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**SPEECH BY DR NG ENG HEN, MINISTER FOR EDUCATION, AND SECOND MINISTER FOR DEFENCE, AT THE 12TH APPOINTMENT CEREMONY FOR PRINCIPALS ON TUESDAY, 29 DECEMBER 2009 AT 3.00PM, SHANGRI-LA HOTEL, ISLAND BALLROOM**

Mr S Iswaran  
Senior Minister of State for Trade and Industry and Education

Ms Grace Fu  
Senior Minister of State for National Development and Education

Mrs Tan Ching Yee  
Permanent Secretary

Ms Yeoh Chee Yan  
Second 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 12<sup>th</sup> Appointment Ceremony for Principals. On behalf of the MOE family, let me first extend our warmest congratulations to the 68 Principals who will receive their appointments today. For 35 of them, this will be their first appointment. Whether new or re-appointed, this ceremony re-affirms our belief that each of you as Principal plays a deciding role in realising the goals of our education system. Only within your school can every child be nurtured and developed to his full potential. Only effective teachers led by their Principals can translate aspirations and policy into concrete programs that can

impact students for the better. Without diligence and commitment from teachers, little can be accomplished.

2. This is why MOE is constantly on the lookout for new and better ways to support the professional community to teach better. For example, we have in recent months, announced the set up of new or enhancement of existing language centres – English Language Institute of Singapore (ELIS), Singapore Centre for Chinese Language (SCCL) – to assist our language teachers. The Umar Pulavar Tamil Language Centre (UPTLC) is being upgraded to enhance its capacity for professional development. Similarly, the Malay Language Centre of Singapore will play a bigger role, when it is set up after SPS Masagos's review. Today, I will announce the two new engines to support teachers and improve learning outcomes – the Physical Education and Sports Teacher Academy (PESTA) and the Singapore Teachers' Academy for the aRts (STAR).

3. These will be enablers to help us provide a more rounded education to every child. Our central goal through education is to prepare each student well for his future. In a few days' time, school will start. We remind ourselves that *that* child entering Primary 1 will only leave our school system in 2021 – in 12 years time – and it is for that future we must prepare. The World in 2020 will be different and we want to equip our students adequately but we cannot be all things to all men. It would be useful today to sum up the core essentials we seek to deliver, the fundamental skills and values we must impart to all students as the desired outcomes of our education system.

4. First, high standards in maths and science will always be valuable for our students to excel in a technologically-driven world. Second, soft skills like leadership, resilience, an innovative spirit and the ability to communicate well will give students that added edge to compete in a globalised world. PERI recommended that developing these soft skills should be part of our core curriculum. English proficiency will also be key. This is why we also wanted to raise standards of English, and set up ELIS to facilitate this. Third, our bilingual policy remains relevant for economic and cultural reasons. If the next growth chapter of history will be centred on the rise of Asia, as many believe, then bilingual skills for our children will be an asset. Lastly, but surely not the least, we must impart sound timeless values to our children in schools. An educated Singaporean must always mean someone who respects himself and those around him, who cares and contributes to improve lives and who is rooted to this country.

5. Thus far, we have done well as an education system that delivers these fundamentals. One major reason why we can do this is that all our processes are aligned and that we place the right emphasis on what is important. Resources, teaching methods, curriculum and exams and how we reward good performance are consistent, so that teachers know what and how to teach, and students and parents know what is expected. We build or buy infrastructure that supports these efforts.

6. The system is all important, if teachers are to do their job effectively. If for example, we had stayed as disparate vernacular schools teaching in Chinese, Malay or Tamil separately, we would be grappling with many problems today, even if we had excellent teachers. If the system does not focus on the correct outcomes and

reinforce the efforts of teachers, or indeed works against them, then students will not do well. Instead, we have used English as our working language, which greatly facilitates the teaching of Maths and Science. The fact that we use English seems natural today, but we should remember that it was not so before and only exists because we took decisive steps to change.

7. From time to time, we must continue to make adjustments to stay relevant and effective. Over the past decade, we have indeed not shied from making such moves. This include the through-train programs, the revised JC curriculum, Direct School Admissions, Specialised Independent Schools for Arts and Sports, Subject-Based Banding, and new pathways for Normal (Academic) [N(A)] and Normal (Technical) [N(T)] students. When introduced, these new polices did cause some disruption but were necessary to cater to the diverse abilities and needs of our students. These changes improved our educational system by providing the optimal structure for our teachers to achieve better outcomes for more students.

#### **REVIEW OF TEACHING OF MOTHER TONGUE LANGUAGES**

8. This need to make appropriate adjustments early, rather than late, to respond adequately to changing needs and environment applies equally to our bilingual policy.

This is why, at the Workplan Seminar in September this year, I drew attention to challenges in teaching English and our Mother Tongues Languages (MTLs). I shared then that today, nearly 6 in 10 Primary 1 Chinese students come from households where English is the dominant home language, compared to 1 in 10 in 1982. For Indians it has increased from 3 in 10 to 6 in 10; Malays — 0.5 in 10 to 3.5 in 10. For MTL, we cannot expect the same outcomes or teach the same way as we

have before, when the speaking environment in homes today, indeed in society, is radically different compared to that 20 years ago, or even a decade ago. I asked that the professional community recognise and tackle this challenge head-on. In recent months, PM and MM have also touched on CL education and much public debate has ensued.

9. I am glad that both the public and professional community have understood that if our bilingual policy is to remain relevant and effective, we must deal with the new reality decisively. DGE is leading a review to make the teaching of CL more engaging and useful, to keep pace with our changing language environment. Basically, we will need more and differentiated approaches to cater to students with a wider band of language abilities and home backgrounds.

10. There will be necessary changes afoot but today, I want to make clear MOE's general approach to CL teaching and specify the desired outcomes. This is important so that you as Principals can guide your teachers in the teaching of CL, and students and the public will know what to expect.

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11. First, we will continue to help those students who can excel in CL to do so. As mentioned, 27% - double that a decade ago - took HCL at O levels. This shows that our CL teachers have succeeded in their efforts. They deserve acknowledgement and praise for their endeavours and positive results. We will maintain our efforts to support these high ability students, through existing bicultural Chinese programs and SAP schools. Indeed, if more students do well in CL, and

more demand for SAP school places, MOE is willing to consider setting up one more SAP school.

12. However, for the broad middle band and the smaller group of students now taking CL-B, we cannot ignore the inexorable change in language environments in our homes and society. It is for these groups that we will have to re-calibrate our expectations and teaching methods to keep CL alive and useful for them. Our aim is to emphasise and teach CL for students as a live language they can use, in the modes which they are likely to use. We will have to update our curriculum, teaching methods and even tests to keep in tandem with changes in our society. We do want to make the learning of CL more engaging and fun, but students will still have to make the effort to learn CL. We will provide details of initial changes for CL in March during COS, but the general directions should not be a surprise. Indeed in implementing these changes, we will ensure an orderly progression and provide sufficient time for students to adjust. These directions will also apply to Malay and Indian languages, which are also experiencing the same language trends as CL.

13. The changes to take place will be an extension of measures from the MTL review in 2004. Let me elaborate to provide clarity. Firstly, the modular approach recommended in 2004 has shown positive results and we will extend the modular approach to cater to wider bands of abilities for CL. We started this for Primary schools but in principle this would be applicable for Secondary CL as well. Recognising that students will have a wider spread of abilities in CL at every level, we ought to have a system that allows separate groups with different abilities to

progress at a more realistic pace at each level. In essence, more subject bands for CL.

14. This over-arching policy to match the teaching methods and outcomes appropriate to the student's ability should sensibly start as soon as they enter Primary 1. Therefore, we will put in more processes to assess the ability of individual students and to take into account their home speaking environment when they enter Primary 1. This will help teachers better customise methods to teach CL to different ability groups. For some primary students who are at the basic level, it would require using English to help them learn CL, as our initial pilots have shown positive results. As the child progresses in his CL abilities, teachers will continue to employ appropriate methods. Teaching a student CL as a second language is fundamentally different from teaching a student whose mother tongue is Chinese. Our teaching approaches must recognise this.

15. Secondly, we will continue the emphasis in speaking and listening, to make the learning of CL more relevant and useful for students. As part of the 2004 CL review, we announced that the oracy component for PSLE would increase from 30% to 35 % and that for 'O' level CL would increase from 25% to 30% from 2006. We will increase further the oracy component but details will be announced in due course, with adequate time for students to prepare well. Third, we will use more information technologies platforms to help students learn and write the language. ICT tools are widely available and indeed what people use through emails or SMS-es to communicate in daily life and work.

16. As with all subjects, we must align teaching methods, curriculum and testing formats to achieve the right outcomes for CL. To assist us, DGE's Committee is also looking at curriculum and testing approaches from other systems which include the Hanyu Shuiping Kaoshi (HSK), the International Baccalaureate (IB) and Advanced Placement (AP). The review is still in exploratory mode but we are interested in these other systems as they are more tailored for students with home language environments that approximate a growing segment of our students. Their end points have a different emphasis – less focused on writing components but more targeted to help students use the language and build confidence progressively – a goal we share.

17. Let me illustrate. The HSK is a standardised CL language proficiency test developed by Hanban (The Office of Chinese Language Council International headquartered in Beijing). It incorporates daily events in its tests. Hanban has recently launched a new HSK examination format consisting of two parts – a written and an oral test – which are independent. The written test has 6 and the oral test 3 progressively higher levels as end-points which are more modular and integrated, than our system. Students can achieve higher levels at their pace, like piano exams. Such a system has its advantages. For example, students in a school at say, Sec 2, would then be studying at different levels, to achieve the next level appropriate for themselves. Students will progress at different speeds to reach different levels, but all can be encouraged to go as high as they can or want. In fact, in our current system we do have a semblance of such a system. In primary schools, we have 3 levels – foundational, CL and HCL. In secondary schools, we have 5 levels – Basic



CL for Normal Technical students, Normal Academic CL, CL 'B', CL and HCL. But our system lacks the integration and seamless progression pathways.

18. The AP and IB systems use ICT module for teaching and assessments. For example, the student candidate is asked to watch a video and participate in a simulated conversation that they might encounter in real life, like applying for a scholarship. Students are taught appropriately for the test, through dialogue sessions between themselves, email writing with the help of computer software etc.

19. This study of other systems will take a longer time to complete as we want to be careful that their methods are appropriate to adopt in our context. We are likely to evolve our own model, by integrating the most appropriate features we find in good teaching systems around the world.

20. These changes re-affirm our bilingual policy. We are responding decisively to on-going trends and preparing our students for their future. We will not get stuck in any mental mould or system even when they have become less effective or relevant in changed circumstances. Instead, we must remain open to new ideas, methods and tools that are available to more effectively help all our students with different abilities learn CL. We want to engage all our students, help them become proficient in using the language – to converse and read in everyday contexts. For those with the ability and interest to go further, we will continue to equip and support them through the Higher Mother Tongue Languages, Language Elective and Bicultural Studies Programmes, and SAP schools.

21. The upcoming changes will require some re-training, but these changes will be introduced over time, to minimise disruptions. I want to commend our CL teachers who have responded positively in the past to change. They recognised the need to adapt to changing circumstances with the interests of our students at heart. Through this process, I also want you, as Principals to reinforce the reasons for change and set clear directions to your teachers, to guide and help them understand what we are trying to achieve.

### Enhancing Staff Engagement

23. Even as we seek to deliver good education, we must take care of teachers well, if we expect them to perform in their jobs. Let me touch on some major efforts underway.

24. First, staff engagement is vital. This is why MOE tracks the level of well-being and job satisfaction among teachers. We will do more to enhance staff engagement. Principals like CEOs of companies, set the tone in schools. We want our schools to be progressive organisations which expect and draw the best from its people. If we want to attract high quality people into teaching, our schools must provide an environment where they look forward to work in, where they feel valued and caters to their needs.

25. MOE will do more to better support Principals to build such organisations in our schools. Schools Division recently released a **Teacher Work Management Framework** to help Principals optimise the deployment of teaching resources and workload of their teachers. PED will also establish a **new HR Partner Centre**. Each

Principal will be assigned his school's dedicated HR Partner at MOE to assist the Principal in areas such as manpower planning, staff engagement, as well as professional and leadership development.

26. For teachers and other employees, PED has also established the **HR Contact Hub**. **This will provide a direct avenue for their** input queries and receive answers.

### **BUILDING PROFESSIONAL CAPACITY**

#### Singapore Teachers Centre

27. Recently, DGE spoke on the Singapore Teachers Centre (STC – working name) to drive a culture of professional excellence and enhance teacher professional development (PD).

28. Over the past two months, many of you from across the spectrum of Superintendents, Principals, Master Teachers, Senior Teachers and Beginning Teachers have contributed ideas. There is strong support for the STC. Let me share some of these ideas.

29. Teachers want the STC to focus on developing professional standards and expertise. One way is for this to be led by Master Teachers appointed full-time to the STC to develop a mentoring and coaching culture where teachers are strongly supported throughout their career, especially when they take on new duties.

30. The STC can also be a one-stop centre for **Research and Resource**, equipped with new technologies and a repository of learning and teaching resources for all educators. At the STC, teachers can work closely with relevant partners such as industry and NIE on practice-based research. The STC can help form networks within and outside Singapore for collaborative projects to advance teaching methods.

31. The STC can also help establish varied interest groups to help build a strong sense of camaraderie within the fraternity.

32. I recognise that to accomplish these goals, that the STC should be accessible and adequately resourced. MOE is drawing up the blueprint of this centre as the professional home for teachers.

#### Teacher Academies for PE, Art and Music

33. Developing soft skills is a core deliverable of our education system. Physical Education, Arts and Music (or “PAM”) are integral to this developmental process. If we want to do this well, we will have to build up a cadre of better qualified teachers in

PAM. For example, good Art teachers need a professional community of like-minded teachers to interact, conduct exhibitions and learn from to develop their craft to better teach students. Music teachers too need opportunities to share best practices, exchange techniques in teaching or for them and their students to perform. PE teachers would welcome opportunities to interact professionally with colleagues here and from abroad. MOE wants to enhance the career opportunities for dedicated PAM teachers as well as provide a permanent platform – a receptacle, a gestational bed – that can help these teachers through their careers.

34. I am happy therefore to announce that MOE will set up the Physical Education and Sports Teacher Academy (PESTA) and the Singapore Teachers' Academy for the aRts (STAR). PESTA will provide platforms and in-service training for PE teachers in various PE methods, sports concepts and coaching skills. Similarly, STAR will develop professional excellence in art and music education. Plans to physically site these two academies are underway.

35. Collectively, PESTA and STAR will garner available expertise from NIE, tertiary institutions, schools and practitioner communities here and abroad. With these combined resources, they can better provide high quality training and development programmes for continuing training to teachers. PESTA and STAR will also draw on expertise from overseas to enrich the training programmes and provide overseas attachment opportunities for Art, Music and PE teachers. In time, when PESTA and STAR are more established, we hope they will forge links and partnerships with various reputable universities around the world.

36. With better arts, music and PE teachers, students can expect more avenues to develop the full range of their talents. The PE community can develop a more systematic and effective delivery system to help our students achieve physical wellness and access a wide range of sports and games to develop sportsmanship, teamwork and resilience. Similarly through more art, dance and drama, our students can learn to see the world through different lenses, develop their creativity and better express themselves.

37. Collectively the STC, PESTA and STAR will serve as new engines to upgrade the professional capacities of our teacher community. Each of these new engines will take time to build up capacity. If we do this well, we will greatly enhance the professional standing of educators in Singapore and internationally.

#### **A SHORT TRIBUTE TO RETIRING PRINCIPALS**

38. Finally, I would like to pay tribute to our 24 retiring Principals with us this afternoon, some of whom have served more than four decades in education. Every one of them has made significant contributions and impacted thousands of students in their professional careers. I would like to pay a special tribute today to two outstanding Principals.

39. Ms Selvarani Ratnasingam, who will be retiring after 37 years of service and after 10 years as Principal of Canberra Primary, stands out as a leader who inspires and leads by example. Her school developed innovative strategies to help students with learning difficulties in the English Language, and also championed the FutureSchool Project that leverages on technology to make learning more engaging for students.

40. I would also like to pay tribute to Mr Ang Wee Hiong who has served as an educator for 33 years. As the first CEO and principal of Hwa Chong Institution, Wee Hiong implemented the Integrated Programme and saw through the successful merger of The Chinese High School and Hwa Chong Junior College. Under his leadership, HCI expanded its network of international linkages by establishing a satellite campus in Beijing and pioneering the inaugural Asia-Pacific Young Leaders'

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Summit that brought together student leaders from the Asia-Pacific region and beyond, including the United Kingdom and the Middle-East.

41. We would not be here today without dedicated school leaders like you who are able to adapt to the changing demands of the time. We have a respected and renowned education system because of strong and competent principals, constantly striving to improve our schools, and never fearful of new challenges. As these Principals retire, new ones rise to continue the journey. If we can perpetuate this virtuous cycle, then the future of Singapore will remain bright.

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