

## **Integration at new Canossa Convent complex Mainstream classes for hearing impaired**

By Braema Mathi

CANOSSA Convent Primary School is planning to integrate hearing-impaired pupils into its mainstream classes in two years' time.

This will take place when the school is redeveloped as part of an \$11.5-million educational complex at its Sallim Road premises, off Aljunied Road.

The principal, Sister Maria Sim, said that the integration would allow mainstream pupils to learn how to live with handicapped children, while the hearing-impaired pupils would benefit from being with normal children.

Sister Anne Tan, principal of the Canossian School for the Hearing Impaired, which is now at Jalan Merbok in Jurong, said the move would help her pupils to socialize and to broaden their perspective.

"We believe that hearing-impaired pupils, who have the same capacity as any normal child but lack normal hearing, can be in the mainstream," she said.

"So it is better to start them early, as eventually they will have to integrate into society."

For a start, only 60 of the 150 hearing-impaired pupils will join the 900 pupils of the primary school. The other 90 pupils will remain at the hearing-impaired school, as they need more supervision, said Sister Anne.

They will be taught in a new \$1.5 million school building which will have four new rooms for speech therapy, consultation, testing and observation, in addition to 13 classrooms, meant for smaller classes of 12 pupils or so.

The deaf school's 20 teachers will continue to teach the remaining 90 pupils and also be near enough to offer support to the teachers in charge of the integrated classes.

But all pupils, normal and handicapped, will be together at recess, for art and music lessons and at the playground.

Sister Anne said that no normal child will be slowed down or be deprived of attention from teachers at the primary school. "A hearing-impaired child will not be helped at the expense of a normal child," she said.

Both schools will also share facilities such as science laboratories, the counseling room, the hall, the gymnasium, the tuckshop and the dental clinic.

Four parents interviewed all welcomed the concept of integration.



Madam Julianna Tan, 39, a training manager who has six normal children, said: "Kids do not label each other. With integration, they will simply accept children who are different and learn how to be compassionate."

Housewife Mrs. K.C. Chin, 40, has a daughter, 11, who is hearing-impaired and has been attending St Anthony's Canossian Primary in Bedok for two years.

She said: "She is very happy now. She has many friends. She has learnt not to talk too loudly and she speaks better now".

## **Canossa to educate those with learning abilities too**

THE \$13-million Canossian educational complex at Sallim Road will address the needs of not only the hearing-impaired, but also those of children with different learning abilities.

It will house the primary and the hearing-impaired schools, a children's home and its extension, the Total Learning Centre, and the St Magdalene's Kindergarten.

Only the \$2 million learning centre is ready. The rest should be completed in 1998.

About \$5,000 has been spent on equipping the place with learning booths for those with learning disabilities. Currently, 60 children receive individual attention for two hours daily.

"We build up children's self-confidence in small steps," said Sister Elizabeth Tham, the centre's principal.

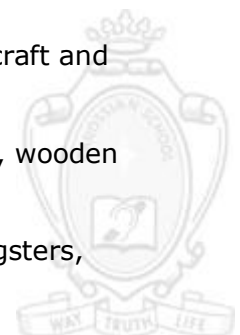
"We bring the goalposts closer to the kicker, and move them a step back as each skill is mastered."

Also director of the Canossaville Children's Home, she said: "It costs \$70,000 per year to operate the centre; some of this money is from a group of bankers and well-wishers.

"We can help children whose needs have been overlooked. While they may have been at the bottom of the class, they become kings here."

Plans for the complex, which is on a site the size of about three football fields, include:

- A new block for a library, laboratories and rooms for music, art and craft and computer-aided programmes, for the primary school.
- The 55-year-old school building will keep its well-loved mosaic stairs, wooden classroom doors, and grotto and courtyard garden.
- The Canossaville Children's Home, which now houses about 30 youngsters, will have more rest areas and study rooms.



Canossa Convent Primary's principal, Sister Maria Sim, said her pupils would be at the recently closed Upper Aljunied Secondary School's premises during construction.

Donations for the complex are coming in "slowly", she said. Cheques donating money for the project should be made out to the mission.

