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**SPEECH BY DR NG ENG HEN, MINISTER FOR EDUCATION AND
SECOND MINISTER FOR DEFENCE, AT THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF
THE NEW PATHLIGHT SCHOOL SITE ON TUESDAY, 27 APRIL 2010,
AT 10.30 AM**

Mr Yew Teng Leong
Chairman, Pathlight School Board

Ms Denise Phua
President, Autism Resource Centre (Singapore) and
Supervisor, Pathlight School Board

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

INTRODUCTION National Archives of Singapore

1. Good Morning. I am pleased to be here for the opening of the new Pathlight School site. I congratulate the school leaders and staff on the special occasion.

2. In Singapore, there are 20 Special Education (SPED) schools run by Voluntary Welfare Organisations (VWOs) that receive funding from the Ministry of Education (MOE) and the National Council of Social Service (NCSS). Pathlight School is the first special school for children with autism who have the cognitive ability to benefit from a rigorous mainstream academic programme.

SUPPORT FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION

3. This partnership of Government agencies and VWOs – the many helping hands approach – was first mooted in 1988 by the Advisory Council for the Disabled (ACD), chaired by Dr Tony Tan who was the Education Minister then. The ACD was appointed to look into how best the Government could help the disabled integrate into Singapore society, and it noted that the care of the disabled should not be seen as purely a governmental responsibility but the concern of everyone – the family, the community and the government. Under the “Many Helping Hands” approach, the Government has been working hand-in-hand with parents and the community to better complement each other and coordinate efforts to help the disabled.

4. Specifically for children with special needs, several measures have been undertaken to enhance their support in both SPED and mainstream schools since 2004. For example, additional funding has been provided for curriculum enhancement in SPED schools last year, and this year, funding was provided to SPED schools to establish school-based education awards to recognise and encourage students for their achievements and progress. To better support SPED students offering mainstream secondary curriculum and vocational education programmes, MOE also announced at the Committee of Supply this year that the Edusave Pupils Fund and Edusave Grant for these students will be increased from January 2011. SPED students can use their Edusave Pupils Fund to pay for school fees and enrichment programmes organised by the schools. Over the next few years, MOE will also be introducing Reading Mastery, a Direct Instruction reading programme, to SPED schools to build a firm foundation of literacy skills in SPED students.

5. In mainstream schools, MOE has created a career path for Allied Educators (Learning & Behavioural Support) who can now specialise in providing support for students with mild learning disabilities. Starting from

this year, Metta School and Delta Senior School are offering their students a vocational education programme that comes with nationally accredited qualifications. MOE is currently prototyping a structured programme of vocational preparation, for SPED students from age 13 years in four SPED schools, which aims to help students develop the necessary foundational and readiness skills for vocational education.

6. In addition, new models of educational provisions such as satellite SPED classes in mainstream schools have also been successfully prototyped. Within Pathlight, two models for systematic integration were successfully implemented with three mainstream schools in the vicinity, namely Chong Boon Secondary School, Townsville Primary School and most recently, Bishan Park Secondary School.

National Archives of Singapore **GREATER INTEGRATION BETWEEN STUDENTS FROM SPED AND**

MAINSTREAM SCHOOLS

7. In the first model with Chong Boon and Bishan Park Secondary Schools, Pathlight secondary school students study in self-contained classes in the mainstream schools, taught by their own SPED teachers, but

share common facilities and interact freely with their mainstream peers during recess. Routinely, Pathlight students also join the host schools in various social and learning activities through platforms such as the Community Involvement Programme (CIP), National Education Programme and CCAs. Some Pathlight students who have developed the skills to stay engaged in large-group classes also join their mainstream peers for some of their academic subjects.

8. Perry Kwoh is one student who has benefited from this meaningful integration. Like many students with high functioning autism, Perry had good cognitive abilities but faced significant social and communication difficulties. He enrolled in Pathlight School several years ago and is now attending satellite classes in Chong Boon Secondary School, learning alongside mainstream students. Through the close attention and autism-specific strategies used by Pathlight teachers, Perry slowly and steadily acquired the attention and behavioural skills that are needed for learning. He has participated well during the satellite classes and is also well-liked by his mainstream classmates.

9. In the second Satellite model, daily social integration opportunities are created for students at the primary school level. Students from Pathlight and its immediate neighbour Townsville Primary School interact during daily recess and regular enrichment activities. In fact, in the planning of this new Pathlight school building, the two partnering schools made provisions to facilitate the regular interactions. For example, Townsville Primary widened its adjacent gate so that students can move easily between the two schools. Pathlight School, on the other hand, created a covered walkway linking Townsville Primary to Pathlight's school canteen, so that pupils can walk over for recess easily, regardless of the weather.

10. All these joint social and learning activities are planned and facilitated by the staff of both schools with one purpose in mind – to create meaningful and effective integration activities between Pathlight students and their mainstream peers. This has enabled the students with autism to access the full rigour of the mainstream academic curriculum, while continually receiving the specialised support that they need. At the same time, this has also provided opportunities for the mainstream students to develop a sense of empathy and social acceptance, so that they, in turn, can help to create a more inclusive society for Singapore. One example is

M. Kasthuri, one of Perry's mainstream classmates from Chong Boon Secondary. She enjoys the regular interaction with the Pathlight students as it allowed her to communicate with and understand them better. The shared activities encouraged greater bonding, and she has shared that she now was aware that the SPED students are just like everyone else and there was no awkwardness between them.

PATHLIGHT SCHOOL'S SUCCESS

11. Pathlight School has seen a significant growth since its inception in 2004 with just 41 students. A large portion of this new site is built with MOE funding of \$26 million. It now serves more than 500 students aged six to 18 years old. Over the five years, many students have benefited from

Pathlight's unique brand of education and flourished under the care and guidance of their teachers.

12. Huang Kai Song, for instance, is among the first batch of GCE 'O' Level graduates of Pathlight. Once a shy, isolated boy, Kai Song has become a confident young man who is now in Temasek Polytechnic pursuing an IT course in mobile and network solutions. At Pathlight, not

only did his social and academic skills improve, Kai Song also developed strong employability skills and work ethics through direct job coaching in Pathlight school work sites after school hours. He worked as a paid part-time customer service staff in two of the school's worksites, the Deli started with Starbucks, and Professor Brawn Café. And, I am told, he saved the money he earned to buy his favourite IT accessories.

13. Another student whose life was transformed is Low Quan Jin. Quan Jin, who has more severe autism, is cared for by his widowed mother, a cleaner. From a non-verbal child who used to throw things out of the windows, Quan Jin has acquired good understanding of simple English, excellent work habits, and, is on his way to achieving the ITE-endorsed Certificate in Baking. Quan Jin works during the weekends at a café and is well-liked by his colleagues for his work discipline and diligence.

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14. I am heartened to note that some features of the systems and curriculum developed in Pathlight and the Autism Resource Centre (ARC) are now scalable and extended to Eden School, another SPED school serving students with autism.

CONCLUSION

15. Pathlight is the result of a successful collaboration among the Autism Resource Centre (Pathlight's parent charity), the National Council of Social Services and MOE. The happy, confident faces of the students are testament to this collaboration. I commend the volunteers and staff of the ARC, as well as the many dedicated officers from MOE and NCSS, donors, corporate partners and parents who have, through their support and contribution, made Pathlight a success.

16. We have indeed made good progress in Special Education in Singapore, thanks to various stakeholders in the public and private sectors. The Ministry will continue in its mission to provide every child with quality education, whatever their abilities or family background.

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17. I wish the Board and staff of Pathlight School every success in the years ahead.

18. Thank you.