

Pilot scheme lets rookie principals pick own mentors

One-year programme kicks off in March with 17 new school heads tapping expertise of veterans

By Ho Ai Li

ROOKIE principals will get coaching from more senior school heads under a pilot one-year programme to be rolled out in March.

The programme will begin with 17 first-time principals picking a mentor from a pool of experienced school heads. The scheme is voluntary and participants can decide how they want to work together.

These senior figures are a valuable resource and the mentoring system can transfer knowledge from one generation of principals to the next, said Education Minister Tharman Shanmugaratnam, who announced the scheme at the ninth principal appointment ceremony yesterday.

Among those who have signed up to be mentors are Mrs Lim Chye Tin from St Andrew's Junior College, Mrs Yeo Chin Nam from Henderson Secondary and Mr Robin Ong from Yuhua Primary.

Besides the 17 first-time school heads, 33 other principals received their appointment letters at the ceremony held at the Shangri-La Hotel yesterday afternoon.

These include former Mendaki chief executive officer Rashidah Abdul Rasip who heads West View Primary, as well as Miss Helen Choo, ex-CHIJ St Nicholas Girls' principal, who takes over at Tampines Junior College.

Mr Tharman said that "regular refreshing and recharging" is one of three key features of the school leadership system, the other two being school autonomy and sharing of expertise.

Singapore does not employ the seniority-based system used in many other countries, in which school heads take up their positions only a few years before retirement, he said.

Instead, potential leaders are identified and promoted early in their careers. Principals are also rotated regularly. Almost 40 per cent of schools here have had new heads in the past five years.

However, the minister noted that the average tenure of principals had been extended to slightly over six years to give them time to shape their schools' cultures and follow through their initiatives.

What MOE would like to promote is "a culture of school leaders taking responsibility for grooming their peers", he said.



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YOUNGEST PRINCIPAL: Ms Liew Wei Li (from left), who at 34 is the youngest principal appointed this year, is being mentored by Ms Ek Soo Ben, 43, principal of River Valley High, and Mr Low Eng Kee, 61, principal of Orchard Park Secondary.

Two heads who have already taken up this responsibility are Mr Low Eng Kee and Ms Ek Soo Ben, principals of Orchard Park Secondary and River Valley High. They mentor Ms Liew Wei Li, the new

Xinmin Secondary principal.

Ms Liew, at 34, is the youngest principal to be appointed this year. She likes the idea of having a mentor.

"If you are the top man in an organisa-

tion, there are not many people you can turn to," Ms Liew said. "Having a mentor will be useful. You can be really free to ask them questions."

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