



EDUCATION

Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong praised neighbourhood schools for helping children fulfil their potential regardless of background. He also said schools were seeing good results from the "Teach Less, Learn More" approach.

He assured SAP schools of full government support, saying these schools play an important role in promoting Chinese. Also, a regional studies programme will be introduced in three to four "good" secondary schools, with about 100 scholarships on offer a year.

» EDUCATION

Teach less, learn more? It works, schools tell PM

PM says he could see the difference in students when he visited two schools

By PEH SHING HUEI

A GROUP of teachers invited to the National Day Rally received a round of applause last night, as Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong hailed the good work being done in Singapore schools.

He praised neighbourhood schools, in particular, for their sterling efforts to help children fulfil their potential regardless of family background.

And he reported that schools were already seeing good results from the "Teach Less, Learn More" approach he initiated three years ago at his first rally speech.

"When we first talked about... teach less, learn more, sceptics asked, 'I am sure you will teach less. Are you sure they will learn more?'" he said last night.

He liked what he saw when he visited two neighbourhood schools - Mayflower Primary and Jurong Secondary.

At Mayflower, in Ang Mo Kio, he watched pupils rehearsing a full-scale 90-minute musical scripted, choreographed and produced by the teachers.

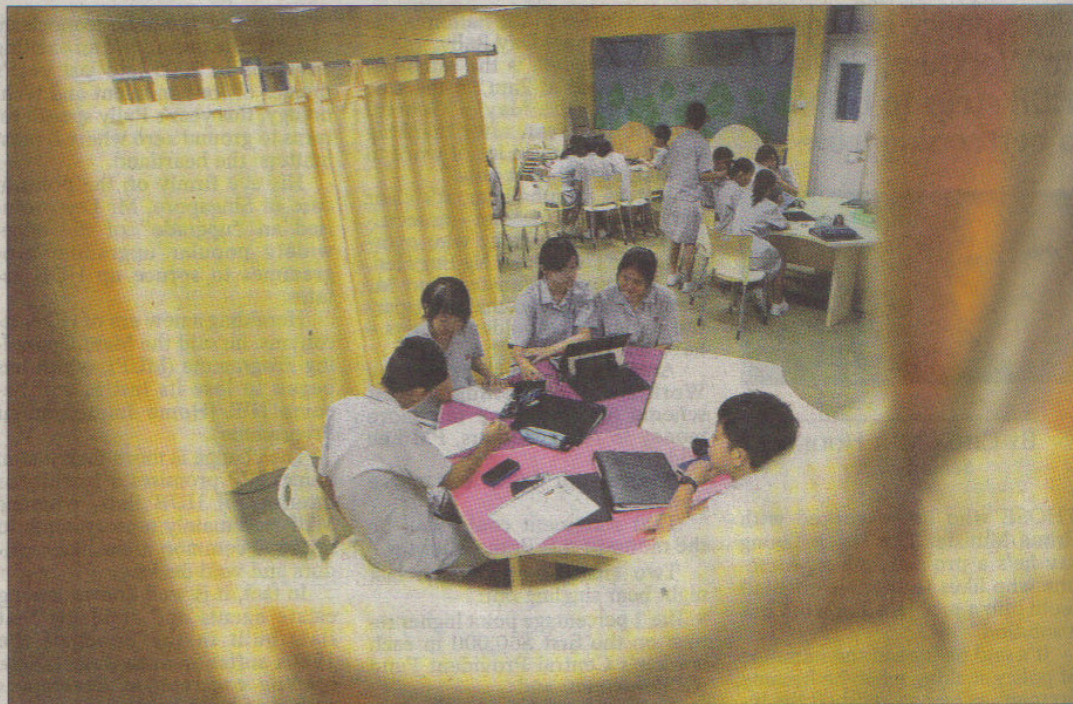
It was part of the school's efforts to encourage active participation and build pupils' social skills and character.

Mr Lee said he could see the difference in the pupils.

"I quizzed the teachers. I decided to ask them, 'In Singapore, students are famous for staying quiet in class and they never speak up. Have you been able to get the students to speak up?'"

"I was greatly cheered by the reply, 'The problem is how to get them to stop talking,'" he said, to laughter from his audience.

At Jurong Secondary, he was impressed by the high-energy Chi-



ST PHOTO: FRANCIS ONG

LIVELY LESSONS: Students in their Problem-Based Learning Studio at Jurong Secondary. Instead of textbook-based lessons, students now "move out of the four walls of the classroom", says principal Tham Yoke Chun.



nese language lessons which included digital video, acting and drama.

Students had to write a script based on their assigned holiday reading - The Little Prince - and act it out against a blue screen background in a drama room converted from a former rifle range.

The drama was recorded on video and played back to other students who then interviewed the actors and discussed what they had learnt.

"The students interviewed me in front of the blue screen. I felt quite nervous," said Mr Lee, to more laughter.

He also joined students for a science lesson in their Problem-Based Learning Studio, where they examined specimens collected from Jurong Lake.

Jurong Secondary principal Tham Yoke Chun said the students previously had textbook-based lessons. "But now, they can search on the Internet, go out to the field and move out of the four walls of the classrooms," she said.

The result? Livelier lessons.

History teacher Tang Shien Yin told The Straits Times: "When we first started on this new format, the students felt lost. Now, they love it and the classes are much more energetic."

If the students left a strong impression on PM Lee, his visit proved memorable too.

Said student Nur Rahmah Ja'afar, 14: "He came into class and we greeted him. He said that he now feels like a teacher. The class laughed and we didn't feel so nervous anymore."

He made an impression at Mayflower too.

Said principal Zainal Sapari: "Before PM Lee left, a Primary 1 girl went up to him and said she wanted to give him a present. She gave him a Strepsil sweet."

shpeh@sph.com.sg