

**Headline: Sec 1 : Top schools still have over 50% of places**

**By: Ho Ai Li & Jane Ng**

With direct admission ending today, over 1,500 spots remain open at IP schools

TODAY is the deadline for Primary 6 pupils to take up offers from secondary schools under the direct admission scheme. But for those who did not get an offer, the top schools still have at least half their places available.

Seven of the eight schools offering the Integrated Programme (IP), which lets students skip the O levels, have given out only up to half of their total places.

Raffles Institution, for example, made offers to 225 pupils, leaving another 225 to be filled after the Primary School Leaving Examination results are released next month.

The school received 788 applications, including several from top pupils, head prefects and co-curricular activity leaders.

The Education Ministry (MOE) said last week that 1,600 pupils - or about 3 per cent of the PSLE cohort - had been offered places under the Direct School Admission scheme.

It was introduced last year to give schools more flexibility in admitting students and to recognise a more diverse range of talents. Students can apply directly to the 43 schools under the scheme instead of waiting for their PSLE results.

Schools with approved niche programmes, autonomous and independent schools can offer up to 20 per cent of their places.

IP schools though, are allowed to admit all their students directly, sparking concerns about the odds of getting into one. Indeed, NUS High School for Mathematics and Science has filled up all but 10 of its 150 seats.

In a letter to The Straits Times Forum page yesterday, MOE assured parents that more than 1,500 places in the IP schools are still available.

Students unsure about their suitability for the IP will have another chance to enter these schools at Secondary 3, said Ms Lim Huay Chih, MOE's director of corporate services.

Currently, among the top schools, Hwa Chong Institution and Raffles Girls' still have about 225 places each, River Valley has more than 360 places, and Nanyang Girls' High 273 places available.

Nanyang said it had planned to offer more places, but had to make sure that incoming students could 'handle the rigours of the curriculum', said Ms Chi Pin Lay, dean of marketing and information.

One parent, who declined to be named, said she initially decided against putting her daughter through the direct admission scheme as she did not want to place additional stress on her.

She was also under the impression that only 20 per cent of the places at IP schools would be offered under the scheme.

But she now regrets not getting her to apply earlier to her first-choice school. 'The stakes now are really high,' she said.

But another parent, who wanted to be known only as Ms M. Chua, is unfazed.

She said: 'There's no need to worry...There will be a place for every child.'