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Top tutor's school is so popular, the wait to get in is

One year



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PASSIONATE: Ms Janice Chuah set up Concept Math to give math tuition to primary schoolkids. TNP PHOTO: JEREMY LONG

'Tutors do it for love of teaching, not money'

When she left her job as a primary school teacher in 2009, Ms Janice Chuah was worried she would not be able to contribute enough to her young family.

So the mother of three boys, who were then aged between eight and below one, started giving maths tuition to upper primary schoolkids.

She started out with only five pupils. The business grew and she now heads her own tuition centre, Concept Math, with 600 students.

There are 70 classes, with each class having an average of six to seven kids.

Sessions are an average of \$32 an hour. The classes last 90 minutes, except for those for Primary 6, which go up to two hours each. Kids generally attend one or two classes a week.

She is reluctant to say how much she earns but acknowledges hers is a lucrative business. She says it is not her business acumen – “because I have none” – but her passion which has taken Concept Math to where it is today.

Her centre became popular through word of mouth because pupils have been doing well and today, the waiting period for Primary 1 pu-

pils is about a year.

“Our Primary 1 programme focuses on teaching concepts the fun way. We use ... snap cubes, counters, fraction disks and include games and stories.

“This helps young children acquire a strong foundation in mathematics concepts and in turn builds their confidence in the subject,” she explains.

WAITING LIST

Ms Chuah says that in the past, some parents tried to circumvent the waiting list by calling or turning up at the centre every week.

“Some even told us that they were willing to pay the whole year’s fees just to secure a slot of their choice for their children,” she says.

Throughout the interview, Ms Chuah, whose husband is an engineer, insists many teachers who left the profession to become tutors “are doing it for the love of teaching” and not for the money.

“Numerous reports in recent years put tutors in a bad light. They gave the public the impression that private tutors capitalise on the fear of parents and the ‘kiasu’ culture to have a bite of the billion-dollar pie.”

No doubt, there are black sheep in the industry who have resorted to falsifying qualifications, giving parents false hopes and charging exorbitantly high fees.

— Ms Janice Chuah

She adds: “No doubt, there are black sheep in the industry who have resorted to falsifying qualifications, giving parents false hopes and charging exorbitantly high fees.

“But many just want to equip our students with content knowledge and at the same time, impart correct values and prepare them for the world tomorrow.”

She says that if a child desperately needs help but there is no slot at Concept Math, “we refer him to our worthy competitors”.

She adds: “We would rather lose the business than leave a child stranded.

“There was this new student who did not turn up for the first lesson and when we learnt of the reason – that her mother, who was the sole breadwinner of the family, had died, we refunded the fees paid to help the family out over the difficult period.

“We also offered her free tuition and supported her till she completed her PSLE last year.”

As for the “super tutors” tag, Ms Chuah says: “There is no need for (that). You don’t need to earn big bucks. You will know you are one when a student walks up to you and says ‘thank you.’”