

When the principals go back to school

Mentoring scheme lets newbies tap seniors' know-how and experience

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STARTING next March, newly-appointed school principals will soon be given the chance to be mentored by experienced school leaders from the fraternity.

The Ministry of Education is partnering the Academy of Principals to pilot a one-year mentoring scheme, in which new school leaders can learn from, and build close relationships with, their more senior counterparts.

Announcing this at the annual principal appointment ceremony, Education Minister Tharman Shanmugaratnam said the scheme will further strengthen the ability of Singapore's school leaders.

"Similar mentoring schemes are in place in countries such as the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand. The mentorship scheme will involve partnerships and I'm sure it will involve two-way learning, with ideas and reflections being passed on from both experienced and new principals," he said.

First to benefit from the scheme will be the batch of 17 new principals who received their letters of appointment yesterday.

They have the option to work with a mentor of their choice, and both parties will be left free to decide on the sort of partnership model they are comfortable with.

Academy of Principals' president Mrs Belinda Charles, who is also head of St Andrew's Secondary School, said the scheme will complement current initiatives, such as the school cluster system.

Mdm Liew Wei Li, the new principal of Xinmin Secondary School, has already picked Ms Ek Soo Ben, the principal of River Valley High School, to be one of her mentors.

The 34-year-old Mdm Liew, who is the youngest of those appointed this year, said: "I worked with her during the recent Leaders in Education Programme in September. She has a lot of experience and I feel comfortable learning from her."

Mr Tharman described experienced principals as a "valuable resource". He said: "They have built up considerable knowledge in running schools and managing people. A fair bit of this is tacit knowledge, not stuff that can be compiled in brochures. We should find ways to enhance the transfer of this knowledge from one generation of principals to the next."