

FOR CHILDREN WITH special needs, Fengshan Sparkletots Infant & Childcare Centre is intent on turning things around.

The PAP Community Foundation (PCF) pre-school advocates integration with inclusive practices — that is, special needs children get to mingle freely with other students in one classroom. The pre-school currently has 112 children aged 18 months to six years, of which six have been diagnosed with developmental disorders.

“Most of them have high-functioning autism or Asperger syndrome, and/or exhibit mild cases of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. We also have one child with severe autism,” says centre supervisor Mdm Nyo Cheng Cheng.



Being Aware

Fengshan Sparkletots — located at Bedok North Road — has welcomed an increasing number of children with special needs in recent years. “There is a much greater awareness of developmental disorders now, so parents and teachers are more vigilant in identifying symptoms in children,” explains Mdm Nyo, 44. “At the same time, many parents cannot afford to send their kids to private special education schools while other pre-schools may not be in a position to take in children with learning disabilities, so more and more families are enrolling their kids here.”

The key to managing this group of children is early intervention and working in partnerships with parents, and committed teachers. All 13 teachers at PCF Fengshan are trained to identify potential warning signs such as being unresponsive to communication cues.

“The teachers typically observe the children for about three months to a semester. If they suspect any cause for concern, they will work closely with the parents to cater the learning environment to suit the child,” says Mdm Nyo, who became the centre’s supervisor in March 2012.

Once doctors have confirmed a diagnosis,

teachers will collaborate with Learning Support Educators from the Development Support Programme, Ministry of Social and Family Development to devise an intervention package. This usually involves modifying teaching materials and setting realistic educational goals based on the child’s ability.

Indeed, Mdm Chan Yue Hwee — a mother of four children, three of which have been diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder and attend PCF Fengshan — notes that her children have blossomed thanks to the extra effort put in by the teachers. “I regularly update the teachers on the strategies used by my children’s occupational and behavioural therapists and, although it was not required of them, they carry out these strategies in class,” she says. Of her eldest child who will be entering Primary 1 next year, Mdm Chan adds, “From a child who was struggling in many areas, he is now a confident, independent pre-schooler and is ready for his transition to a mainstream school.”

But it is not just teachers who reach out to children with special needs. “We have a buddy system in which we pair them with typically developing children” Mdm Nyo says. “By practising integration with inclusive practices, we hope to instill in children the core values of empathy and respect, so that they develop a positive attitude towards people who are different from themselves.”

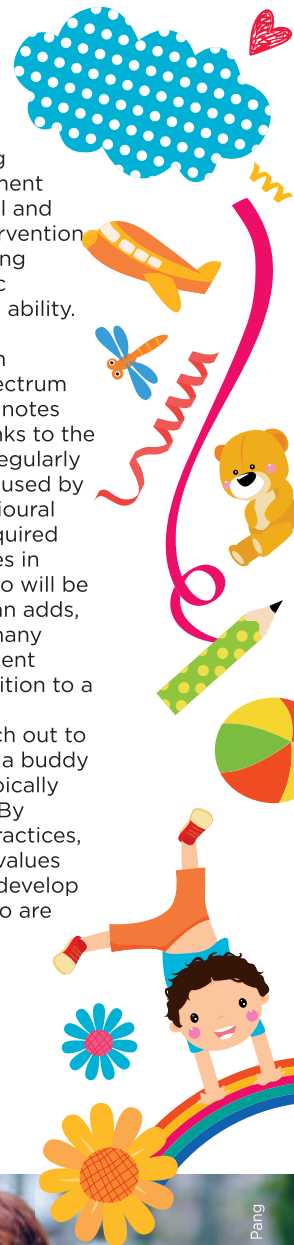


Photo: Wilson Pang

Reaching out to every child



At PCF Fengshan Sparkletots Infant & Childcare Centre, children with special needs mingle freely with other students.

NYO CHENG CHENG
44, Centre Supervisor
Fengshan
Sparkletots