

**EMBARGOED TILL AFTER DELIVERY
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**SPEECH BY MS GRACE FU, SENIOR MINISTER OF STATE,
MINISTRY OF NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND MINISTRY OF
EDUCATION, AT THE DELTA SENIOR SCHOOL GRADUATION
AND PRIZE PRESENTATION CEREMONY HELD ON FRIDAY, 20
NOV 09 AT 9.40 AM AT SPRING SINGAPORE AUDITORIUM**

Miss Denise Phua, Member of Parliament Jalan Besar GRC,
Mr Chan Chee Keong, Vice-President of Association for Persons with
Special Needs,
Members of the APSN Executive Committee,
Miss Soh Mee Choo, Principal of Delta Senior School, Teachers,
Parents,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen

Good Morning.

Introduction

National Archives of Singapore

1 It gives me great pleasure to be here at the graduation and prize giving ceremony of Delta Senior School. My warmest congratulations go to all the 127 young men and women who graduate and receive prizes today. Let me also congratulate the proud families of the graduands and prize winners who are here to celebrate this special occasion with them.

2 This day marks an important milestone in the lives of our graduating seniors. Just as a caterpillar has to eventually leave its cocoon, so too must our young wards make the important transition from schooling, to working and living. The graduation today shows the school's commitment to prepare students with special needs to integrate successfully into society, and lead independent and purposeful lives.

Nationally Recognized Vocational Certification for SPED Students

3 Over the past few years, MOE has embarked on several initiatives to raise the quality of special education. One of these was to work with SPED schools to explore the feasibility of preparing students with mild intellectual disability to obtain nationally recognized vocational certification so that they are equipped with skills to be gainfully employed.

4 In 2007, MOE partnered two key vocational training agencies -- the Institute of Technical Education (ITE), and the Workforce Development Agency (WDA) -- to prototype a vocational education programme in two of our special schools. Metta School partnered ITE to offer the ITE Skills Certification or ISC, while Delta Senior School partnered WDA to offer the Workforce Skills Qualification or WSQ certificate. The following year, in 2008, Metta School became an Approved Training Centre (ATC) under ITE, while Delta School attained Approved Training Organization (ATO) status under WDA.

These approvals are affirmations that these schools have met the required industry standards in their delivery of vocational programmes.

5 Three industry areas were selected for prototyping in these schools - horticulture and landscaping, food and beverage, hotel and accommodation. To date, 29 students have successfully attained an ITE Skills Certificate and secured jobs, while about 100 students are on track to attaining WSQ certifications in the next 1 or 2 years.

6 The prototype vocational education programme has had a positive impact on teachers and students. The teachers themselves reported a greater sense of focus, professionalism, and direction, in their work. The students showed greater pride in their achievements, were more confident, and more motivated to learn and achieve.

7 An example is Steven Jackson, a student from Metta School. Armed with an ITE Skills Certificate in Food and Beverage, Steven will serve as a full time trainee at Crown Plaza Changi Airport upon graduation this year. The 2-year prototype vocational education programme has not only equipped Steven with the necessary industry-related skills, Steven is now more able to manage his emotions and expectations on the job. If a cake does not turn out right, Steven knows he has to relook at the steps he took, or re-examine the recipe to see if he missed out an ingredient.

8 Two key factors have contributed to the success of the vocational education prototypes. The first success factor is the ability of the teachers to customize the curriculum to cater to the unique learning styles and pace of students with special needs. Every student had an individualized transition plan supported by a multi-disciplinary team comprising teachers, para-professionals, and industry trainer.

9 The second success factor is the ability of the schools to forge strong partnerships with employers. This partnership is instrumental in facilitating authentic work experiences for students, which for many students, like Steven Jackson, result in actual job placements. Employers too stand to benefit as this arrangement gives them the opportunity to assess the SPED school trainees for potential employment. Indeed many employers report a positive appreciation and regard for the SPED employees they have hired.

10 One such example is Loi Bing Kun, a student trainee from Delta Senior who is currently employed as a kitchen assistant at Saprino's Pizzeria, Orchard, as part of his work experience. In a letter of commendation, Mr Ela Ali, restaurant manager of Saprino's Pizzeria, had this to say of Bing Kun: "Bing Kun is obedient, courteous, respectful towards his colleagues. He has a hardworking personality and always offers to help his colleagues. He does his job well with guidance, once he understands his daily tasks". Bing Kun is nominated for the Best Student Award at today's Graduation and Prize Giving Ceremony.

Announcements on Vocational Education

11 I commend Metta and Delta for their bold and dedicated effort in forging this vocational education pathway for students with special needs. From 2010, Metta will offer an accredited vocational education programme for SPED students living in the Eastern part of Singapore, and Delta's vocational education programme will cater to students in the Western part of our Island.

12 MOE will enhance the facilities of these two schools so that they are better equipped for vocational education. Plans are underway to enhance the physical facilities in Metta School¹ to cater to the needs of students in the vocational education programme. As for Delta Senior School, the planning and construction of their new purpose-built school building is on track and will be ready in 2011. When it is completed, the new building will be equipped with state-of-the-art equipment and facilities to support the vocational education programme for students in Delta Senior School.

13 When the vocational education programmes are fully implemented in these two schools, it is estimated that up to a quarter of SPED students will have the opportunity to graduate with nationally recognized certification and relevant industrial skills for open employment.

¹ Metta's purpose-built school building was completed in 2005.

14 To ensure that SPED students with the potential for certification are given the opportunity to do so, MOE will be piloting a common set of eligibility criteria for the vocational education programmes in the next two years. In addition, MOE will also be piloting a set of exit targets for the programmes, to ensure that students graduate from the programmes job-ready, that is, with the necessary levels of competencies for gainful and sustainable employment.

15 The prototype showed that SPED students can learn when the pace of instruction is appropriate. The vocational education programme will be extended from the current 2 years, to 3² years in duration. This is to better accommodate students' learning needs, and allow them sufficient time to attain certification. This would ensure that more SPED students will graduate job ready.

16 Another thing we have learnt from the vocational prototyping experience is that the work-experience component is critical toward successful school-to-work transitions for SPED students. This is where SPED students work on-site at an actual place of work, and receive job coaching from job mentors or job coaches. With an extended 3-year programme, Metta and Delta will be able to put in place carefully structured work experiences for students. Students would receive no less than 600 hours of work experience during the programme. We will continue to look to international best practices and latest research to improve this critical aspect of the training.

² The duration of the current vocational education prototype is 2 years.

17 Strong school-industry partnerships are the bedrock of vocational education for SPED students. However this remains a challenge for SPED schools as they lack the leverage and resources to engage employers. Moving forward, MOE will engage relevant partners, including MCYS, NCSS, MOM, ITE and WDA, to build stronger ties between SPED schools and employers. These may include enhancing supports for employers to provide work-experience settings for SPED students and to make it easier for them to hire the trained graduands from SPED schools.

18 I commend employers such as Prince Landscape, Fig and Olive, Holiday Inn Park View, which have managed to achieve successful outcomes with their SPED employees. They have done this through job customization, or through simply assigning a suitable mentor to the SPED employees. To encourage more employers to come on board, I urge Metta and Delta to provide prospective employers with more information and guidance on ways to better accommodate the work styles and needs of SPED students at the workplace. With their experience and expertise in teaching students with special needs, the schools could conduct briefings or workshops, or provide guidelines to prospective employers.

19 We have learnt that SPED students stand a greater chance of success when they are better prepared for the rigors and demands of vocational education. Going upstream, MOE will support a second phase of prototyping aimed at putting in place a more structured phase of vocational preparation for SPED students, starting as early

as 14 years of age. This preparatory phase will focus on vocational guidance, exposure to a range of vocational options, and systematic training in basic employability skills such as communication and problem solving. This new phase of prototyping will take place in selected SPED schools from 2011.

Conclusion

20 The special education landscape is a diverse one. We recognize that different supports are needed for different children. MOE is committed to providing pathways to nurture the potential of every student. The steps we are taking to develop vocational education in the SPED sector is one more pathway for our students with special needs.

21 The policy of Many Helping Hands has, and continues to serve us well. MOE will maintain its positive collaborations with NCSS, families, and many other partners, in improving the quality of lives of our children with special needs.

22 In closing, may I once again congratulate today's graduands and prize-winners. I wish each one of you fulfillment and happiness in the paths that you choose.

23 Thank you.