O-level results best in 20 years

More than 83% of students passed five subjects or more

By PEARL LEE and CALVIN YANG

SINGAPORE has put its best showing at the O levels in at least two decades going back to 1994, despite the exclusion of students on the Integrated Programme (IP) who skip the exams.

Of the students who took the O-level exams last year, 83.3 per cent scored five passes or more. This surpasses the 82.7 per cent mark set by the 2013 and 2004 cohorts.

Dr Timothy Chan, director of SIM Global Education’s academic division, said the better results could be because the education system now places emphasis on both content knowledge and the learning experience.

“Schools have been teaching students how to learn better,” he added.

Education policy expert Jason Tan at the National Institute of Education observed that competition at the O levels has not eased despite some students being on the IP track.

“With the IP, some students are guaranteed places in top-end JC1s (junior colleges) so the competition is no less intense for those in non-affiliated secondary schools competing for a smaller number of places,” he said.

Just like in the last two years, the Ministry of Education did not name the top scorers when it released the results yesterday. Of the 30,664 students who took the exams, 95.9 per cent passed at least three subjects, while 99.9 per cent had at least a single pass.

But some schools celebrated their top performers. Balsilere Hill Secondary principal Abdul Harris Sumardi got those who scored six to 13 points to stand while their schoolmates clapped.

At St Joseph’s Institution (SJI), its last full cohort of students to take the O levels did better than their peers last year. All its students attained at least five O-level passes, while 98 per cent qualified for JC admission.

From this year, SJI has students in the O-level and IP routes at every level.

The school highlighted Ian Luke Chan, 17, who scored 11 points for six subjects: distinctions for English, combined humanities, physics, elementary mathematics and additional mathematics, and an A3 for chemistry.

Ian, who lost vision in his right eye at eight as a result of glaucoma, started to lose vision in his left eye in 2013 in Secondary 4 and took a break.

When he resumed Sec 4 last year, he had become completely blind. He studied by using a computer program that read out words on the screen.

For the exams, he had to type out answers for English and the humanities subjects, while an assigned scribe helped to work out sums and equations for the math and science subjects under Ian’s verbal instructions.

“I was aiming for below 12 points so that I could qualify for Catholic Junior College,” he said.

Juying Secondary in Jurong West scored its best results in 10 years, with 85.7 per cent of its students getting at least five passes.

Tan Siew Fong, 16, is one of Juying’s top students. She scored five distinctions. She said: “Some of the teachers stayed back after school to help us with our weaker subjects. They gave me the motivation to work harder even when I felt tried.”

Meanwhile, of the 5,940 students from the Secondary 4 Normal (Academic) stream who took one or more O-level subjects last year, 87.9 per cent had at least a single pass.

A total of 2,133 private candidates also took the exams, with 89.5 per cent passing at least one subject.

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