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*Editor's note: There were errors in the reply published in yesterday's edition, introduced during the sub-editing process. Here is the correct version.*

# Tapping local talent

## Primary school teachers meet MOE's criteria for English Language teaching

Letter from **JENNIFER CHAN**  
Press Secretary to  
Minister for Education  
Ministry of Education

Fok Kah Hon ("Why aren't our English teachers suitably qualified?", June 22) and Law Sin Ling ("Students getting short shrift?", June 22) had the impression that primary school teachers were not trained to teach English Language (EL).

Earlier media reports had inferred from comments made by Minister for Education, Mr Tharman Shanmugaratnam, that many teachers of EL in primary schools were not trained to teach EL.

What Mr Tharman meant was that many primary school teachers who taught EL had not majored in English or English Literature in university or taken it at the pre-university level. Unlike secondary school EL teachers, this is not a requirement for primary school teachers as they generally teach two or more subjects.

But all primary school teachers would have met MOE's short-listing criteria for teaching, which includes good passes in EL and Mathematics in their "O" levels. Besides mother tongue language teachers, all primary school teachers are also trained at the National Institute of Education in the teaching of three subjects - EL, Mathematics and either Science or another subject (like Music or Art). They also receive regular in-service training in the subjects they teach.

There are educational benefits to teachers, especially those teaching lower primary classes, teaching a class of pupils a few subjects. In this way, they get to know their young charges better and build rapport with them. This also helps in the transition between pre-school and primary school.

At the upper primary level, some teachers in fact do specialise in the teaching of certain subjects, thus developing deeper expertise in content and pedagogy through experience and in-service training. MOE is currently studying whether to allow for more of such specialisation among primary school teachers. This includes exploring how we can support and better utilise

teachers with a strong command in EL so as to get greater benefit for our pupils.

Recruitment of a small number of foreign teachers to complement local teachers has been part of the Ministry's overall recruitment programme in areas like English, the Mother Tongue Languages and the Humanities. MOE is currently looking into a more proactive strategy for sourcing suitable foreign EL teachers to supplement the local teaching force, as part of our comprehensive review to take EL standards higher in our schools.

The criteria for the selection of foreign teachers will remain stringent. Besides academic and teaching qualifications, they should also have a proven track record in teaching in their countries. The individuals may be native speakers or persons who have learnt EL well as a first language.

Local teachers must comprise the core and the vast majority in our teaching profession, in EL as with other subjects. The training and development of our local pool of EL teachers is a key issue being studied under the EL review, and broad strategies in this area will be announced later.