

S'pore schools score 'soft skills' wins

Victories in global debate and choir, dance contests testify to success of holistic focus

By JENNANI DURAI

IF RESULTS of recent international competitions are anything to go by, then Singapore's education system seems to be doing all right with the holistic development of its students.

In the past month alone, Singapore schools won at least four international titles in debates, choir and dance.

Leading the way was Singapore Management University's (SMU) three-year-old Law School, which snagged the university's first international law moot title. Then, choirs from Catholic Junior College (CJC) and Anderson Secondary School, both not typically known as choir schools, clinched gold awards in international choral competitions, while Victoria Junior College's (VJC) dance ensemble similarly beat international rivals to win in Italy.

SMU's team, comprising third-year students Chang Zi Qian, Eng Cia Ai, Sheryl Lee and Michael Ng - all from its pioneer law batch - emerged the champion at the Monroe E. Price International Media Law Moot, organised by Oxford University, on March 27. A moot is a mock trial in which participants argue a



The VJC dance ensemble (left) was crowned the champion at Lecco Danza in Italy; and the SMU team - comprising (from left) Michael Ng, Sheryl Lee, Eng Cia Ai and Chang Zi Qian with their coach Asst Prof Tay Eu-Yen (third from left) - won the Monroe E. Price International Media Law Moot. PHOTOS: VICTORIA JUNIOR COLLEGE, SINGAPORE MANAGEMENT UNIVERSITY

case as if in court. The SMU team defeated more than 20 others from all over the world in seven rounds of simulated court debate.

This particular moot centred on media law issues, and this year's hypothetical problem involved a clash between the press and the state on the issue of press

freedom, said Assistant Professor Tay Eu-Yen, a litigator with law firm Drew and Napier, who helped coach the team.

The SMU team beat the defending champions from the Cardozo School of Law in New York in the finals to clinch the title.

The team was sponsored by Drew and Napier, with the personal support of the firm's chief executive officer Davinder Singh, who was part of the first moot team from the National University of Singapore to win an international title in the 1980s.

CJC's choir emerged the overall winner in the Mixed Youth Choir category at the Young Prague Festival 2010 on March 27 and 28. The 36-member choir, which was the only Asian participant in the festival, beat 16 other choirs from Estonia, Poland, Ireland, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Britain.

"We have made quite a breakthrough, considering that CJC is not known as a choir school, and more than half of the singers have no formal musical

training," said teacher in charge Priscilla Lee.

Anderson Secondary earned the High Gold award in the choral competition held in Riva del Garda, Italy, from March 28 to 31. The team beat 40 choirs from 14 different countries, including two other Singapore schools, to emerge tops in the Children and Youth Choir Category of Mixed Voices.

VJC's dance ensemble was crowned the overall grand champion of Lecco Danza, an international dance competition, in Italy early last month.

More than 45 teams from seven countries participated, with the majority from the competition's home country.

Singapore's contingent, the sole representative from Asia, comprised 26 students from VJC, who earned top honours in the seniors category for contemporary dance and the hip hop solo item.

The recent wins in some of the "soft skill" areas that the Ministry of Education is striving for shows that it may not be that difficult a challenge.

The current education system already provides a holistic education for many students in many different ways, said Anderson Secondary School principal Poh Mun See. She added, however, that these winning teams such as Anderson's choir, cater to students who are already interested and talented.

"We have to do more to ensure that every child gets that kind of opportunity, so I would also agree with the latest announcements to provide more opportunities to schools in the areas of music, art and PE," she said. "It's a step in the right direction, especially for the lower levels, to expose the students to many different areas."

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