

## MOE to add 450 places at 2 special-needs schools

By GWENDOLYN NG

TO MEET the increased demand for special-needs education, the Ministry of Education (MOE) will add 450 places to two Special Education (Sped) schools by the end of 2013, Education Minister Heng Swee Keat said yesterday.

The two schools are Pathlight and Metta School.

Mr Heng said during a visit to Pathlight yesterday that MOE will look into ways to "improve the quality, affordability and accessibility of special education".

He added that MOE will spend about \$30 million to upgrade infrastructure at three Sped schools: Pathlight, Metta and Delta Senior School.

During the National Day Rally last month, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said more help will be

given to special-needs children.

Pathlight, which caters to autistic students, will add 300 places in phases from next year, taking the school's total capacity to 900 by the end of 2013.

The former Chong Boon Primary School, located in Ang Mo Kio Street 44 near Pathlight, will be refurbished to accommodate the additional students.

Pathlight board supervisor Denise Phua said the "additional places...are very (much) needed and very appreciated" as the school has a waiting list of about 200 to 300 applicants each year. She added that the school aims to hire 25 teachers and 25 assistant teachers to match its increased capacity.

Vocational school Metta will add 150 places for students with autism or intellectual disabilities. This will happen from 2013 after the school's new extension block is completed

at the end of next year.

Vocational school Delta Senior, which caters to students with intellectual disability, will move into its new premises in Choa Chu Kang Grove next year.

Mr Heng also said yesterday that Ms Sim Ann, Senior Parliamentary Secretary for Education and Law, will review the support given to the Sped sector. The study will be conducted over the next six to nine months.

Ms Sim will address concerns such as the retention of teachers, and the emotional and financial burden of families with special-needs children.

Following the review, Madam Angelia Tan, 47, hopes to get more specialised help for her eight-year-old daughter, who suffers from cerebral palsy.

Madam Tan said there is no point in getting her to "undergo a standard programme when she needs more training in areas like speech and physiotherapy". Her daughter attends a government-funded special-education school.

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