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More children enrolled in pre-school in 2023, median fees drop: MSF report



The state of early childhood education in Singapore was one of the areas reviewed by MSF in a report on family trends. ST PHOTO: LIM YAOHUI



Syarafana Shafeeq

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SINGAPORE - More children attended pre-school in Singapore in the past decade, and childcare fees have become more affordable.

In 2023, 90 per cent of children aged three to four were enrolled in pre-school, up from 75 per cent in 2013, while fee caps and government subsidies have kept pre-school fees affordable, the Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF) said on July 15 in a new report.

The number of young children with developmental needs in early intervention programmes has also more than doubled since 2015, it added.

The current state of early childhood education and support in Singapore was one of the areas reviewed by MSF in an [inaugural report on family trends](#).

The Government has taken steps such as imposing fee caps and expanding the capacity of pre-school operators in recent years to improve early childhood education in Singapore.

The number of full-day infantcare places has nearly tripled over the past decade to cater to growing demand, from 5,257 in 2013 to 14,580 in 2023. Places in full-day childcare centres also increased from 96,340 in 2013 to 194,972 in 2023.

Parents are also paying less for anchor operator and partner operator pre-schools. Anchor and partner operators are pre-school operators that receive funding from the Government to keep their fees at a certain cap to ensure affordability.



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MSF said the median infantcare fees for children who are Singapore citizens went down slightly from \$1,275 in 2019 to \$1,235 in 2023, while median childcare fees decreased from \$800 to \$720 over the same period.

Thus, a median-income household with a child attending full-day infant care in an anchor operator centre would spend 5.9 per cent of its household income on pre-school in 2023, compared with 7.5 per cent in 2019, the ministry said.

In 2025, the fee cap for full-day childcare will drop again by \$40 a month to \$640 at the five anchor operators, and to \$680 at 28 partner operators. Fees are currently capped at \$680 for anchor operators and \$720 for partner operators.

Chief executive of Care Corner Singapore Christian Chao said the steady increase in enrolment rates is encouraging and the result of efforts such as outreach to increase awareness of the importance of pre-school education among parents.

He said: "Early childhood education plays an important part in the future well-serves to mitigate disparities that may exist for children from different socio-economic backgrounds.

"Access to early childhood education helps level the playing field by providing children from all backgrounds with a good start to life and more equitable opportunities for success – all of which makes for a more inclusive society."

Pre-school enrolment rate

Children aged 3 to 4



Chart: STRAITS TIMES GRAPHICS • Source: MINISTRY OF SOCIAL AND FAMILY DEVELOPMENT

Support for younger children with developmental needs

The report showed that more children with developmental needs are receiving timely support, as the Early Childhood Development Agency has increased the supply of places through current centres that provide early intervention, and opening new ones.

The total number of children helped in early intervention programmes grew from 3,824 in 2015 to 9,850 in 2023.

These children typically do not meet developmental milestones – for instance, in speech, cognition, social-emotional or physical aspects. Examples of their developmental needs are speech and language delay, global developmental delay and autism spectrum disorder.

In 2023, capacity in the Early Intervention Programme for Infants and Children (Eipic) and its private operator equivalent increased by 1,100 spaces, a 26 per cent rise from 2022. Eipic supports children with developmental needs, such as autism and mild language developmental delays, in a group-based setting.

MSF said the annual number of referrals grew substantially from 2020 due to greater parental awareness and earlier detection through hospitals' child development programmes. The average waiting time for early intervention programmes for children with developmental needs in 2023 was 7.5 months, a slight drop from 7.6 months in 2022.

Children with developmental needs helped by early intervention programmes

Aged 0 to 6



Chart: STRAITS TIMES GRAPHICS • Source: MINISTRY OF SOCIAL AND FAMILY DEVELOPMENT