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SPEECH BY MR CHAN SOO SEN, PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY

(PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE & MINISTRY OF HEALTH), AND

MP FOR EAST COAST GRC (JOO CHIAT), AT THE TEMASEK SECONDARY SCHOOL'S 18TH SPEECH DAY
ON SATURDAY, 3 JUL 99 AT 9.00 AM AT

2 BEDOK SOUTH ROAD

National Archives of Singapore

Good morning

Mr Loo Pui Wah

Principal, Temasek Secondary School

Mr Andrew Low

Chairman of the School Advisory Committee

Members of the School Advisory Committee

Teachers, Parents

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

Boys and Girls

I am very happy to join you today on this very happy day. I would like to welcome Temasek Secondary School to Joo Chiat. Your beautiful campus has given character to Upper East Coast Road. I would first like to congratulate all students who are going to receive prizes at the Annual Speech and Prize-Presentation. Your achievements are the source of pride and inspiration of all in this hall.

2 I would also like to congratulate Temasek Secondary School for having done well. Temasek has been in the list of value-added schools in the last two years. The School has certainly added value in the academic and ECA fields. The School has also added value in the non-curricular areas through enrichment, social, and leadership development programmes. I can feel the strong sense of pride as the Principal presented the school report.

3 The four or five years in secondary school is perhaps the most formative years of a person's life. One of the most important "value-added" elements of a secondary school is to help the students know themselves during these formative years. This is a most challenging but important task. Teenagers often have identity crisis. They are no longer children, but are not quite adults. They want to experiment on new things and new ways of life. They want to be taken seriously but feel the society does not really understand them. They try to catch adults' attention but feel the adults are looking elsewhere. They feel frustrated and feel the adults seem to have forgotten how it was to be young.

4 Schools help students know themselves by providing a safe environment from where they can experience the society, experiment their approaches, receive friendly feedbacks and guidance. A good neighbourhood school with average intake of students provides a good cross-section of the society in the safety of the school. The school may have students who range from potential scholars to problem cases. They study together, get to know and make friends with each other. By interacting with each other, all would have a better understanding of what a community and the society is really like. They will find mirrors for themselves. Through the mirrors, they get to know themselves better and see who they really are. They find roles for themselves in the school, and derive roles for themselves in the society later. So they will be better prepared for the real life when they leave school.

5 Teachers should not be discouraged by the fact that the intake of pupils are

quite average. From my own experience of my alma mater, it is often the average students who will have the deepest feelings and memories for the teachers and their schools. I recall a few years ago, one of my old Principals, a Catholic priest, returned from Rome to retire in Singapore. Our Alumni Association organised a "return to school day" for our old boys to meet with the old Principal. Many old boys turned up. For the whole afternoon, he was surrounded by the old pupils, talking about the good old naughty days. Some were nearly in tears. Some apologised profusely for past misdeeds. Most of these grateful students were not the most successful. They were the average pupils who felt that the school had really made a difference to them. They are grateful to the old Principal for the love and care which they cherish and miss after they left school. They feel the school has added value to their lives. The feeling appear stronger for average pupils than the scholars.

6 One specific story is most heartwarming to me. I had a Primary One classmate who was an intelligent boy from a rich family. However, his parents neglected him. He was mischievous in school, did badly in his studies, and was eventually two years behind me. When he reached Secondary Two, he got involved with gangs and was badly beaten up in a serious gang fight. The police came to school. Some teachers advised my old Principal to dismiss him since he had brought disgrace to the school. My old Principal decided that the boy should be given another chance. He told the teachers he saw goodness in the boy. Totally moved, the boy swore to my old Principal that he would never betray the trust. He started to study hard. The following year, the Discipline Master appointed him a prefect. He told the other students if he could obey school rules, so should they. He did well in his studies, went to the university, and is now running his own business. He told me without the old Principal and the school, he would have been in Changi Prison today. The school helped him know both the good side and bad side of himself. He had been through life in school.

7 Not everybody can get to the top. But everybody have goodness in them. It is our responsibility as parents and schools to discover the goodness in our children and pupils, get them to know themselves, develop them, so they can become useful members of the society when they grow up.

8 Do keep up with the good work in the name of your motto "We Care". Let us work together for a better future for each of our students. We will have a better future for our Nation.

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Thank you.

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