



(From left) Ms Grace Fu having a chat with pupils Gareth Tuscano (standing) and Ahmad Syahmi, along with Ms Denise Phua (centre) and Ms Ho Ching. ERNEST CHUA

An Eden for autistic children

LOH CHEE KONG

cheekong@mediacorp.com.sg

IT HAS taken some years but now the education ecosystem for children with autism is near complete — with the launch of Eden School on Friday.

Converted from the Singapore Autism School at Yuan Ching Road, the makeover is far from just a name change: Specifically, the new school will remove the admission IQ cap of 70 and run a specially-designed curriculum to impart independence and vocational skills.

Said its principal Jenny Lai: “Some children may have higher IQ but because of their autism, their stress levels are very high and they may not be able to cope with mainstream education.”

The school is the latest addition to an ecosystem that began life in 2003 with the founding of Pathlight School, which provides mainstream academic education tailored to children with autism. Autism Resource Cen-

tre president Denise Phua supervises both Eden School and Pathlight School.

For her, the “beauty” of the ecosystem is the synergy between the two schools. Besides sharing training resources, they will also implement a centralised enrolment system where prospective students are assessed through interviews and lesson simulation exercises.

And even after the student enrolls with either school, he or she may be transferred to the other. For instance, an autistic student uncomfortable with the academic rigours in Pathlight School could be transferred to Eden School seamlessly, and vice-versa for late bloomers in Eden who show ability for formal academic learning.

Said Ms Phua, Member of Parliament for Jalan Besar: “It takes away the parents’ fears of their children not being in the right school.”

Senior Minister of State (Education) Grace Fu hailed the effort in offering “a different segment of educational needs (to) the community”.