

Pathlight looking for partner school

Its two satellite schools can't take in 60 Primary 6 pupils graduating this year

■ BY JANE NG

WANTED: a secondary school or junior college willing to share space with students from Pathlight School.

The school in Ang Mo Kio, which takes in students with autism, currently sends 100 of its secondary-level students to Chong Boon Secondary School and Bishan Park Secondary School for lessons.

These two satellite schools will not be able to take in Pathlight's batch of 60 Primary 6 pupils graduating this year.

Currently, Pathlight students have been allocated 10 classrooms in Chong Boon Secondary and four in Bishan Park Secondary. In the latter case, the four classrooms were partitioned into eight smaller ones.

Pathlight, which has an enrolment of 600, was set up in 2004.

Autism is a brain-based developmental disorder that affects a person's ability to communicate with others.

Pathlight offers academic lessons as well as a vocational track for those with more severe autism.

Ms Denise Phua, supervisor of the school's board, said Pathlight is urgently looking for another satellite school. When its Primary 6 pupils pass the PSLE, "it's time to nudge them out of the special school environment", she said.

At the satellite schools, Pathlight dispatches its own teachers, support teachers and psychologists to support the students in preparing for the N- or O-level examinations.

They can attend lessons in mainstream classes only if they are assessed ready by both Path-



Pathlight's Caleb Heng (centre, wearing T-shirt) and Chester Sim (standing) interact with Bishan Park Secondary students at recess. ST PHOTO: DESMOND FOO

light and the satellite school. In the case of Chong Boon, they have to go through an interview with its principal.

But the Pathlight students get to mingle with those from the mainstream classes during recess, along corridors, in the library or at school events.

Caleb Heng, 13, a Secondary 1 Pathlight student at Bishan Park Secondary, said: "The students are friendly. When I say 'hi', they'll say hello to me. When I shared with them stories I wrote, they seemed impressed."

The collaboration started with Chong Boon Secondary in 2005 and Bishan Park Secondary last year.

Buses take students to the two schools and back to Pathlight for their specialised curriculum, for instance, in life skills training.

The principal of Bishan Park Secondary, Madam Valerie Goh, said the tie-up has been mutually beneficial.

"Students from both schools have naturally been able to strike up conversations, especially dur-

ing recess and lunch breaks in the canteen. This helps to enhance the quality of their learning experience in school," she said.

Hillary Liem, 16, a Secondary 4 student from Bishan Park Secondary, said she enjoys looking at the drawings by students from Pathlight. "I don't take art and they love to draw. We also talk about our favourite movies. They're not that different from us," she said.

Ms Phua, who is also an MP for Jalan Besar GRC, said the top criterion in looking for a partner school would be a secondary school or even JC that is near Pathlight's Ang Mo Kio campus.

She hopes the school coming on board will see the upside of the collaboration. "It will take some adjustment to have children with special needs in your own backyard, sharing your toilet, canteen and corridors," she said.

"But we won't be a burden to you; in fact, it might enrich the character of your students."

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