BY SANDRA DAVE

ACADEMIC high-flyer Wah Chia Ling nearly got stuck in a life she was sure to hate: as a number-crunching accountant.

But the former Raffles Girls’ Secondary and Raffles Junior College student realised her mistake just in time, and broke free of family expectations to pursue her dream.

Ms Wah, 24, found her true vocation by dropping out of a Singapore Management University accountancy course to study early childhood education at Ngee Ann Polytechnic.

She had achieved perfect O-level and A-level scores. She obtained 10 As in her O levels and went on to Raffles JC where she aced her A levels, scoring 4 As in her A-level subjects, a distinction for her S-Paper and A for her General Paper.

It was her parents’ advice that led her hate: as a number-crunching accountant.

Part of the reason, she says, could have been “other people’s expectations”.

“People, my parents included, have certain expectations of those who do well academically. But I had thought hard about it and knew that this would suit me. I had to stand my ground.”

Her father, a property manager, and mother, who ran a textile shop, eventually came round and supported her decision. But not wanting to put too much of a burden on them as they were about to retire, she looked for a way to study early childhood education in Singapore.

Ngee Ann seemed to be the answer, especially since she could go on to a degree with Boston’s Wheelock College, a top institution brought in by the Singapore Government to run degree programmes in early childhood education in partnership with Ngee Ann.

In 2007, she enrolled in the early childhood diploma course and this year she graduated top of her class of 170 students with an almost perfect GPA of 3.99.

She applied for the Wheelock College course run here and was accepted. She will start classes in June this year.

Her ambition is to start a kindergarten or become an academic specialising in the area.

“I know this is what I was meant to do. The polytechnic gave me a direct path to realise my dream.”