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Raj Nadarajan / TODAY

Teh Jun Hang and his father Nicholas Teh. After a long road to recovery, Jun Hang, now aged 13, was one of the 39,995 Primary 6 pupils who collected their Primary School Leaving Examination results on Wednesday.

- **Teh Jun Hang experienced frequent headaches and nausea in 2017**
- **He was later diagnosed with a grade four cancerous brain tumour**
- **His parents said the road to recovery was long**
- **Jun Hang's teachers were supportive and motivated him to try new things**

SINGAPORE — At the age of 10, Teh Jun Hang began complaining about frequent headaches. Initially, his parents thought he was making excuses to avoid doing his homework.

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But the Pasir Ris Primary School pupil's headaches became more frequent and severe, and he also started vomiting and walking in a trance.

He was later diagnosed with a grade four posterior fossa medulloblastoma — a cancerous tumour in his brain, which required surgery in 2017.

After a long road to recovery, Jun Hang, now aged 13, was one of the 39,995 Primary 6 pupils who collected their Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE) results on Wednesday (Nov 25).

The Ministry of Education (MOE) said that 98.4 per cent of the students who sat for the exams can move on to secondary school.

Of these, 66.3 per cent are eligible for the Express course, 21.2 per cent for the Normal (Academic) course and 11 per cent for the Normal (Technical) course.

There were 634 students who did not qualify for any of the courses. They can either re-attempt the PSLE next year, or apply to the Assumption Pathway School or NorthLight School for "a more experiential and hands-on learning approach", said MOE.

In response to TODAY's queries, the Singapore Examinations and Assessment Board (SEAB) said about 140 pupils, or 0.4 per cent of the PSLE cohort, were granted special considerations due to Covid-19-related reasons.

This includes pupils missing some papers while they were on medical leave due to acute respiratory infection, SEAB said.

To ensure fairness when assessing these pupils, SEAB said it took into account several considerations, such as the pupil's performance in other papers, and his or her school cohort's performance for the affected PSLE subject and school-based exams.

No pupils missed the PSLE due to testing positive for the coronavirus, or because they were placed on stay-home notice, quarantine order or leave of absence, said the board.

LONG ROAD TO RECOVERY

While Jun Hang said he was disappointed that he did not do as well as he had expected in the Mathematics exam — a subject in which he usually excels — his parents told TODAY they were proud and happy that he qualified for the Express course despite the challenges.

After Jun Hang's surgery, the doctors had warned that he may have lost some memories, so his parents prepared themselves for the worst while waiting for him to regain consciousness.

"When he opened his eyes and he called me, I thought: 'What a relief, he still recognises me!'" said Jun Hang's mother, Ms Felicia How.

The 44-year-old global logistics manager also recalled how her son had struggled when he first woke up in intensive care, so much so that the hospital staff had to tie him down to the bed.

After Jun Hang was discharged, his parents then worried about his recovery — whether he would have trouble walking, writing and going back to school.

His father, Mr Nicholas Teh, 48, said Jun Hang took a year and a half off school to receive radiotherapy treatment in Hokkaido, Japan and intense chemotherapy at the hospital and at home.

"It took a while for him to get back to normal pace, but he did really well," said Ms How.

Going back to school was quite daunting for Jun Hang.

For one thing, his former classmates had moved on to the next year without him, and so he returned to an environment with few familiar faces.

"Because I didn't really have any friends, I felt a bit sad," he recalled.

It was therefore helpful that the staff members at Pasir Ris Primary were sympathetic and understanding about Jun Hang's situation, going above and beyond to help him re-adjust back to the learning environment.

For example, his teachers assigned Jun Hang with two buddies to accompany and support him in school.

Because the surgery had also affected Jun Hang's motor skills and he ate a lot slower than the other students, his teachers also asked a student to accompany him during recess time.

"They helped me carry my bag and talked to me," said Jun Hang.

What his parents appreciated most was that the school never limited or singled him out because of his diagnosis.

In fact, the teachers had encouraged him to join his schoolmates for an outdoor camping trip as well as an immersion programme in Vietnam last year.

"Some teachers may not want to bear the responsibility or risk (of taking care of a child with his condition), but the teachers here really put a lot of thought into (taking care of him) and motivated him," said Ms How.

SUPPORT SYSTEM KEY

The support systems available were key in guiding the family through Jun Hang's recovery, said Ms How.

The Children's Cancer Foundation played a key role in helping Jun Hang with his recovery, from providing counsellors to explain his condition to him in a way that is less scary to arranging a session with his classmates to explain what Jun Hang went through.

The Brain Tumour Society Singapore also provided caregiver support to Ms How and Mr Teh.

Most of all, Ms How said she was grateful to doctors Dr David Low and Dr Prasad Iyer at KK Women's and Children's Hospital, who gave valuable advice on how to help Jun Hang recover when they were uncertain of what to do.

Asked about how they feel now looking back on the journey it took for Jun Hang to cross this milestone, Ms How said: "Kids are actually a lot more resilient than we think."

Even when schools closed due to the coronavirus and they had to cope with home-based learning, Ms How said she was proud that Jun Hang was always willing to ask for help, even if it meant attending extra enrichment classes.

"He is very willing to do his best," she said.

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