



(From left) Guest-of-honour Senior Minister of State for Education Grace Fu, president of Autism Resource Centre Denise Phua and Pathlight and Eden School boards adviser Ho Ching interacting with pupils at Eden School's opening yesterday. ST PHOTO: DESMOND LIM

Eden's curriculum will challenge kids

Autistic children to get training that will make them employable

■ BY JANE NG

EDEN School, which focuses on vocational skills for children with severe autism, opened yesterday.

Located in Jurong and formerly known as the Singapore Autism School, Eden begins a new chapter with a beefed-up curriculum that will impart a range of skills to its students.

These include proper work habits, specific vocational skills, social communication and basic literacy and numeracy skills.

The school, for students aged between six and 18, will complement the

efforts of Pathlight, its sister school in Ang Mo Kio, which provides mainstream education for children with autism.

Before Eden's curriculum was revamped, it focused on teaching its students general functional skills aimed at enabling them to take care of themselves.

Eden will move to its new campus in Bukit Batok in the middle of next year. Its facilities there will include an industrial kitchen, an information technology lab, an art studio and an office worksite, where students can pick up proper work habits, such as follow-

ing instructions and working independently.

The opening of the school, timed with this month being World Autism Awareness Month, was graced by Senior Minister of State for Education Grace Fu and Ms Ho Ching, the adviser to the school.

Ms Fu told reporters the school will broaden the spectrum of help available to parents of children with autism and give these children a better education.

She said the Education Ministry was also trying out ways of integrating children with special needs with children in mainstream schools.

The ministry has done more for special-needs education lately, including posting special-needs officers to more than 100 mainstream schools to help children with autism or dyslexia.

MP for Jalan Besar GRC Denise

Phua, who supervises Pathlight and Eden, said the target is for more older students to be trained in skills to make them employable.

She said that in the charity and special-needs world, "where expectations can be low, we must raise the bar in our expectations of what we as providers can do for them and what the students themselves can achieve".

For instance, where the students used to have a snack in the classroom, they now go to the canteen for recess.

The school's principal, Ms Jenny Lai, said many of her students had shown potential. She added: "In the past, we would just teach them to take care of themselves. Now if we can stretch them and prepare them for employment, we will."

This pleased parents with children in the school. Lecturer Norman Kee, 45, and his wife Bernadette, 43, have three sons with autism, two of them at Eden. Mrs Kee said her boys are good with their hands, so she hoped they would be able to pick up skills for jobs in, say, horticulture or cookery.

"These children just need another style of learning, so the school is trying to match its teaching style to the students' learning style."

Mr Kee said: "I like that the school accepts them as they are, and does not see them as people with a disability. They are just different."

janeng@sph.com.sg