

Primary 5 pupil Shannan Tan plays the Rush Hour game with her mother Joyce Sim at House of Hows education centre. The game is one of the activities the 11-year-old plays at the centre to improve her mathematics.
ST PHOTOS: BRIAN TEO



Watch for stress and burnout

FROM C1

Ms Tan says: “This time of year is like a mid-point check for children. Am I on the right track? Am I behind? These holiday programmes are like a crash course. Most of the students who sign up are looking to brush up their scores in certain areas.”

Ms Laura Oh, director of House of Hows education centre in Bedok, has also seen increased demand for academic boot camps in June. “In the past, the majority of sign-ups would be from the graduating classes taking PSLE and O levels. But now, other levels sign up as well.”

Meanwhile, at Future Academy, which has three tuition centres in Braddell, Bukit Timah and Bencoolen Street, principal tutor Yvonne Chen has seen, since 2022, a year-on-year rise of about 20 per cent in inquiries and sign-ups for its June holiday crash courses at all school levels.

Ms Chen says: “The pupils have busy term-time schedules and are

frequently occupied with co-curricular activities. The June holidays are a prime time for them to catch up and revise.”

She adds that the trend towards e-learning, sparked during the Covid-19 pandemic, has contributed to this rise in demand.

“Many parents have given me feedback that their young children did not learn much from e-learning. A lot of students also felt the same way,” she says.

THE NEW NORMAL?

Some psychologists say the common practice of prioritising studying during the mid-year holidays, which are meant to be a period of downtime for children, could have negative effects.

Dr Annabelle Chow, principal clinical psychologist at Annabelle Psychology and Annabelle Kids, which are private psychology clinics, says: “It’s become a new norm. If a child is not going to tuition enrichment during the holidays, it’s like, ‘If you don’t do this, you’ll just fall behind.’ In my

Secondary 2 student Tris Tay revises her science lessons with tutor Laura Oh (both right), director of House of Hows, where Tris signed up for three academic boot camps in the mid-year school break.



opinion, it’s systemic, it’s a product of the environment that we live in.”

She says a minority of parents she has encountered want to “protect play” for their kids during the mid-year school holidays.

But they, too, feel pressured and judged for not sending their children to academic boot camps or giving them more assessments to do during this time.

Dr Chow adds: “Ten years ago, I saw this phenomenon more from the parents, but now I see more kids wanting to sign up for these holiday classes.”

Ms Tan Su-Lynn, a senior educational psychologist at Promises Healthcare, which provides psychological and psychiatric services, sees the growing emphasis on academics during the school holidays as a societal symptom.

She says: “We are driven by productivity. If it’s not being academically productive, it should

be skills-based. A lot of people feel that rest is a waste of time.

“But the school holidays are a time to rest and explore other interests. The burden on school children’s mental space is meant to be alleviated.”

Professor Yow Wei Quin, head of the humanities, arts and social sciences cluster at Singapore University of Technology and Design, adds: “Overscheduling can occur when a child’s holiday is filled with too many structured activities, leaving little to no time for rest, play or unstructured time. This can lead to stress, burnout and a lack of opportunities for creativity and self-directed learning.”

However, National Institute of Education assistant professor Cheung Hoi Shan, who researches parenting and children’s development, advises parents to consider the meaning behind academic holiday activities.

For instance, a child might feel motivated to achieve a goal like spending five hours a day on assessment books during the holidays, says Dr Cheung.

In such cases, flexibility and checking in with the child to see if these goals and structures need to be reassessed and changed periodically is helpful, she adds.

WHEN STUDENTS GIVE THE THUMBS UP FOR WORK

Secondary 2 student Tris Tay, 14, for instance, says she is “very happy” to have a full holiday programme. It includes boot camps in English, maths and science at House of Hows, tuition in three subjects and regular training for her concert band CCA.

The Manjusri Secondary School student wants to study hard in the mid-year break so she can do better for her year-end examina-

tions and have more latitude in choosing the subjects she wants to pursue in Secondary 3.

Ms Joyce Sim, 46, has signed up her 11-year-old daughter Shannan Tan for maths and science boot camps at House of Hows in June. But they also went on a family holiday to Australia, together with dad, a 48-year-old civil servant, and the couple’s eight-year-old daughter.

Ms Sim also ensures Shannan has free time for her hobbies such as craftwork and painting.

Ms Sim, an assistant leasing manager in the property management sector, says: “Next year is Primary 6, so she needs to strengthen her foundation for her weaker subjects rather than panic at the last minute.

“We’re trying to strike a balance between family bonding and revision.”

venessal@sph.com.sg