

Debate on ministries' budgets

National Education will adapt to global changes



More than 70 Secondary 3 students from Ping Yi Secondary School receiving their NRICs at a presentation ceremony at the school yesterday. Before the ceremony, the students took part in a reflection session on what it means to be Singaporean. ST PHOTO: SEAH KWANG PENG

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A year-long review has led to a refreshed National Education (NE) syllabus which will take in different perspectives, deal with contemporary issues and allow students to find out for themselves what it means to be Singaporean.

Revealing this yesterday, Senior Minister of State for Education Janil Puthuchery said the review, completed last October, aimed to create a syllabus that can develop students into citizens amid changing global social, economic and political contexts.

He was responding to Mr Ang Wei Neng (Jurong GRC) who had asked how the Ministry of Education (MOE) can make NE classes more interesting and relevant. Mr Ang said: "Many students cringe when they attend NE classes, which could be known as different names in different schools but have similar results. Many feel that it is propaganda."

Acknowledging this, Dr Janil said: "MOE recognises that we have to be open to doing NE differently. We must empower our students to discover what being Singaporean means to them personally - not because the syllabus says so, but because they themselves know so."

More than 2,000 students, educators and members of the public were engaged for their views as part of the review.

Dr Janil said the recommendations from the review include nurturing a sense of belonging to the community and country, Singapore's challenges and shared hopes and aspirations as a nation.

Going forward, schools will be given the autonomy to implement the changes to NE - which will be driven by three main thrusts - based on their students' needs.

First, curriculum time will be set aside for more regular discussions on contemporary issues so that students can make sense of connections between the past and present, and form their own opinions after considering different views.

"Our students may not agree with each other or even with their teachers," said Dr Janil. "But we do want to ensure that there is a space for respectful conversations, and that we nurture in our students open-mindedness and respect for others, and that they develop the skills for critical thinking."

Second, students will be encouraged to reflect on what it means to be Singaporeans through "citizenship experiences" such as NRIC presentation ceremonies.

"As educators are critical to any learning experience, the third thrust is about supporting our teachers," said Dr Janil. "We will include more professional development opportunities and involve experienced educators in spearheading innovation."

Asked by Workers' Party Non-Constituency MP Leon Perera on how students are exposed to diverse perspectives, Dr Janil said: "This is already done in subjects like social studies, history and geography. Our students examine evidence and different viewpoints before arriving at informed and reasoned conclusions."

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