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FRIDAY 02 MARCH 2018

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No homework, full-day school curriculum to help level playing field: NMP Chia

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Mother tongue language being taught at Edgefield Primary School. TODAY file photo

Published 28 FEBRUARY, 2018

UPDATED 28 FEBRUARY, 2018

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SINGAPORE — To level the playing field for children from less advantaged socio-economic backgrounds, and break out of the country’s tuition culture, Nominated



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That way, the children will complete their homework during school hours, and be able to spend more time on “push-frontier practicals” aimed at training them to become more comfortable in tackling problems and to grow an appetite for risk-taking. These qualities are essential traits for the current technological revolution, also known as Industry 4.0, she said.

In her Budget debate speech in Parliament on Wednesday (Feb 28), Ms Chia said the current academic model “runs the risk of not harnessing the potential of all our young people” who do not have access to enrichment and tuition classes. As a result, those from more advantaged socio-economic backgrounds who have access to these classes will outperform their peers.

Stressing that “every school is a good school, but not every home is equal”, the lawyer said the current system has been “abused” such that inequality continues to be perpetuated and deepened.

Full-day curriculum in schools can be a “good tool to eliminate a part of that inequity”, she added.

“(That way), we have children study together, grow together, spend time together. (It creates) greater opportunity to level up, greater opportunity to bond,” she said.

“When they go home, parents should be encouraged to reduce reliance on external contractors in providing additional teaching and hothousing, and use the time for family bonding.”

Full-day curriculum schools will also facilitate a move away from an environment in which “children cram or are hothoused for better grades”, to one in which they challenge one another by creating, and devising solutions to problems.

“Despite living in Industrial 4.0, our schools continue to certify competencies relevant to models of the earlier industrial economies,” she said. “While basic subjects remain important, I submit that we should review our curriculum make structural changes to our education landscape.”

For example, instead of introducing clearly defined experiments within each subject, students could be challenged to use their knowledge and skills across subjects to achieve certain outcomes, said Ms Chia. Simulations of real-life



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By empowering them with the ability to anticipate, adapt and overcome, this generation of young people will have the confidence, and courage, to be different, she added.

She said: “It is imperative that we build this psyche. If we cannot, whether as businesses or individuals, we will have neither the courage nor the drive to innovate. We will be nothing more than buyers and users of technology, machines, and skills.”

In Parliament on Wednesday, Ms Chia also proposed for a review of the scholarship criteria used in the Government, commercial sector and institutes of higher learning. She pointed out that there was too much an emphasis on grades, and not character.

She said: “What qualities do we want? Academic and extracurricular performance? Or do we encourage responsibility, courage and risk-taking?”

“Are we prepared to grant a scholarship to a student with a B scoring, in place of one with straight A scoring, if the first student had scored his Bs because he had to overcome an illness, or because he had to work to supplement family income, or because he had to care for a sickly parent or sibling?”

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