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STAYING CLOSE:

Doing well at nearby schools

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S. MANOJ, 16, had the pick of brand-name schools when he scored 251 points in the Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE) four years ago, but he chose to go to Gan Eng Seng School near his home.

Yesterday, he was among the few who showed that it may not matter which school a good student goes to, emerging with nine AIs in last year's O-level exams.

Lee Ya Yu and Claire Goh of Ngee Ann Secondary, both 16, who had scored 253 and 240 respectively in the PSLE, also did well in the exams, each bagging eight AIs.

The students said going to a neighbourhood school was right for them. The convenience of short commutes aside, their schools ran various programmes to help them do their best, they said.

Manoj said he appreciated his school making an exception for him to take nine subjects, making him the first there in at least five years to do so.

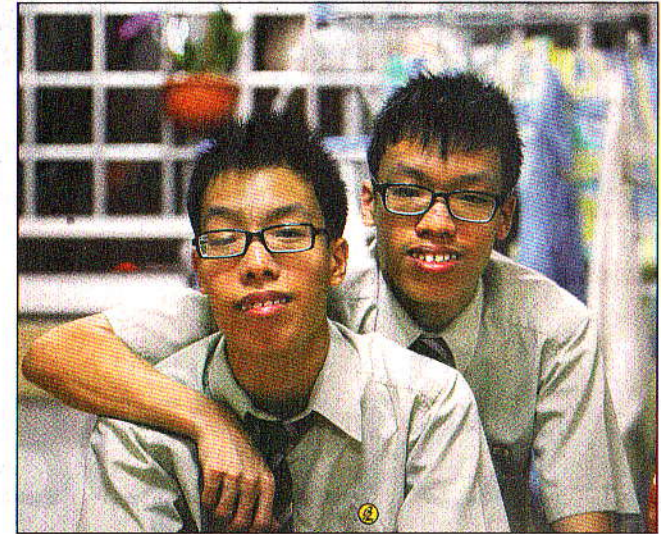
Gan Eng Seng principal Carolin Tan recalled that Manoj appealed to her at the



Manoj chose to attend Gan Eng Seng School, which was near his home, even though he had the pick of brand-name schools. He scored nine AIs in the O-level exams. ST PHOTO: NG SOR LUAN



(From left) Ngee Ann Secondary top students Lee Ya Yu, Claire Goh and Lim Yong Jia. Their school ran programmes to help them do their best. ST PHOTO: LAU FOOK KONG



Twins Pan Zi (left) and Pan Fei each scored seven AIs at Pasir Ris Secondary, which they chose on the advice of their elder brother, who said he enjoyed his time there. ST PHOTO: KEVIN LIM

end of his Secondary 2 year to be allowed to take a ninth subject – geography – and that she had told him: “We’ll give you the support if you have the determination.”

As the only one in his class taking the subject, Manoj had weekly one-on-one sessions with a teacher and did self-studying. He was so interested in it that he covered the syllabus in less than 1½ years.

He said he particularly enjoyed learning about plate tectonics. “It’s interesting because it’s related to events around you,” he added, referring to the earthquakes he read about in the news.

Manoj said he chose Gan Eng Seng on the advice of his father, cargo coordinator G. Sivavanam.

When asked about this, Mr Sivavanam, 48, said: “I thought the school was

well-established and had heard good things about it from friends who had studied there years ago.”

It helped that the family’s Delta Avenue home was only a five-minute walk away from Gan Eng Seng.

Ya Yu and Claire, who could have gone to top schools as well, said Ngee Ann Secondary had programmes that pushed them as far as they could go.

The school in Tampines runs a talent development programme called Sparks for students with an aptitude for mathematics and science from Sec 1. Ya Yu said the workshops on topics such as the human DNA and forensic science gave her an education beyond textbooks.

She added that students are encouraged to take part in competitions such as the Singapore Mathematical Olympiad.

“My time was better spent studying or resting than squeezing on a bus or train with others,” said the girl, who once considered going to Cedar Girls’ Secondary, an hour-long commute from her home in Pasir Ris.

Identical twins Pan Fei and Pan Zi, 16, who scored seven AIs each, did well in the PSLE with scores of 270 and 267 respectively. They picked Pasir Ris Secondary on the advice of their elder brother, Zi, who said he enjoyed his time there.

Pan Fei said: “My brother said the teachers were patient, and I later experienced that. They really took the time to explain concepts.”

Because he was weak in Higher Chinese, two teachers gave him extra coaching after class to improve his writing and comprehension. He scored a B3 for that.

Haziah Asyran Mohamed A., 16, who scored seven AIs and an A2, went to Dunman Secondary after scoring a sterling 263 in the PSLE.

She said: “I felt that by going to a brand-name school, I would meet mostly motivated and hard-working students. I like to meet different types of people. At Dunman, my friends worked hard and also enjoyed their co-curricular activities.”

She will once again eschew the more conventional route – instead of a junior college, she is gunning for a place at Temasek Polytechnic to study either media and communication technology or aviation management and services.

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