

7 schools gear up for first batch of P1 pupils

New schools going the extra mile to engage kids, develop their interests

By KEZIA TOH

SEVEN-YEAR-OLD Adler Tem faces a tray of coins – in 10-cent, 20-cent, 50-cent and dollar denominations.

His mother, physiotherapist Felicia Seet, is teaching him to count change so he can buy food in the canteen when he starts Primary 1 today at Westwood Primary in Jurong West – one of seven new primary schools opening their doors this year.

“It is one of the most useful skills to learn,” said Ms Seet, 32.

She also drives Adler past his new school – less than 1km from their home – to warm him up to the idea of schooling.

Adler, for his part, is wide-eyed at the thought of using brand-new facilities such as the library, making friends and – best of all – donning the teal uniform that all Westwood pupils will wear for classes and physical education. “I’m excited to go to school because I feel proud in my uniform – I tried it on and it is very nice,” he said.

Today, he joins other Primary 1 pupils as the pioneer batch in seven new primary schools, most of them sited in the newer towns of Punggol and Sengkang.

Aside from Westwood Primary, the new schools are: Palm View Primary, Punggol Green Pri-

mary, Punggol View Primary, Sengkang Green Primary, Springdale Primary and Riverside Primary in Woodlands.

These schools are pulling out all the stops to welcome their first batch of Primary 1 pupils, introducing programmes that make use of the schools’ surroundings and develop pupils’ interests.

At Punggol Green Primary, for example, Primary 1 and 2 pupils will go on learning journeys at nearby Punggol Waterway and Lorong Halus Wetland Reserves.

They will also do environmental projects to hone their skills in problem solving, critical thinking and teamwork, said vice-principal James Goh.

Teachers will use nature to teach academic subjects such as mathematics. Instead of using a ruler to teach units of measurement, pupils can use leaves to measure the circumference of their school pond.

“We won’t spoon-feed the children, but will help them understand concepts by discovering them for themselves,” said Mr Goh.

Palm View Primary’s proximity to a park inspired its open layout, said principal Clifford Chua.

For example, common corridors give pupils a peek of the park through openings and bridges.

Meanwhile, Sengkang Green



Seven-year-old Adler Tem (seen here with his mother Felicia Seet and his new pile of books) starts school at Westwood Primary today. Meanwhile, Punggol Green Primary teachers Wee Chee Kok (below, left), 40, and Angelynna Lim, 32, are preparing their lessons. ST PHOTOS: MARK CHEONG FOR THE STRAITS TIMES, CHEW SENG KIM



Primary is enrolling its pupils in enrichment courses such as jazz dance, calligraphy and guzheng, to develop pupils’ interest in these areas early, said principal Daphne Yeoh.

But prepping for opening day

was not all smooth sailing for the new schools.

One challenge was convincing parents to send their children to a school that has no track record, said Springdale Primary’s principal Lee Siew Cheng.

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INDEPENDENT LEARNING

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– Mr James Goh, vice-principal of Punggol Green Primary, on how teachers will use nature to teach academic subjects

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To overcome this, the school showed parents its state-of-the-art facilities – which include a band room, dance studio and library equipped with a stage for performances, said Mrs Lee.

The extra effort seems to have paid off for schools like Westwood Primary.

Parents went to the ballot box to vie for a place for their children there, enhancing the growing reputation of relatively new schools.

Westwood Primary principal Ng Yeow Ling has attributed this to marketing efforts, including distributing fliers at pre-schools and posting information about school matters on Facebook.

The primary schools also held an orientation day last month to familiarise pupils with the school compound, and to brief parents on what to expect when their child goes to school.

✉ keziatoh@sph.com.sg