started at 8am for the Sengkang Green Primary School pupil. Even though classes ended at 1.30pm, he was still in school at 6pm - and loving every minute of it.

The Primary One pupil had made friends, explored the brand-new school building and the fun did not end even when curriculum time ended, all thanks to a student care centre on the premises.

It is one of 14 new school-based student care centres launched yesterday by the Ministry of Education. These centres provide after-school programmes such as homework supervision and games.

Other schools with the new centres include Opera Estate Primary and Blangah Rise Primary.

At Jayden's school, the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) runs the centre, which has 36 pupils. When classes for the day ended yesterday, five staff members of the YMCA picked up

the children from their classrooms and took them to the two rooms in the school specially set aside for the student care centre where all activities are held.

They were given lunch, allowed to shower and also took a 30-minute nap. When they got up at around 3pm, there was a light snack waiting for them. As it was first day of school there was no time set aside for homework.

Instead they played games to break the ice and learnt how to fold their sleeping bags, before their parents picked them up at around 6.30pm.

Several principals told The Straits Times that such services are proving popular. Mrs Daphne Yeoh, principal of Sengkang Green Primary, said there is a waiting list for the student care scheme because she could not admit all the pupils who signed up.

Mrs Yeoh added that, as an international organisation, the YMCA may also run a global awareness programme for the pupils as an after-school activity.

This could include inviting foreign speakers to share their cul-



Ms Jolene Koh (left), picking up her son Jayden Soh from Sengkang Green Primary's after-school care centre yesterday. The centre provides programmes such as homework supervision. ST PHOTO: ASHLEIGH SIM

ture with the pupils, she said.

Currently, 80 out of 187 primary schools have such centres. MOE said that more will be set up by the end of this year.

Jayden's mother, Ms Jolene Koh, 32, said that if it were not for the school-based service, she would have to get someone to take her son to another student care centre in the neighbourhood.

"It's more convenient and I won't have to worry about whether he has reached the place safely," said the procurement executive, who will pay about \$275 a month for the after-school care.

She added that without supervi-

sion, her son may spend most of his free time watching TV.

Another parent, Mr Daniel Goh, 45, said that having someone supervise his son when he does his homework meant that he could spend more of his time after work interacting with his child.

Mrs Yeoh said that the after-school programme will be structured with time allocated for homework and other activities but it will not be an extension of the classroom.

"We don't want it to be like a second school for them, it must feel like a home," said Mrs Yeoh.

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# Teachers to be consulted on new code of conduct

IT IS important to maintain the trust that parents have in educators, said Education Minister Heng Swee Keat, noting that over the next few weeks, school heads will be consulting teachers on the new code of conduct drawn up by the ministry.

His comments yesterday came after several cases of teacher misconduct made the news last year, including a 32-year-old female teacher who was jailed for having sex with a 15-year-old male student in her school.

In the most recent case, former River Valley High School principal Steven Koh is being probed by the Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau. The issue is believed to centre on travel agencies set up in schools under his watch.

Mr Heng said that despite the scandals, many parents remain confident of educators and added that the teaching profession will "emerge out of this stronger".

He said much thought had gone into drawing up the code and ministry officials have done extensive consultation for over a year and also looked at codes used in other countries.

"So I think it is a good set of documents which will serve as a baseline document that would guide our educators," he noted.



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The new Code of Professional Conduct for Educators incorporates two documents currently used by teachers - the Civil Service Instruction Manuals and the Ministry of Education internal conduct guidelines.

It will also focus on the teaching ethos, which is a set of professional beliefs, practices and conduct.

Areas covered in the new code will include maintaining professional educator-student relationships and the dos and don'ts on social websites.

There are about 33,000 teachers in schools.

SANDRA DAVIE