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## Not clear if full-day school curriculum will be beneficial

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TODAY file photo

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While well-intentioned — and complemented by the important observation that “every school is a good school, but not every home is equal” — the proposal by



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...and the logistical challenges of the likely effectiveness of the proposed change (“**No homework, full-day school curriculum to help level playing field: NMP Chia**”; Feb 28).

If the concern is that students from well-to-do families have access to more resources such as enrichment and tuition classes, and that such benefits will only widen the socio-economic divide, then policies should work on two levels: First, and in the short-term, provide students from the other families with similar resources; and second, in the longer-term, level the playing field.

There are obvious logistical challenges in having a full-day school curriculum. Teachers may be burdened with heavier workloads or the school has to plan other engagements to fill the hours.

It is also not clear whether keeping students in school for the whole day is necessarily beneficial for their development. If anything, it could be argued that they should instead be exposed to a wider variety of activities in more settings, such as community projects or other youth development programmes outside of school.

To allay some of Ms Chia’s concerns over the distribution of resources, social service agencies already offer after-school services often targeted at latchkey students, without imposing upon parents or caregivers. The more relevant questions, in this vein, is how effective these services have been, and if they offer the same variety and rigour which may potentially narrow the disparities.

A second set of longer-term policies builds on these programmes, to level the playing field through structural changes. The Ministry of Education would point to the KidSTART initiative for low-income families as well as upcoming changes to the scoring of Primary School Leaving Examination to widen the distribution of students across different schools, yet I agree with Ms Chia’s call for “a review of the scholarship criteria used in the Government, commercial sector and institutes of higher learning”.

Since scholarships function as signalling mechanisms, a starting point would be more information — especially from the Government — on the socio-economic and demographic distribution of public-sector scholars over the years.