

# Online chat service for troubled pupils

By **PRISCILLA GOY**

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CHILDREN who need a listening ear can tap an online chat service launched yesterday by the Singapore Children's Society.

Called Tinkle Friend Online, it is the only such chat service for distressed children here and adds to the society's phone helpline, which has seen a drop in calls.

Last year, 1,701 calls were made to the toll-free Tinkle Friend helpline, down from 2,508 in 2012, and 4,662 in 2008.

This could be because children have become more Internet-savvy and fewer calls are made in the mornings as more schools go single-session, said Ms Rachel Tan, a director at the society's

Student Service Hub (Bukit Merah).

The society saw a possible demand for the service as children are increasingly "hanging out" online.

"Schools are moving into things like e-learning, and have been starting computer classes at a very young age," said Ms Tan.

Tinkle Friend Online offers support, advice and information to lonely and troubled pupils, especially when their parents or main caregivers are unavailable.

Manned by trained staff and volunteers from the society, the service was launched yesterday at West View Primary. More than 220 children have used it since its soft launch last December.

Jarvis Cham, 12, from West View, said he usually approaches his parents or teachers for help, but may use the service next time.

"It's sometimes easier to talk online, and you can chat without giving your real name."

Last year, boredom was the most commonly cited reason for calling the helpline. Others include academic stress.

The chat service, at [www.tinklefriend.com](http://www.tinklefriend.com), is available from 2.30pm to 5.30pm on weekdays.

The Tinkle Friend helpline (1800-274-4788) operates from 9.30am to 11.30am and 2.30pm to 5pm on weekdays.

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