

Mental maths, abacus for Year One pupils

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KUALA LUMPUR: Learning mathematics will soon be made easier when abacus and mental arithmetic are introduced as part of the Year One syllabus for the subject from next year.

Deputy Education Minister Datuk Hon Choon Kim said the decision, applicable to all schools, was part of the ministry's bid to improve students' performance in the subject.

"We will start with Year One and then extend it to Year Two and Three. There is no need to learn it after Year Three, because it is just a method of learning maths. It is not going to be taught as a separate subject but will be incorporated into the syllabus.

"Teachers will start training in the next two months as

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details on how it is to be incorporated is being worked out," he told reporters after attending Maktab Perguruan Ilmu Khas' (MPIK's) convocation yesterday.

Hon said the AMA way of learning maths, developed by Chinese teacher Xu Sizhong, would also make learning the subject at higher levels much easier.

"Xu and seven other lecturers will be in the country from next week to train teachers as well as teacher trainers."

In an interview with *The Star* last year, Xu said his method has simplified what students need to memorise to just two formulae as opposed to what other mental abacus systems require.

"We are not just teaching a child to do mental arithmetic. What is even more important is the development of the left and right brain with the use

of mental imagery to calculate.

"The final product is a child that is intelligent, confident, has character, disciplined and the ability to focus and is efficient in calculating," Xu said.

Interest in Xu's method began several years ago when he impressed Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad with his work. Numerous meetings were later held with Dr Mahathir to discuss how Malaysia could benefit from Xu's method.

When asked if there was adequate time to train teachers considering they also had to undergo training to teach maths and science in English from next year, Hon said it could be done.

"Introducing AMA and English to teach maths is all part of our effort to produce students who are good in the subject," he added.