



ST PHOTO: LAU FOOK KONG

HIGH HOPES: Evergreen Primary's Loh Jia Wei, who gets around in a motorised wheelchair, suffers from a muscle-wasting disease and fractured her thigh bone in August last year. Her determination to fight the odds has paid off and a philanthropic organisation is exploring ways to help her through a scholarship or bursary.

Disabled girl tops her school in PSLE

Despite many obstacles, she scores an aggregate of 278

BY SUMATHI V. SELVARETNAM

AT THE tender age of three, Loh Jia Wei was found to have muscular spinal atrophy, a muscle-wasting disease.

A physically weak child, she missed out on most sports.

Then she became wheelchair-bound after fracturing her thigh bone in August last year.

She also felt faint during her Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE) this year.

But Jia Wei, 12, persevered. With the results out yesterday, she topped her school, Evergreen Primary. Her aggregate score of 278 was the highest among her school's Primary 6 cohort of 487 pupils.

Jia Wei said: "My teachers had high hopes for me and I did not want to disappoint them."

She also attributed her success to the strong support that she received from her family.

When she missed school for a month in January after surgery to strengthen her spine, her form teacher, Madam Linden Ng, 41, visited her home once a week to help her with her schoolwork.

Madam Ng said: "She took pride in every task or project. She really pushed herself."

In August last year, Jia Wei's mother, Madam

Loke Wai May, 44, left her job as a human resource officer in the civil service to take care of her only child.

Because Jia Wei's motorised wheelchair does not fit into the family car, Madam Loke and her Filipino maid had to wheel her from their home in Woodlands Drive to her school at Woodlands Circle every day.

Jia Wei's top PSLE result was all the sweeter since her medical condition made her tired after studying for more than an hour at a stretch.

She said: "If I write for too long, my hand gets tired." Despite this, she completed over 20 assessment books.

Jia Wei's father, Mr Loh Yap Song, 48, an executive in a label-printing company, was visibly delighted at his daughter's achievements.

But he had one worry. He said: "She wants to go to Raffles Girls' School which is some distance away. Her wheelchair will fit only in a London cab. Transport will cost over \$1,000 a month."

Mr Loh can take heart. Aware of her potential and family circumstances, the Tan Chin Tuan Foundation (TCTF), a philanthropic organisation, is exploring ways to help Jia Wei and two other disabled PSLE pupils at her school, through scholarships funds or bursaries.

TCTF CEO Eric Teng added that it will be setting aside funds to champion similar deserving causes that may arise in other schools.

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TENACIOUS: Nazir's teacher, Mrs Geetha Velmurugan, said he worked consistently from his first day back.

Missed 2 years, but he aces EM3

By Ho Ai Li

HE WAS a dropout but not a typical one. And 12-year-old Nazir Khan Abdul Mutalib proved it when, after returning to his school, he emerged as one of its 18 top EM3 pupils.

Nazir, the fourth of six children of an odd-job worker and a housewife, had spent most of his Primary 3 and 4 years away from school.

There wasn't enough money for him to go to school. Also, he stayed home to look after his younger siblings.

But after persistent visits by his Huamin Primary teachers, he returned to class in Primary 5. The teachers "wore him down" with encouragement.

They also helped him get financial aid for his books, fees and meals. He was also made a prefect.

Yesterday, Nazir learnt he had scored Grade 1 in all

his subjects and an aggregate of 129. Huamin principal William Pushpam said he was not surprised by Nazir's results, as he has been "very consistent" and "diligent".

In fact, he had done well in lower primary and only went to the EM3 stream, which offers foundation courses, because of all the schooling he had missed.

His Primary 5 and 6 form teacher, Mrs Geetha Velmurugan, knew he had grit.

"From day one, he started working. He aims very high and is very competitive," she said.

To stretch him, she set high targets, like giving him work meant for those in the more demanding EM2 stream.

Nazir, who plays hockey and floorball for Huamin, hopes to pursue a sports career in future. He is gunning for a Normal (Academic) place in Northland Secondary, known as a hockey powerhouse.

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Best performers this year

Top PSLE pupil

» Natasha Nabila Muhamad Nasir, St Hilda's Primary

The next 15 top scorers with aggregates of between 286 and 288

- » Zou Yuhun, Geylang Methodist School
- » Rebecca Teng Siew Yan, Tao Nan School
- » Angela Leong Feng Ping, West Grove Primary
- » Pamela Ting Li Ming, Methodist Girls' School
- » Ang Jie, Kong Hwa School
- » Chng Jin, Kong Hwa School
- » Benny Cheong Yi Loong, Tao Nan School
- » Michelle Tan Hwee Min, Tao Nan School
- » Cao Yuxin, Nanyang Primary
- » Amanda Choo Min Hui, Nanyang Primary
- » Liu Xuetong, Canossa Convent Primary
- » Iris Ng Li Shan, Nan Chiau Primary
- » Melissa Tham Seen Mun, Nanyang Primary
- » Liu Ziwei, Nanyang Primary
- » Lee Jia Le, Nan Hua Primary

Top Malay pupils

- » Nur Aisyah Azman, Jurong Primary
- » Herman Lin Yao Ahmad, Tao Nan School
- » Adam B. Mohamad Rafey, St Hilda's Primary
- » Mimi Amira Zainal Abidin, Haig Girls' School

Top Indian pupils

- » Vanessa Malishree Dharmaratnam, Raffles Girls' Primary
- » Keerthana Kannappan Sundar, Methodist Girls' School
- » Reichel Jenifer, Northland Primary
- » Sonia Vijendran, Methodist Girls' School
- » Deepa Selvaraj, Woodgrove Primary School

Top Eurasian pupil

- » Priscilla Nicole Santa Maria, CHU (Katong) Primary

Singapore students have triumphed in the international arena recently – a group of polytechnic students bagged golds at a technical skills competition, while a Hwa Chong Institution student was top in Chinese for the international equivalent of the O levels. **Tessa Wong** reports

Winning feeling for Hwa Chong girl

By Tessa Wong

CHINA-BORN student Pan Tingting from Hwa Chong International (HCI) is the top student worldwide for the Chinese subject in the International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE) examination (IGCSE) examination this year.

The Cambridge University-administered exam is the international version of the O levels.

Some 500,000 students from 125 countries took the exams in 60 subjects this year. It is not known how many students sat for Chinese.

There have been no past reports of Singapore- or Singapore-based students winning this achievement.

Mr Yeong Seow Chang, HCI's principal said: "As a new international school, the fact that we are able to produce this result brings

pride and happiness to HCI."

Tingting, 17, who is back in her hometown province of Anhui during this school holiday period, told The Straits Times in a phone interview that although her favourite subjects are maths and science, she had always enjoyed using the Chinese language.

An avid writer and aspiring journalist, she was accepted into a national youth writing programme in China at the age of 13, and had her works vetted by famous Chinese writers such as Xiao Fuxing and Bi Shuming.

She said she was confident that other students in Singapore could repeat her achievement.

"(Proficiency in) language is not about your nationality or where you're from. If you work hard and are interested in it, you will get there," she said.



PHOTO: LIANHE ZAOBAO

AVID WRITER: China-born Pan Tingting of Hwa Chong International sat for the IGCSE Chinese paper.



PHOTO: ITE

CHAMPIONS: Nursing graduate Poh Pei Fen (left), 20, and student Ethel Lim, 19, with their gold medals.

Poly students excel at WorldSkills

SINGAPORE has made its best showing in its 12 years of participation in an international vocational skills contest held in Shizuoka, Japan.

The team of 14 polytechnic students bagged three golds, a bronze and six medallions of excellence in the WorldSkills Competition last weekend.

It came in third overall behind Japan and South Korea in the contest, dubbed the "Olympics of skills". Singapore took part in 12 areas.

The biennial international competition saw 800 young people from 47 countries compete in 47 areas of vocational training, ranging from cookery to industrial design, this year.

Team leader Yeow Swee Soon, divisional director of student affairs at the Institute of Technical Education (ITE), said:

"The group did much better than we expected. It was a gruelling four-day event, and the strong team spirit really helped them to perform well."

The team was assembled from winners of the national round organised by ITE in July last year.

Ms Poh Pei Fen, 20, a recent Nanyang Polytechnic nursing graduate, and Ms Ethel Lim, 19, a current nursing student at the polytechnic, bagged one of the golds in nursing.

Ms Poh and Ms Lim were tested in a series of simulated situations, such as teaching patients how to use walking aids and administering first aid.

"We're very honoured to win the gold for Singapore, and hope that with our experience, we can help guide juniors in future competitions," said Ms Poh.

TESSA WONG