

THE STRAITS TIMES

O-level prep classes now more popular



An O-level English preparatory class at Kaplan. Other private schools have also reported seeing more demand for O-level preparatory courses. ST PHOTO: KEVIN LIM

🕒 PUBLISHED JAN 18, 2016, 5:00 AM SGT

Private students signing up for tuition with an eye to securing a polytechnic place



Amelia Teng (mailto:ateng@sph.com.sg)

O-level preparatory classes in private schools are becoming more popular with private students, with many hoping that the tuition will help them get into a polytechnic.

Private schools said they see more students signing up for these classes despite fewer private candidates taking the O levels in recent years. Last year, there were 1,983 private candidates, down from 2,133 in 2014 and 2,615 in 2013.

The figure was above 3,000 in previous years.

Private schools said the drop in numbers is because students now have more options, such as a wider range of courses at the Institute of Technical Education and private diplomas. But there are those who also want a polytechnic stint before going to work as many harbour hope of earning at least a diploma qualification, so they sign up for preparatory courses.

That is why Kaplan Higher Education launched an intensive course last year to cater to these students. Such courses last up to a year and are geared towards students who need help studying for the O levels. The lessons are usually conducted in groups and take place several times a week.

The course, which started last October, now has 30 students and Kaplan hopes to double the class size for the next intake. Said Ms Elaine Ng, head of Kaplan's O-level preparatory school: "The O levels is a recognised qualification so there's always demand for it from locals and foreigners. Many are young and have a bright future ahead of them, so we are trying to help them gain the qualification to move on to local institutions like the polytechnics."

Other private schools have also reported seeing more demand. Depending on the number of subjects students take, course fees range from \$3,000 to more than \$10,000.

Last year, Penciltutor had 109 full-time students - all Singaporeans or permanent residents - in its O-level preparatory programme, up from 98 in 2013. Principal Ananda Rajan said he expects the figure to rise to 120 this year.

Sense College saw the number of students in its O-level preparatory course grow from 70 in 2013 to almost 100 last year. The school, set up by Yayasan Mendaki, a self-help group for the Malay and Muslim community, expects a 30 per cent increase in enrolment this year.

At YMCA Education Centre, there has been a 40 per cent increase in student intake for its O-level preparatory course over the last three years. It currently has 45 students and expects this number to grow as students join the programme during the year.

A similar course conducted by the Management Development Institute of Singapore (MDIS) College has had "fairly stable" numbers in recent years, taking in about 400 students yearly. Ms Tan Gek Khim, MDIS' senior director, said it hopes to increase the cohort size by 20 per cent this year.

Despite having fewer O-level students, St Francis Methodist School achieved its best results to date - 89.5 per cent of its latest cohort of 19 students passed at least five subjects, beating the national average of 83.8 per cent.

In 2013 and 2014, the school's five-subject pass rates were 25 per cent and 56 per cent respectively. The school attributed the improvement to an extra academic enrichment programme and study camps during holidays it started in 2013.

Students said these preparatory courses are a chance for them to complete secondary school education. Mr Kong Wei left secondary school in 2009 after being suspended for smoking and fighting.

"It's possible to earn a living without the O-level qualification but I realised I had to put in more effort compared with other people," said the 22-year-old, who was working in a logistics services company.

He took his O levels last year and scored B3s for five subjects after enrolling in Sense College. Mr Kong now hopes to study veterinary technology in a polytechnic.

