

Special focus on disadvantaged in Budget, says Indranee

Cara Wong

The upcoming Budget will cover social programmes that focus on the elderly, healthcare and education as well as pay special attention to helping the disadvantaged and underprivileged, Second Minister for Finance and Education Indranee Rajah said yesterday.

Speaking to the media during a visit to Big Heart Student Care centre in Lianhua Primary School, Ms Indranee, who is also Minister in the Prime Minister's Office, said there is a small group of people unable to make the most of the opportunities given to them because they face issues such as family difficulties.

"We are putting special focus on how we can help those who are underprivileged, from a disadvantaged background, and the Uplift committee will be a part of that," she said, referring to the Uplifting Pupils in Life and Inspiring Families Taskforce.

Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat, who will present this year's Budget statement on Feb 18, is also expected to focus on boosting security and defence.

Ms Indranee declined to elaborate on whether social spending this year would be higher than that last year, but she noted that it has more than doubled in the past decade, spurred in part by the growing needs in the education and healthcare sectors – the first because of the need for continued education, and the other due to an ageing population.

As the head of the eight-member Uplift, Ms Indranee also said the visit to the student care centre has helped her confirm some of the ideas the committee has had.



Second Minister for Finance and Education Indranee Rajah and Senior Parliamentary Secretary for Education and Manpower Low Yen Ling helping children from Big Heart Student Care centre in Lianhua Primary School put up notes of appreciation on a "tree" yesterday. The centre is one of 24 operated by the four self-help groups. ST PHOTO: ALPHONSUS CHERN

The Big Heart Student Care centre at Lianhua Primary School is one of 24 centres operated by the four self-help groups – the Chinese Development Assistance Council, Mendaki, Singapore Indian Development Association and Eurasian Association. Six more centres are expected to be set up by the four self-help groups by next year.

Nearly half, or 45 per cent, of the 3,021 students enrolled in these school-based student care centres are from lower-income families and pay subsidised fees under the Ministry of Social and Family Development's Student Care Fee Assistance scheme.

Recounting her conversations with students, Ms Indranee said that

one told her that she preferred studying at the centre than at home as it was more conducive, while another shared that he was taken to school every day by neighbours instead of his parents.

"You can see that some of the ideas we have been looking at, like having a structured environment... or getting volunteers to assist those

who are not able to take the kids to school, it is actually being played out in real life here," said Ms Indranee.

She added that the Uplift committee would be making more detailed recommendations when Parliament meets to debate the details of the Budget.

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总理公署部长兼财政部及教育部第二部长英兰妮（右二），昨天走访设在联华小学的童心学生托管中心，与学生一起互动。右一是教育部兼人力部高级政务次长刘燕玲。（海峡时报）

提升支援弱势群体措施是今年预算案一大重点

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今年财政预算案的社会项目方面，支援弱势群体的措施将是一大重点。由总理公署部长兼财政部及教育部第二部长英兰妮领导的跨部门工作小组“提升”（UPLIFT），对如何更好地援助弱势家庭与孩子所提出的建议，也会是预算案中社会援助措施的重要组成部分。

英兰妮昨天走访设在联华小学的童心学生托管中心（Big Heart Student Care）后接受媒体访问时说，每年财政预算案必定包含针对医疗保健、教育，及以年长者为对象等的社会项目，今年也不例外。“但我们今年会把如何援助弱势群体作为一大关注点，而由我所领导的‘提升’工作小组的建议将是有关措施的一部分。”

英兰妮以教育预算为例指出，政府着眼教育的整体发展，会继续确保国人良好发展前景，但有一小部分国人因各种因素，尽管获同等机会，却无法充分把握这些契机，这也就是为什么政府成立“提升”工作小组，并会在今年财政预算案的社会项

目方面，给予弱势群体特别的关注。

政府去年底成立“提升”工作小组，是为加强对弱势家庭与孩子的支持，改善社会不平等，探讨的课题包括如何帮助弱势家庭解决孩子长期缺课或辍学等问题、加强对家长的宣导及教育，及提升孩子学习动力。

英兰妮说，她走访学生托管中心，除了了解中心的运作，同时也为印证“提升”工作小组的一些想法，例如在支援弱势孩童方面，所可能采取的一些措施，如在放学后为他们提供适当的学习环境、寓教于乐的学习项目，以及发动义工协助接送上下学等额外支援。

教育部将在国会里辩论教育部的开支预算时，宣布“提升”工作小组的具体建议。

另一方面，自助团体学生托管有限公司过去三年在各小学成立了24所童心学生托管中心，目前服务超过3000名学生；截至去年12月，其中45%接受社会及家庭发展部的学生托管费援助。教育部兼人力部高级政务次长刘燕玲，是自助团体学生托管有限公司董事部主席。

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童心学生托管中心明年增至30所

童心学生托管中心明年将增至30所，估计2023年能服务约6000名学。中心每月收费290元。符合家庭人均收入1000元以下等条件的学生，可享受学生托管费援助计划津贴。

刘燕玲说，自助团体已向社会及家庭发展部提出加强学生托管费援助津贴的建议，以给弱势孩童更多支援。

设有校内学生托管中心的小学，目前有170所，占本地小学的九成。教育部目标是在2020年底前，在所有小学设学生托管中心。