

17 SEP 1986

Singapore Government

PRESS RELEASE

Information Division, Ministry of Communications & Information, City Hall, Singapore 0617 • Tel. 3307269 / 3307270 / 3307271

Release No. 68/AUG
06-1/86/08/23

St-764-7

SPEECH BY DR TONY TAN KENG YAM, MINISTER FOR EDUCATION,
AT THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE NEW SCHOOL BUILDING OF ST.
NICHOLAS GIRLS' SCHOOL ON SATURDAY, 23 AUGUST 1986 AT 5 PM

Let me first say how pleased I am to be with you this afternoon to share with you your pride and joy at the official opening of your new school building.

St. Nicholas Girls' School has come a long way since its founding on 16 January 1933 with an enrolment of 40 pupils in two classes, Primary One and Primary Two. At that time the entire teaching staff consisted of only two persons, the principal who taught English and another teacher who taught Chinese. From such modest beginnings, St. Nicholas has blossomed to become one of our premier schools in Singapore with an enrolment of almost 3,000 pupils in 79 classes ranging from Pre-primary to Secondary Four.

After operating at the Victoria Street premises for many years, St. Nicholas has now found a new permanent home on this beautiful location overlooking Pierce Reservoir. The new school facilities, which are spread over five hectares of land, include exceptional facilities such as a double-sized hall, air-conditioned libraries, a variety of music and resource rooms and a well equipped gymnasium.

While good premises and beautiful surroundings are helpful they do not, by themselves, ensure that a school will be able to give a good education to its pupils.

For the premises and facilities to be put to full use, the school needs to have capable and hardworking

teachers led by an imaginative and enthusiastic principal. In the case of St. Nicholas, the pupils are indeed fortunate to have a dedicated teaching force who have the interest of their pupils at heart. One in 10 of St. Nicholas' teaching force of 120 teachers has been with the school for over 15 years. More remarkable, over the last 45 years since 1941, St. Nicholas has had only two principals both of whom have left their mark on the school. Mrs Hwang-Lee Poh See has been the principal since 1972. Her predecessor, the late Sister Françoise Lee, was principal for over 30 years from 1941.

This continuity of leadership and consistency of purpose has given St. Nicholas a special character which distinguishes the school from other schools.

St. Nicholas has always been well known for its high academic achievements and active ECA programmes. There are, however, two features which, in my view, deserve special mention: the bilingual ability of the pupils and the strong moral tone in the school. Even before the Government stressed the importance of English and while St. Nicholas was still a Chinese medium school, the school had begun to introduce from 1960 the use of textbooks in English in all subjects. Pupils were encouraged to speak English and Mandarin on alternate school days. These measures have served to give the pupils first language competence in both English and Mandarin.

Another distinctive feature of St. Nicholas is the strong moral tone in the school and the emphasis on the importance of filial piety and the importance of the family. Indeed staff and pupils of the school are encouraged to treat one another as members of the same family and the atmosphere of care and concern which prevails in the school is indeed heart-warming.

St. Nicholas is an example of the quality education which can be achieved when a school has adequate facilities, good teachers and a capable principal backed by an active Board of Management and old Pupils' Association. The question that comes to mind is "Can we not delegate more areas of responsibility in school management to established schools such as St. Nicholas?" This is a matter which is currently under consideration by my Ministry and I would welcome feedback, views and suggestions from parents, teachers and particularly principals on the subject. There will, of course, be problems when changes are made to the present system of administering schools but, with patience and careful consideration, there seems no reason why we cannot devise workable schemes to give our more established schools a greater say in determining their own futures and courses of action.

In conclusion, may I congratulate the principal, teachers and pupils for having prepared a most impressive and interesting programme. With its dedicated teaching force and the strong support of parents and former pupils, I am confident that St. Nicholas will continue to be a centre of excellence for education in Singapore.
