

Singapore Government

PRESS RELEASE

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SPEECH BY DR OW CHIN HOCK, MINISTER OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS, MAYOR OF TANJONG PAGAR CDC DISTRICT AND MP FOR TANJONG PAGAR GRC AT THE OPEN HOUSE OF MEI CHIN PRIMARY SCHOOL ON SATURDAY, 5 JUNE 99 AT 9.00 AM

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I officiated at the opening of the school in 1976. It is indeed a great pleasure to be back here again after 23 years for the Open House. In 1976, the school started functioning with about 1,400 pupils in 35 classes and with 76 teachers. But because of the population shift and aging population, the pupil enrolment has dropped to 588 pupils in 7 classes and with 29 teachers. This poses the greatest challenge to the school.

2 While the external changes such as new housing developments are beyond the school's control, internally, the school can strive to upgrade so as to attract more pupils. It should aim to become one of the best value-added schools in the neighbourhood. I am glad Mei Chin has been in the process of learning - and continuously making innovative improvements to meet new circumstances and challenges.

3 One concrete example of the innovative improvements is that the school is aggressively moving into Information Technology. IT is a necessity in today's school curriculum. Mei Chin is one of the few primary schools, and the first in this area, to initiate such a comprehensive IT programme for its pupils. Mei Chin and other schools must keep pace with the time and adapt quickly to the technological changes so that schools can impart relevant skills and knowledge to pupils to enhance their ability to learn and ensure employability in a knowledge-based economy, after they leave school.

4 In addition, schools also need to look into the physical infrastructure and facilities to enhance the learning environment for pupils. I am glad that Mei Chin has been identified for Phase I of PRIME which stands for Programme for Rebuilding and Improving Existing schools. Pupils can look forward to a full range of academic programmes and extra-curricular activities in the upgraded or rebuilt schools. The details of the plan will be made known in October this year.

5 Good IT facilities and physical environment will not mean much if schools do not embrace the "Thinking Schools, Learning Nation" vision. This is our vision for Singapore's education in the 21st Century. Thinking schools have to develop future generations of thinking pupils, equipped with creativity and passion for learning. Pupils must learn, unlearn and re-learn continuously throughout their life.

6 At a young impressionable age, however, pupils must be given basic knowledge in languages, IT, Mathematics, and Science, and imbibe our shared core values. Pupils will grow up in tune with these values so that they will, as citizens, identify with Singapore, rooted in their cultural heritage, develop a sense of belonging to their community, and a sense of responsibility to the society.

7 At an older age, our pupils should not always be trained to give only the right answer or the right solution to a posed problem. They should be taught to weigh the pros and cons, costs and benefits of the choices they make, and learn to live with the consequences of their choices. They may be encouraged to even question the assumptions of things around them, and not be afraid to disagree. These are pre-requisites for creativity and changing mindset.

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8 However, at the end of the day, when we take stock, education must be seen as more than just about academic performance and prizes won. Fundamentally, education is about nurturing the whole person, his moral, cognitive, physical, social and aesthetic development. These 5 areas are spelt out succinctly in the Desired Outcomes of our Education System. To the educationists, these outcomes are not new. But in our eagerness to make changes and adapt to changes, we may sometimes derail from the fundamentals. We must go back to the basics. The aim of education is to produce pupils with a sense of what is right or wrong, who are fit and healthy so that they can continue to pursue their goals in life, who can relate to the community at large regardless of creed or class, who are able to sit back and appreciate the beauty of things around them, and who will become good citizens of tomorrow.

9 We all know that bringing up the young is not an effort in isolation. The kind of students we aim to mould and develop cannot be the task of schools alone. Parents, caregivers, and the community must play an active role in ensuring that the

desired education outcomes are achieved.

10 Finally, let me congratulate Mei Chin Primary school for its past achievements and progress, and wish the school success in its future endeavours.

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