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Journalist :	Ho Ai Li
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Kindergarten teachers to get English lessons

By Ho Ai Li

THE move to improve the quality of spoken English among teachers here has filtered down to pre-schools.

The Ministry of Education (MOE) put up an online notice on Thursday, inviting interested parties to apply to run an English proficiency course for kindergarten teachers.

While the ministry has previously arranged such classes for primary and secondary school teachers, this is the first time it is doing so for kindergarten teachers.

The notice did not include details of what the course would entail, and when contacted, an Education Ministry spokesman said more details would be released later.

The Straits Times understands that such courses could include lessons on grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary enrichment.

More needs to be done to make sure teachers model good English – a point raised by an MOE committee charged with reviewing how English is taught here last year.

It recommended English enhancement courses for trainee primary and secondary school teachers who teach English.

Many Straits Times readers feel strongly that it should not not stop at those levels, and have written in to urge the ministry to aim it at pre-school teachers as well.

There are about 3,000 pre-school teachers in al-

most 500 kindergartens, including 266 PAP Community Foundation (PCF) ones, here.

It was only from 2001 that kindergarten teachers who teach English were required to have a pass in O-level English, or a minimum score of 5.5 in the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) exam – which indicates a modest to competent speaker.

Ms Denise Chan, who heads the Early Childhood Institute under the PCF, believes there is a need to improve the English proficiency of pre-school teachers. But this would be “a very daunting task”, she said.

Mrs Jenny Kwek, principal of Ascension Kindergarten in Potong Pasir, agreed that there is a need for such a course.

“Children spend a lot of time with teachers and hearing English correctly used is very important. It doesn’t have to be the Queen’s English, but the correct pronunciation is very important.”

The course would also help these teachers gain extra confidence for when they teach, she added.

Ms Chan said areas which need attention include vocabulary, articulation and pronunciation, and, in particular, grammar.

Teachers sometimes make fundamental errors such as mixing tenses, she said.

“One thing that creeps up on you is grammar. That’s the one that really gives you goose pimples,” she said.

hoaili@sph.com.sg