

# MIX TO LEARN, LEARN TO MIX

Pupils with hearing loss from Canossian School will learn alongside mainstream school peers come 2025. It is a move that will help cultivate empathy, say school staff and pupils



From 2025, Canossa Catholic Primary School will be one of two mainstream primary schools designated to provide support to pupils with moderate to severe hearing loss. The other is Mayflower Primary School. ST PHOTO: NG SOR LUAN



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Correspondent

Canossa Catholic Primary School (CCPS) and Canossian School, which takes in children with hearing loss, will combine in 2025.

But unknown to many, the groundwork for the move was laid some 25 years ago.

Since 1999, both schools have been situated side by side on their MacPherson campus in Sallim Road. Not only are there no fences between them, but the buildings are also connected on two levels.

This paved the way for pupils and teachers from the two schools, both founded by the Canossian Sisters, to move easily between the buildings.

In what the school leaders call a “natural progression”, all current Canossian School pupils will become pupils of CCPS in 2025, which will be one of two mainstream primary schools designated to provide support to pupils with moderate to severe hearing loss, who can access the national curriculum. Canossian

School will no longer exist.

Besides CCPS, Mayflower Primary School is the other mainstream school designated to support pupils with hearing loss. But unlike CCPS, where children with hearing loss communicate orally, Mayflower takes in those who communicate using sign language.

According to the Education Ministry, there are about 1,600 students with reported hearing loss in mainstream primary and secondary schools, as at December 2023.

CCPS principal Eugenie Tan says the way the school buildings was set up made it easy for collaboration and for the children to grow up in an “accepting culture”.

“It was important that the two schools were housed together so that children from both schools could play together, learn together and grow up together,” says Mrs Tan, who has been heading the school since 2018 and will continue to do so after the restructure in 2025.

Over the years, pupils from Canossian School have been progressively included in lessons, programmes and activities at CCPS.

Since 2018, Canossian School pupils have been on the CCPS’ prefectural board and pupils from both schools went on an overseas learning journey together. The following



Primary 5 pupil Audrey Zeng (left), who has cochlear implants, joined the CCPS floorball team in March after she was talent-spotted by her PE teacher and floorball teacher. PHOTO: CANOSSA CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL

year, some joined co-curricular activities (CCAs) offered by CCPS.

CCPS currently has a “mixed” floorball team that includes a Primary 5 pupil with hearing loss, Audrey Zeng, 11.

Audrey, who has cochlear implants, joined the CCPS floorball team in March after she was talent-spotted by her physical education teacher and floorball teacher.

She was initially hesitant as she was afraid that her hearing devices might drop off while playing the game. She also found it challenging at first, but now looks forward to

every training session.

“I’m grateful for the opportunity to play floorball as it helped me realise I can be good at sports,” she says.

Ms Christina Michael, principal of Canossian School, says her pupils have benefited from having academic and social exposure in a mainstream school.

“They were getting the full slew of mainstream education and all the enrichment programmes that not all special schools have access to. So, our children were doing so much better because of that,” says Ms Mi-

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SISTER THERESA SEOW, who supervises both Canossa Catholic Primary School and Canossian School

chael, who will be retiring at the end of 2024.

For instance, some of her pupils were picked for the stretch classes in mathematics and an advanced art programme.

Several of them have gone on to schools like St Joseph’s Institution and School of Science and Technology after their Primary School Leaving Examination.

Sister Theresa Seow, who supervises both schools, says attending school together has built confidence in pupils from both schools.

“The hearing children learn empathy. They don’t see friends who have special needs, they see beyond that. The children with hearing loss don’t say, ‘I am less than my friend.’ They contribute towards the well-being of their hearing friends by helping them,” she says.

Hearing pupils will still form the majority at CCPS – about 120 a cohort. Canossian School has a total of 67 pupils, about 11 pupils a cohort and all will join CCPS, with about two to three with hearing loss in each class from 2025.

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Primary 3 pupil Mohammad Hady Firash Mohd Yazid is one of the pupils in the percussion band. It is one of two co-curricular activities offered by Canossian School for pupils with hearing loss.



## Inclusive community a foundation for friendships

FROM C1

### CHANGES TO INFRASTRUCTURE

Since the announcement of the restructure in January, changes to CCPS’ learning environment have been ramped up.

For example, to reduce sound and background noise in the classrooms, the legs of all chairs have been fitted with socks. Cork boards have also been placed at the back of the classroom to reduce reverberation.

Poor acoustics and long reverberation time can result in children with hearing loss not being able to hear speech clearly.

In each classroom, tables will be arranged in an inverse U-shape facing the front so that teacher and pupils face one another and pupils can see one another speaking.

These changes benefit all pupils and not just those with hearing loss, says Mrs Tan.

“When it’s U-shaped, children can see one another speaking. That’s important for all children. When you want to teach good eye contact and social skills, whether they have hearing loss or not, learning to face someone when they speak is important,” she says.

All teachers in CCPS teach with an iPad, which is projected onto a screen, so that pupils can refer to visual cues.

Teachers also wear a lanyard with an FM transmitter connected to a Soundfield System, which helps to improve the audibility and clarity of speech.

Sound is projected directly into hearing devices, as well as through

the speaker at the back of the classroom, which enables sound to be evenly distributed throughout the room.

Venues such as the school halls will also have technology that improves acoustics and sound distribution.

Small wall-mounted devices called wall pilots will allow sound to be transmitted directly to compatible hearing aids or personal receivers worn by pupils with hearing loss.

The library has also been “acoustically treated” to have thick curtains that absorb sound, and furniture and surfaces that result in less sound reverberation.

Infrastructure aside, CCPS teachers have progressively been sent for training since 2023, to obtain a certificate in Teaching Students with Hearing Loss from the National Institute of Education.

In 2025, 12 teachers will be trained in this 140-hour course.

Ms Elizabeth Yee, head of special educational needs at CCPS, says it helps for teachers to understand some of the difficulties that children with hearing loss face. For example, they may find it difficult to tell the distance for sounds.

“Children with hearing loss may not be able to differentiate between the conversation and the background noise from outside. As teachers, we need to be aware of it, so that when we interact with the children, we are better able to accommodate them,” she says.

Besides attending mainstream classes, pupils with hearing loss will get support from audiologists and speech and language thera-



Ms Joslyn Chew, subject head for aesthetics, uses an FM transmitter that is connected to the hearing devices of children with hearing loss while teaching a Primary 1 class English. ST PHOTOS: NG SOR LUAN



A group of Primary 5 pupils, two of whom have hearing loss, are close friends who have been learning and playing together. They are (from far left) Teng Wen Xuan, Zoe Abigail Laiso, Audrey Zeng, Nur Adriana Razil, Sara Tan and Karis Chan.

to the teacher during science lesson, I repeat for them and tell them what the teacher said,” she says.

Primary 5 pupil Zoe Abigail Laiso, 11, appreciates the help of classmate Audrey, who has hearing loss, when they were in the same Chinese class. “My Chinese isn’t so good, I cannot always read the questions. So she would help to read it out for me, gave me some hints, but not the answer. And that helped me a lot,” she says.

Both girls are on the prefectural board, and Zoe recalls an incident when Audrey offered to help her. “Once, when I was doing my duty, I had to go to the toilet urgently. I didn’t even have to ask her. She just saw that I was a bit troubled and offered to help,” she says.

Zoe says she has also picked up Audrey’s optimistic attitude. “She is very enthusiastic, always positive. I learnt how to be more cheerful and not always look at the negative,” she says.

Mrs Tan says the children will take the compassion and empathy they learnt with them, even after they graduate from CCPS.

“When they go to secondary schools or meet others who have other learning needs or need more support, our children know how to care for others, to help them to fit in, because they’ve grown up in an environment like this. I think that’s the kind of inclusive society we eventually hope to have.”

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pists. Those with higher needs will get learning support from teachers who are specially trained in teaching children in hearing loss.

They may receive such help while the other pupils are having mother tongue lessons, as children with hearing loss are exempted from the subject, except a selected number of pupils who can cope with the subject.

### REVERSE INCLUSION A POSSIBILITY

Canossian School has two CCAs – a choir as well as a percussion band that achieved a Distinction in SYF 2024.

While the CCAs are currently made up entirely of children with

hearing loss, there may be plans for “reverse inclusion” in the near future, to let hearing children who may be keen take part in the band.

“While we honour the fact that the percussion band was set up for children with hearing loss to enhance their listening and feel rhythm, we could have a small percentage of hearing children who love to play percussion instruments that might benefit from being part of their band,” says Mrs Tan.

At the same time, there are activities run by Canossian School that will remain even from 2025, for instance, an annual camp for children with hearing loss.

“It’s special to the children. It also gives them a safe space. It

builds their identity and their community,” says Mrs Tan.

While changes are afoot in terms of infrastructure and administration, nothing changes, says Mrs Tan, who adds that one of the best things about heading CCPS is watching the children’s friendships unfold.

“They don’t see the child wearing hearing aids. They know it’s there, but it doesn’t mean very much to them, because it’s all part and parcel of who they are,” she says.

Primary 5 pupil Nur Adriana Razil, 11, who has hearing loss, says she helps her classmates who may not pay attention during class. “When my friend doesn’t listen

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