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New English Language Institute coming up

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SINGAPORE — The Republic has a “long way to go in raising English standards”. This was the candid assessment from Education Minister Ng Eng Hen in Parliament yesterday as he announced the setting up of a new English Language Institute of Singapore to spearhead such efforts here.

With English being the lingua franca of international business, science and technology, Dr Ng said the ability to write and speak the language well remains an essential skill to cultivate in the young.

And there’s a “need to pool much needed expertise and training resources in teaching English to bilingual learners”, hence the plans for the new institute. This was one of several initiatives that Dr Ng announced yesterday.

Another involved providing all students from 2012 with an individual Holistic Development Profile. This will record each student’s progress in developing a list of what the ministry calls “21st century competencies” — among them soft skills and values like creativity, innovation, cross-cultural understanding and rootedness to Singapore.

“Knowledge and skills must be underpinned by values. It defines a person’s character. They shape his beliefs, attitudes and actions, and form the core of our approach towards nurturing 21st century competencies rooted and grounded on values,” said Dr Ng.

So greater emphasis will be placed on these competencies through the academic curriculum and Co-Curricular Activities, or CCA.

Another change would see primary and secondary school

students spending more time on physical education.

For Primary 1 and 2 students, MOE is increasing their PE time from one-and-a-half hours per week currently, to two hours — while those in the upper primary and secondary levels will have an extra hour of PE time a week.

And to enhance the delivery of the art and music curriculum, all new teachers will be trained for single-subject specialisation. This means they will focus on teaching only art or music, and handle related CCAs and programmes. Existing art and music teachers will also move towards single-subject specialisation.

“We currently have 2,500 qualified PE, art and music teachers ... By 2020, MOE will need to grow this pool by more than 2,000, or 80 per cent, nearly double,” said Dr Ng.