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Headline: Secondary students to get lessons on the law

# Secondary students to get lessons on the law

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LESSONS on the law have made it into the curriculum of secondary schools here, in a move to create more awareness of legal issues that affect the young.

A source aware of the project told The Straits Times that students from more than 10 secondary schools had been picked to participate in a pilot phase in the past few months.

The programme, the source said, will be open to all secondary

schools by the end of this month.

The programme is being initiated by the Law Society, which declined to provide details when asked by The Straits Times.

Other sources involved in the project, however, said the classes will be conducted by the schools' teachers, who will first undergo training sessions conducted for them by the Law Society.

They will also be using teaching materials prepared by law students from the pro bono groups of the National University of Singa-

pore and Singapore Management University law schools, and vetted by lawyers from the Law Society and Rajah & Tann, the law firm that is sponsoring the project.

Besides teaching students about the basics of the law, such as their legal rights and the legal system, the classes will highlight legal aspects of issues relevant to youth. Topics include gangs, illegal moneylending, domestic violence and cyberbullying.

Gangs and rioting were among the top crimes perpetuated by the

young in recent years, and were thrown into the spotlight when the police highlighted youth crime as a key area of concern in 2010.

A spate of gang-related attacks involving young people had shocked the nation then, including the Downtown East stabbing that led to the death of polytechnic student Darren Ng Wei Jie, 19.

That year, the police nabbed 531 young people for rioting - up from 468 in 2009.

Helping young people know how not to run afoul of the law is

one way of curbing the rise of such crimes, said social workers and lawyers.

Ms Brenda Lim, who has counselled young offenders for 20 years, said creating awareness of the law at a young age could help young people change their minds about committing crimes.

"Most young offenders know what they do is wrong, but they might not know the full consequences and the seriousness of their actions," she said. "If they knew the whole picture, they

might choose otherwise."

Criminal lawyer Sunil Sudheesan who represented seven of the 12 youths involved in the 2010 Downtown East attack, said education would help to highlight the kinds of activities that are illegal.

"Having basic knowledge of the law certainly highlights what they shouldn't do," he said.

"But we still need to look at the root causes of youth crimes; you cannot discount the effects of peer pressure."

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