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# Pupils should lead parent-teacher talks

FROM KWAN JIN YAO

Current parent-teacher meetings are not the most productive. My biggest bugbear is that these sessions place disproportionate emphasis on academic performance per se and often fail to consider a pupil's holistic development.

Instead of exploring a child's potential in the arts, music or sports, most parents and teachers appear content to go through his grades. These may be appropriate for a competitive, scholastic culture but will not be applicable in the future.

Are parents and teachers using this platform intelligently for meaningful conversations on the child's growth?

In an environment where young Singaporeans spend most of their time in the classroom or at home, effective discourse between stakeholders is crucial.

If working parents struggle with their commitments, and overburdened educators lack the time, it would make

sense to introduce student-led conferences in our schools.

These have begun to feature prominently around the world, including a number of international institutions here.

They create healthier relationships between pupils, parents and teachers. The child also begins to take greater ownership of his learning and would enjoy assorted benefits.

The first is a stronger comprehension of strengths and weaknesses. The pupil is encouraged to engage in self-reflection and to evaluate what he has done over the past year. It allows him to identify domains he is comfortable in and future action plans.

Pupils who are just getting started could be guided by brief templates or thinking models, but these collaborative meetings could evolve to be more spontaneous.

The second benefit is greater accountability. More often than not, lackadaisical pupils now get off scot-

free as their parents and teachers play the blame game over the child's sub-standard performance, which is too easy and too convenient.

With student-led conferences, pupils would have to think about their learning progress and suss out factors that may have led to certain results.

A well-facilitated appointment would allow parents and teachers to brainstorm on recommendations to help the child cope and excel.

The third benefit is confidence. Besides the negatives, appropriate focus on strengths and opportunities can allow a shy pupil to come out of his shell. This could be a channel for affirmation, from the teacher and parents, to galvanise positive attitudes and actions.

This is an area the Ministry of Education could think about. To start off, sharing sessions could be organised to see how student-led conferences are conducted. The status quo, we should not accept.

“Appropriate focus on strengths and opportunities can allow a shy pupil to come out of his shell.”

# Is NUS tough on misbehaving scholarship holders?

FROM DAVID SEE LEONG KIT

I refer to the report “NUS takes disciplinary action against sex blogger” (Nov 8).

Undoubtedly, Mr Alvin Tan Jye Yee has brought disrepute to other scholarship holders in particular and fellow National University of Singapore (NUS) students in general.

The Malaysian public was also

disgusted at his cocky, cavalier behaviour.

Equally distressing is NUS' lack of transparency in not disclosing the nature of punishment meted out to him.

As his scholarship is funded by taxpayers, the public has a right to know what measures were taken to send a deterrent message so that scholarship holders behave themselves.

And why the double standards?

In March, the disciplinary actions taken against undergraduate scholarship holder Sun Xu, who had made disparaging remarks about Singaporeans, were rightly disclosed.

More fundamentally, a review of our scholarship system is needed.

I feel disquieted that many foreign students are exploiting our generous scholarships and using Singapore as a stepping stone.

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