



An animation class at Pathlight School, which caters to children with autism. A national study will gauge the effectiveness of various programmes in developing children with disabilities. Its findings will determine which schemes are worth expanding and which ones can be cut back. ST FILE PHOTO

Study to examine programmes for children with disabilities

BY CASSANDRA CHEW

A NATIONAL study will be carried out from next year to pinpoint what programmes are effective in developing children with disabilities.

It will be done in several phases and will take a few years to complete, Minister for Community Development, Youth and Sports Vivian Balakrishnan said in Parliament yesterday.

He disclosed the review when replying to Ms Denise Phua (Jalan Besar GRC), who had called for it.

His ministry has asked the National Institute of Education to do the study, which will measure the impact the social,

education and therapy services provided by these early intervention programmes have on children.

Eight voluntary welfare organisations run these programmes at 12 centres, under the Early Intervention Programme for Infants and Children (Epic).

The study's initial phase will aim to develop standardised tools to evaluate a child's development in five areas.

These are: motor skills, cognition and perception, communication and language, social skills, and self-help skills.

Dr Balakrishnan said the tools will allow his ministry to assess the efficacy of programmes at Epic centres.

"The key objective is to get a more evidence-based approach to the way we

manage these children," he said.

The findings will help to sift out the more effective programmes worth expanding from those that should be cut back, he added.

Other partners in the study are: the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health (MOH), and the two hospitals under MOH's Child Development Programme - KK Women's and Children's Hospital and National University Hospital.

The study has long been sought by experts who bemoan the dearth of disability studies in Singapore. A recent MOH study found standards were inconsistent at early intervention centres.

Ms Phua, who is president of Autism Resource Centre, welcomed the news, but asked if the social sector could nominate disability experts for the research team.

Welcoming their participation, Dr Balakrishnan said a multidisciplinary team was needed.