

SDP's Paul Tambyah asks Chan Chun Sing if preschools should be nationalised

Chan said that Singapore did not want to provide a monolithic preschool model.

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On Jan. 5, Minister of Education Chan Chun Sing delivered the opening speech for the Institute of Policy Studies' flagship Singapore Perspectives 2023 conference, entitled "Work".

After delivering his speech, Chan sat for a question and answer session and took a question from Paul Tambyah, Singapore Democratic Party (SDP) chairman and infectious diseases consultant from National University Hospital (NUH).

Diverse means for diverse needs

Tambyah asked if Chan would consider nationalising pre-schools, and thus level the playing field for young children regardless of background.

Chan said the real heart of the matter was not nationalisation, the bulk of preschool education was already directly or indirectly supported by the government.

Chan spelled out some of the different kindergarten options such as MoE Kindergartens, PAP Community Foundation, NTUC, and three other anchor operators.

He also said that in the early years of a child's education, there should not be a "one size fits all model".

Instead, the focus should be on offering a diversity of educational models for students with diverse needs, Chan explained.

Mass customisation

Chan referred back to his experience in the Ministries of Education and of Social and Family Development, saying that it had made him acutely aware of the diversity of learning profiles and student needs.

Saying that it came back to the idea of "mass customisation", a concept he introduced in his main speech.

By this Chan meant a situation where early childhood education was not just easily available, which was mass access, but also for students to have their unique needs meet, and their unique abilities bolstered.

Young children had a diverse range of learning needs, and Singapore needed a diversity of models to cater to that.

Chan said that if Tambyah was suggesting moving to a monolithic model, Singapore would not be going forward in that way.

Instead, Chan said that the real issue was not nationalisation of preschools, but ensuring a seamless "handshake" between preschool and primary schools.

It was important to ensure that what was taught in preschool would be built upon in primary school, which would provide a better outcome overall.