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SPEECH BY MR CHAI CHONG YII, SENIOR MINISTER OF STATE
FOR EDUCATION, AT THE 90TH ANNIVERSARY DINNER OF
FAIRFIELD METHODIST GIRLS' SCHOOL AT SHANGRI-LA HOTEL
ON 4 AUG 1978 AT 8.00 PM

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Tonight you are celebrating the 90th Anniversary of Fairfield MGS. Each year in the life of a school is a milestone of considerable significance. What happens each year will leave its indelible mark on the character and personality of the pupils. Your school has had ninety of such formative years to its credit. It is opportune at this juncture to reflect on what we are trying to achieve in education in our young Republic.

We are trying to give shape and purpose to developing minds. We are training lively, inquiring minds to meet future challenges and to ensure our nation's prosperity and stability in the years ahead. We much achieve this with our pupils while they are in school with us, while their minds are receptive and resilient. In giving them an education, we provide them with far more than the mere ability to read and write. We help them to acquire vitally important qualities like a correct value system, national consciousness, the determination to succeed both as individuals and as members of the State, as well as an awareness of the priorities in life.

These are grave responsibilities on the shoulders of Principals and teachers, and indeed on everyone involved in education. It is not a task that can be achieved by a small group within the Education Service. No matter how hard they work, the end result will still be rather meagre. This is because education is a profession in which individual effort is unlikely to have great impact on the eventual result. In some ways, education is like doing backstage work in an opera. We provide the training and the environment so that the performers can give of their best. In our case, the performers are our pupils. What they are capable of in all respects

is what we, in our different areas have been able, separately, to help them achieve. This serves to emphasize the vital need for everyone in the teaching profession to move in the same direction. Only through a concerted effort by everyone of us can we hope to create a truly robust generation of Singaporeans capable to handling in its stride the problems that lie ahead. This is a formidable task but it is one we must take up in real earnest if we want a better future for ourselves and our children.

One important step in the right direction is the active inculcation of traditionally good Asian values in our pupils. I cannot over-emphasize the importance of giving our pupils the inner strength and substance to weather the vicissitudes of modern life. Asian values will help us to do just that and more, for they will help cement our society together.

Our pupils are being increasingly bombarded with disruptive values by the mass media. We must ensure that our pupils have sufficient good Asian values to act as cultural ballast, to evaluate external influences and give them their proper place. The best place to inculcate such values is the school. I would like you to give serious thought to this task and try to find opportunities to pass on these values to your pupils. You would have succeeded in your educational efforts beyond all measure if you can bring this about within the normal programme of your school.

Finally I would like to congratulate your school for the fine work it has achieved. Your school has grown from humble beginning to its present strength as a result of the efforts of its Principals, teachers, benefactors and pupils. I am confident that your school will continue to grow from strength to strength. I take pleasure in wishing you all the best in the years ahead.
