

PRESS COVERAGE

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Bright hope for autistic students

Pathlight to build new pre-vocational training centre

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IN ABOUT a year's time, autistic students at Pathlight School will be getting a pre-vocational training centre at their new premises, thanks to Ngee Ann Kongsi's \$2-million gift.

This is the first time Ngee Ann Kongsi is donating to a special school. The largesse will go towards constructing a three-storey centre where students can learn skills such as office work and food and beverage production.

Pathlight is also helping NTUC LearningHub find ways to make the latter's courses and trainers autism-friendly.

These two initiatives are all part of a \$33-million project to build a regional centre of excellence for autism, which will house both Pathlight School and the Autism Resource Centre (Singapore). The Ministry of Education (MOE) will contribute \$26 million in funding, and the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports another \$400,000. The balance comes from other donors.

Senior Minister of State for Education Grace Fu said: "Pathlight School started in 2004 with only about 40 students. Now, that number has increased to over 400 students, aged between 6 and 18. But, as enrolment numbers have grown, so has the need for space."

With the new premises, Pathlight School and the resource centre hope to offer an expanded programme for early intervention for autistic children.

"We are working with the United Kingdom's National Autistic Society for worldwide

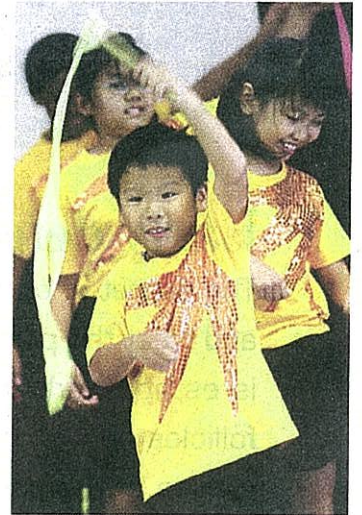


PHOTO COURTESY PATHLIGHT SCHOOL

accreditation to push for quality standards," said Ms Denise Phua, president of the resource centre, adding that more announcements will be made next year.

Also going up on the 1.6-hectare site for the centre of excellence – which will consist of four blocks of buildings – is an information and technology school with at least four computer laboratories to train not only Pathlight School students, but also those from special and mainstream schools.

A daily living skills unit, offering life-skills training in areas such as hygiene, grooming and travel, will also be built.

Some 600 children from early intervention to secondary school levels are expected to benefit from the new centre of excellence, which is targeted to open by the middle of next year. There will also be close to 2,000 autism training places for family caregivers, teachers and other professionals.

Said Ms Phua: "Our mission here is to give the students a quality education so that they can move on to further studies or employment, and be able to pay income tax and not just receive social welfare."