

PRESS RELEASE

Release No.: 15/JUL

06-1/97/07/11

97-TCH-17

**SPEECH BY RADM (NS) TEO CHEE HEAN,
MINISTER FOR EDUCATION AND
SECOND MINISTER FOR DEFENCE,
AT THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE NEW CAMPUS OF
TANJONG KATONG GIRLS' SCHOOL
ON FRIDAY, 11 JULY 1997 AT 7.30 PM**

**IMPROVING SCHOOL MANAGEMENT
THROUGH SCHOOL CLUSTERS**

I am happy to be here to celebrate with you the official opening of the new premises of Tanjong Katong Girls' School. Tanjong Katong Girls' School, being the second post-war government school to be built, has a relatively long history of 43 years. The school has been re-developed on the present site with many more facilities and much larger physical space. This new school building represents the government's commitment to providing the best possible facilities for the education of our younger generation. Tanjong Katong Girls' now has the facilities to conduct a comprehensive range of curricular and co-curricular programmes for its pupils.

Building new schools with modern facilities and upgrading older ones is not enough. Schools must be well led and well managed. Excellence in school management - in all our schools, and in the school system as a whole - is a strategy towards realising our vision of "Thinking Schools, Learning Nation".

The Ministry of Education has been looking into ways of improving the system of managing schools. We want to give schools greater autonomy so that they can make timely local decisions, deploy their resources more effectively and be more responsive to the needs of their pupils. In 1988 the Ministry set up independent schools and in 1994, autonomous schools. To date we have eight independent schools and 18 autonomous schools. The objective is to give these schools greater autonomy and flexibility to introduce innovations and educational programmes to challenge their pupils. I am pleased to note that Tanjong Katong Girls' School has taken full advantage of its autonomous school status to provide a full range of interesting and challenging programmes to benefit its pupils.

We are now looking at ways to provide greater autonomy to all our schools. We have some 200 primary schools and 150 secondary schools in our school system each one reporting directly to the Ministry. Principals have a certain level of authority to make decisions. Beyond that they have to refer to the Ministry. Being a large Headquarters, decisions on the use of resources, and responsibility and accountability for outcomes are spread among a number of different departments and persons. The span of control of the Ministry is also very wide. We want to move decision making closer to the schools. We need a management structure where decision making is decentralised, where the authority to make decisions on the allocation and use of resources, both human as well as financial resources, is associated with responsibility for the educational outcomes achieved. In this way, we will be able to devolve greater autonomy to schools more confidently.

This is in line with the Government's decision that all government ministries and departments will develop as autonomous agencies with authority to decide on how they will use the resources they have been

allocated. We want to see to what extent we can use the same approach in school management.

In January this year, The Ministry of Education started the "School Cluster" project in twenty-four schools to test the desirability and viability of devolving greater autonomy to more schools. The schools are grouped into four clusters with two clusters of five and seven schools each at Primary and Secondary levels. Each cluster is headed by a Group Senior Principal who is experienced in school management. The school clusters operate like autonomous entities. They have the flexibility to make certain financial decisions without having to refer to the Ministry of Education. They also have a greater say in the deployment of teachers within each cluster. Feedback from the school cluster project has so far been very positive. The devolution of decision making to the cluster level has allowed resources and expertise to be used according to the needs of schools in the clusters and there is greater responsiveness to the needs of individual schools. Principals and teachers in the clusters have reported that they have been enriched by the high level of collaboration among schools and benefited from shared experiences. This has improved the ability of the schools to meet the needs of their pupils.

The experiences of the four clusters of schools thus far indicate that the "School Cluster" structure is a viable way of managing schools in future. The aim of school clusters and devolution is not just to achieve administrative excellence. More importantly, it is a way to provide schools with the ability to be more innovative and creative in providing education to their students. To be creative and responsive, schools can no longer be managed by a centralised top-down approach in problem-solving and in implementing change. An approach that depends much more on local initiative with collaborative local decision making is needed to spawn new ideas and initiatives in schools. With

greater decentralisation of authority and accountability, and a culture of collaboration, the management of schools in clusters opens up new possibilities for principals and teachers to look for creative ways of delivering education to pupils.

As we develop more experience with school clusters, we will group more schools into clusters to give them greater freedom of action. And as we refine the administrative procedures we will devolve more authority and responsibility to the clusters. School clusters represent yet another important step in nurturing the culture of "Thinking Schools".

A clear authority and responsibility structure in our education system also means a clearer definition of the roles and responsibilities of the Director of Education. The Director of Education, as the highest ranking professional in the Education Service, has ultimate responsibility for the implementation of all education policies and ensuring the achievement of educational outcomes. As greater autonomy is devolved to schools, the Director of Education will also have responsibility for providing leadership to schools and ensuring good leaders are in place in the schools. To more clearly reflect the breadth of responsibilities of the office of the Director of Education, and to emphasise the important role played by the Director of Education, the position will be redesignated as Director-General of Education with effect from 15 July, 1997.

These changes to give more authority and responsibility to our schools reflect the confidence that we place in the ability and professionalism of the principals and teachers in our education service. I am confident that they will make use of the new opportunities provided to come up with new ideas to take our schools to greater heights.

Finally, let me congratulate Tanjong Katong Girls' School one again on the opening of these fine new premises. Over the years Tanjong Katong Girls School has nurtured batches of highly talented and confident girls, many of whom have taken up leadership roles in both the public and private sectors. It is heartwarming and reassuring to know that a strong community of past and present Principals, teachers, parents, Alumni and School Advisory Committee members are working together to help pupils in this school excel. I am sure that the school will continue to make full use of the autonomy that you enjoy to explore all avenues to maximise the potential of each pupil.

I wish the Principal, staff and pupils of Tanjong Katong Girls' School continued success as they take on the challenges in the years ahead.

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