

Next up: teacher aides trained in special needs

Initial batch of 30 to be trained next month and deployed next year

By Ho Ai Li

TEACHER assistants help teachers with tasks such as managing a class, supervising excursions or data entry.

Now, a group will be trained to help them manage children with

special needs under a new programme developed by the Singapore Teachers' Union (STU) and the privately run Genesis School For Special Education.

The plan is to train an initial batch of 30 assistants next month and to deploy them to schools next year. This was disclosed at a forum yesterday by Ms Claire Lee, chief operating officer of Educare Schools Services – a recruitment agency set up by the STU.

STU senior consultant Swithun Lowe, who also spoke at the forum, said the union introduced

teacher assistants to schools two years ago through Educare.

The agency has since placed about 120 such aides in schools here.

“Now we are breaking new ground again,” he told the 40 or so educators attending the forum at the Royal Plaza on Scotts.

“We are saying that schools should take in teacher assistants to help children with special needs in their schools.”

At the forum, Ms Lisa Barron, principal of Genesis School, said there were many children with spe-

cial needs in schools and it was hard for one person to handle them all.

Teacher aides can help in various ways, such as reinforcing good behaviour by giving stickers or praising these children, she explained.

“There are little things you can do with gestures, stickers and eye contact.”

She also shared with the audience how feelings of pity should be set aside when working with children with special needs.

Instead, such children should be

empowered and encouraged to think “I can!”, she said.

There are now 4,500 students in state-run special education schools.

An estimated 4,000 more children with learning difficulties such as autism or dyslexia study in mainstream schools.

The Education Ministry aims to have 236 Special Needs Officers deployed to help children with learning difficulties in mainstream schools by 2010.

Ms Amanda Tay, vice-principal of Unity Primary, said the presence of special-needs teacher assistants would be of great help as many such children require one-to-one attention.

Her school, which has a Special Needs Officer trained to help autistic pupils, has about 25 pupils diagnosed with learning difficulties.

She said special needs teacher assistants can also help these Special Needs Officers update casefiles on the children, which are important in tracking their progress.

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