

Mentoring scheme for newly appointed Principals to begin in March

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SINGAPORE: 50 principals were appointed on Thursday, among them 17 new principals and 33 experienced ones who will be moving to different schools.

A mentoring scheme for principals was also announced.

Unlike many countries where principals are appointed based on seniority, it is a system of meritocracy in Singapore, says the Education Ministry.

Principals come from all age groups, from those in their early 30s to those in their 50s, and these principals are rotated to different schools every six years or so.

Tharman Shanmugaratnam, Education Minister, says: "The system of rotation of school leaders allows us to raise the overall quality of school leadership by transferring experience and strengths from one school to another and from the schools to MOE HQ and back. It often strengthens and grows individual leaders too, by exposing them to new situations with new challenges and new opportunities."

To further enhance the sharing of expertise, a one-year voluntary mentoring scheme for newly appointed principals will be piloted in March 2007.

The Education Ministry is partnering the Academy of Principals in the implementation of this scheme.

Belinda Charles, President, The Academy of Principals, says: "We have long wanted to tap into the tacit knowledge of principals as we know there is an enormous wealth of that out there among our practicing colleagues."

"We wanted to make it something that younger ones choose to do and to do it within a fraternity of principals who do not have a reporting structure. We thought that that kind of freedom will ensure the most professional kinds of exchange."

Interested principals will be paired with their experienced counterparts, identified by the Academy.

Similar mentoring schemes are in place in countries like the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand.

Chan Poh Meng, Principal, Victoria Junior College, says: "Sometimes, a leadership role can be quite a lonely one. So if you can work with somebody who is close and have gone that way, I think it will be great. He can be like a sparring partner."

Lee Yan Kheng, a newly appointed Principal, Tanjong Katong Secondary, says: "The mentor scheme in particular will help me in dealing with the more complex issues - for instance, incidence management."

Mr Tharman also said that developing a child is not just the responsibility of principals and teachers.

He called on principals to engage the community and parents, and to work with them to gather feedback and develop programmes for students.

One example quoted was Gongshang Primary where the Parents Support Group and School Advisory Committee have helped conduct enrichment lessons, serve as adult volunteers as well as arrange work attachments for teachers.

Principals were also asked to give teachers room to grow.

A recent internal ministry survey showed that 94 percent of teachers believe that the teaching profession provides them with a sense of doing something worthwhile, and are willing to put in effort

beyond what is normally expected of them. - CNA/so

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