



Ministry of Education
SINGAPORE

Speeches

Speech by Dr Ng Eng Hen, Minister for Education, and Second Minister for Defence, at the 13th Appointment and Appreciation Ceremony for Principals on Tuesday, 28 December 2010 at 2.30pm, Shangri-La Hotel, Island Ballroom

Mr Masagos Zulkifli BMM
Minister of State, Ministry of Education and Ministry of Home Affairs

Mrs Tan Ching Yee
Permanent Secretary

Ms Ho Peng
Director-General of Education

Distinguished guests

Principals

Ladies and Gentlemen

Opening Remarks

- 1 It is my pleasure to be with all of you today at this 13th Appointment and Appreciation Ceremony for Principals. On behalf of the MOE family, let me first extend our warmest congratulations to the 65 Principals who will receive their appointments today.
- 2 We have 26 new principals, who for their first time will have the stewardship of a school entrusted to them. It is an onerous responsibility but also a privileged one. I hope that as many before you have done with distinction, that you will discharge your duties with dedication, always being careful never to betray the trust in you accorded as Principal. You should aim always to be exemplary so that your conduct is above reproach. The trust in our public school system that Principals, teachers and MOE have established painstakingly over the years with students, parents and the community must be maintained and guarded by the whole teaching fraternity. No one can be an effective teacher or Principal without this trust. The teaching professional body must therefore continue to adhere to strict ethical codes of conduct, even if it means removing errant members to maintain high standards.
- 3 We have also decided to add a new item to this ceremony this year. We will be showing our appreciation to 21 Senior Education Officers who will be retiring this year after many years of faithful and exemplary service. These 21 officers had contributed much to the Education Service and I hope have had rich rewarding careers as Principals and HQ officers.

Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2009

- 4 Looking back, this year was a bumper harvest of accolades for Singapore's education system. We receive glowing reports and worldwide coverage from McKinsey & Company, the World Bank and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). For example, the OECD lauded our professional recruitment, training and development of teachers and leaders as an example for others to emulate.
- 5 We also did well in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) results recently released. I am very heartened that our students have fared very well in all the three PISA domains of Reading, Mathematics and Science. Singapore had 12.3% of our students classified as Top Performers, attaining the highest levels of proficiency in all the three domains, second only to Shanghai. I would like to acknowledge and thank our teachers and school leaders for delivering a high quality of education—not only in terms of the knowledge our students acquire but also in developing skills that enable them to apply their learning in new situations. The high scores in Reading should motivate us to continue to cultivate a habit of reading in our students.

Review of Secondary Education (SERI)

6 Our education system did not reach this high plane overnight. Our achievements and successes did not come easy. In fact, it has taken nearly thirty years of sustained hard work, often accompanied by sacrifices and efforts beyond the call of duty of teachers and administrators to get to where we are today. Neither should these positive affirmations signal to us that we have arrived. Indeed, global surveys show that other nations are now taking educational reform of their systems seriously. They want to catch up and surpass other countries because they know that good education for their students is key in today's knowledge based economies. We should therefore take these positive results as affirmation that we are on the right track and continue our on-going educational reforms.

7 In early 2009, MOE completed the Primary Education Review, of which implementation of recommendations are underway. Concurrently, we started and have recently completed the review of Secondary Education, by a Secondary Education Review and Implementation (SERI) Committee chaired by the Director of Schools Wong Siew Hoong. The review was comprehensive and took into account the key driving forces and international trends shaping education in the future, good features of other education systems, as well as feedback from the ground. Let me use this opportunity to share further insights into the recommendations, especially on the overall philosophy and intent of SERI.

8 The Committee recognized that adolescence is a period of profound transformation and self-discovery for our secondary students. It is a time that they grow their individual identities, assert their independence, make decisions and form relationships with peers. It is a period of their awakening.

9 Our educational goals must take this critical transforming period for our secondary students into account even as we prepare them for JCs, Poly or ITE beyond secondary school. As in PERI, secondary students should be given a range of experiences and opportunities to mould character and develop the skills and values they need for life.

10 Secondary schools should therefore see it in their overall mission to guide students more closely in their holistic development. We can provide greater social-emotional support through strengthening the teacher-student relationship (TSR).

Strengthening the Teacher-Student Relationship

11 The relationship between students and teachers should never aim to be a substitute for parents. However, during adolescence, teachers and peers do exert a strong influence on individual students.

12 Many schools have already put in processes to strengthen TSR. At Bukit Panjang Government High School, the Normal (Technical) classes have the same Form Teacher for 4 years. It is a whole-school approach to nurture the Normal (Technical) students, involving the Form Teacher, co-Form Teacher, Allied Educators attached to the graduating Normal (Technical) class, subject teachers, CCA teachers, Discipline Master, School Counsellor, and even good classmates to exert positive peer influence. Study groups are formed after school hours under the teachers' guidance, and much effort placed into understanding the students better so as to help them tap into their strengths and work on their weaknesses. The school's Normal (Technical) students have benefited from the school's efforts, emerging as top Normal (Technical) students in the GCE N-level exams, but more importantly I am sure that the strong teacher-student relationships will have a positive effect on the students long after their graduation.

Moving Character and Citizenship Education to the Next Level

13 SERI also recognized that two parallel platforms complement TSR to develop students—the Character and Citizenship Education (CCE) program and Co-Curricular Activities (CCA). A dedicated CCE unit will be set up in MOE to coordinate and synergise efforts across various domains such as National Education, Social-Emotional Learning and Civics and Moral Education. A taskforce, chaired by Director-General of Education Ms Ho Peng, has been studying approaches to enhance the provision of CCE in schools.

14 Schools are improving their CCE programs. For example, Rivervale Primary has implemented a National Education Heritage Islandwide Trail to help its students appreciate Singapore's unique landmarks. After the trip, pupils work as teams to produce art collages of their experiences. This helps them internalize NE messages.

Enhancing Student Learning through Co-Curricular Activities (CCA)

15 CCA provides rich platforms to engage, enliven and develop students. Most students form lasting memories, friendships and values from CCA experiences learnt outside the classroom. I am glad that some schools are utilizing this platform extensively. For example, North Vista Secondary has introduced a Cross-Curricular Activity Programme for Normal (Technical) pupils since 2009. It is a compulsory year-long module that provides tailored, hands-on activities and games to promote active learning. Some examples include kite flying, mocktail design, music appreciation and wushu. The wide array of activities was specifically chosen to cater to students' interests and needs. In addition, structured time is set aside for reflection and group discussions to help pupils internalize and personalize their learning.

16 SERI therefore recommends leveraging on CCA to further enhance student learning. These include providing more opportunities for students to participate in sports competitions and enhancing CCA programmes. We already have the Program for Active Learning Primary

Schools and the Sports Education Programme in secondary schools. MOE will introduce second tier competitions so that more students can compete. As a working goal, we want to provide every secondary student at least two opportunities to participate in sports competition.

Strengthening Education and Career Guidance

17 In line with providing more guidance and developing students, we will enhance the Education and Career Guidance portal. This will help students make good decisions about their post secondary institution and courses they want to enroll in. The ECG portal plans to have a profiling tool which helps students better assess and match their abilities and aptitude.

Strengthening Articulation to Post-Secondary Education

18 As announced by Prime Minister in this year's National Day Rally speech, SERI had also recommended expanding the menu of choices and pathways after completion of secondary school. We will be expanding the Integrated Programme, creating new articulation pathways for Normal (Academic) students via through-train programmes to the polytechnics, and establishing two new specialised schools for Normal (Technical) students. SERI also recommends expanding subject options at "O" and "N" levels, which will help students articulate to post-secondary education. With more diverse pathways and greater options, Principals and schools will play a key role in helping their students, as well as their parents, make informed decisions.

19 We will need strong, committed and visionary Principals with the drive and determination to set up the two new Specialised Schools for Normal (Technical) students. This is a challenging and satisfying role. If you feel that you can make a difference as such a principal of these two schools, let DOS know.

Release of SERI's report

20 I have highlighted only salient recommendations but the full SERI report will be released today.

A Short Tribute to Retiring Principals

21 We have a strong and effective education system today because of dedicated school leaders who are able to adapt to the changing demands of the time. Amongst the Senior Education Officers who have or will be retiring this year, Miss Tay Siew Lian, Miss Ong Pheng Yen and Mr Goh Ek Piang will be retiring as Deputy Directors.

22 Being the first Principal of Hougang Primary from 2000—2007, Mr Goh Ek Piang, a strong advocate of Outdoor Adventure Education (OAE) had incorporated OAE into the curriculum and integrated it into Physical Education lessons. I visited the school recently and saw students climbing rock walls and zipping across the school in the air. The school's innovative efforts were recognised when the school was awarded the Programme for School Based Excellence Award in Outdoor Adventure Education in 2005. The school leads other primary schools as the Cluster Centre of Excellence for OAE today.

23 As Deputy Director in-charge of Co-Curricular Activities, Ek Piang remained true to his conviction of doing his best to enrich the learning experiences of students by putting into place plans for sports and talent development. Ek Piang will be retiring after 45 years of dedicated service.

24 Mrs Belinda Charles will be retiring after almost 40 years of service, of which 25 years were as Principal. She was known to be strict but fair.

25 She expected high standards from students because she believed in them. But she also set high standards for herself and staff. Belinda has been a key player in the conceptualisation of the St. Andrew's Village. As outgoing President of the Academy of Principals Singapore (APS), she had steered the APS in the successful organization of the 9th World Convention of the International Confederation of Principals in 2009. Her dedicated years of service have had great impact on the students and education fraternity.

26 There are many other examples of inspiring school leaders and time does not permit me to list all your many contributions to the education service. But the most satisfying impact is not from words articulated but the real lives which you have touched and enriched through your years as a teacher, Principal and leader in education.

Concluding Remarks

27 Finally, let me congratulate all Principals appointed today. I look forward to another exciting and productive year ahead.

28 Thank you.