

30 NOV 1987

Singapore Government

PRESS RELEASE

Information Division, Ministry of Communications & Information, 36th Storey, PSA Building, 460 Alexandra Road, Singapore 0511. Tel: 2799794/5.

S7-444-38

Release No: 47/NOV
03-3/87/11/20

SPEECH BY MR HO KAH LEONG, SENIOR PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY (COMMUNICATIONS & INFORMATION) AT YUNG AN PRIMARY SCHOOL'S 10TH ANNIVERSARY CONCERT CUM PRIZE GIVING AT OTANI HOTEL BALLROOM, 6TH FLOOR ON FRIDAY, 20 NOVEMBER 1987 AT 7.00 PM

I am delighted to be here this evening to share with Yung An Primary School its tenth birthday celebrations. Like all birthdays, this is a joyous occasion. I remember the time in 1977 when Yung An Primary School first started functioning in a humble way. Then it had only six classes which were held in Boon Lay Garden Primary School because its own building was not ready for occupation. Now the school has its own premises at Yuan Ching Road with the modern facilities found in all our new schools today.

Yung An Primary School has done well in the academic and ECA fields. During the last ten years the school has seen four principals at the helm and each has made a significant contribution to the school's growth. The present Principal, Mrs Lucy Tan, is no stranger to the school. She has grown with the school, going through the ranks of Senior Assistant and Vice-Principal before assuming Principalship. I am confident that Mrs Lucy Tan, who is active in community work and who enjoys good rapport with her staff and pupils, will see that Yung An Primary School continues to grow healthily in the years ahead.

Today there is a great deal of talk about excellence in education. Some people seem to think that striving for excellence is the business of only a selected group of schools. This is not true. Every school can and should strive for excellence. Of course, the degree of excellence

each school can achieve will vary in accordance with a number of factors. The more important consideration, however, is for every school to always want to forge ahead. When we begin to be complacent and rest on our laurels we sow the seeds of decline. I like the motto of one of our Singapore schools. It reads "The Best is Yet to Be." It is clear that the motto signifies striving for something better all the time. That is the spirit in which we must strive for excellence. Yung An Primary School's motto of "Progress Forever" has that same spirit. The school's track record reflects this spirit.

Many theories have been put forward as to how a school can move towards excellence. I don't propose to examine them here. I just want to mention two factors which, in my view, are vital. The first is the school leadership. It is the principal who charts the destiny of a school. It is the effective principal who has a clear vision of what he or she wants the school to be, and is able to articulate clear goals, directions and priorities for the school. The emphasis nowadays is towards the professional competence of the principal. This is a correct emphasis and dovetails well with the purpose of education. It requires principals to spend more time acquainting themselves with what is going on in the classroom so as to find out, together with the teacher, how learning can be improved for the pupils. A principal can do this effectively only if he or she has a good understanding and knowledge of what quality instruction is.

The second factor that is crucial to education is the teacher. No matter how good and effective a principal is, he needs dedicated and committed teachers to help him realise his goals. It is the teacher who is in closest contact with the pupils and it is the teacher that has the greatest influence to effect change in pupil behaviour. A teacher's first love in school must always be his pupils.

Their interest and well being must always be his first priority. There is also a growing need for teachers to keep pace with the fast-moving modern educational technology. For progress to continue and excellence to be realised teachers must strive to meet this need. However, the teacher's task is not merely to impart information and knowledge, it is to nurture the pupils to become good and effective thinkers. The knowledge explosion today makes it all the more necessary to devise a curriculum that enables pupils to discover and process knowledge rather than merely commit facts to memory. How well teachers can adjust themselves to meet these new demands will reflect on their dedication and their commitment to the profession. The destiny of our country depends on how our young children are being moulded. And the shaping of that mould is in the hands of teachers.

In conclusion, may I congratulate the principal and staff for the excellent work they have done for Yung An Primary School. I also like to thank the School Advisory Committee for their ardent support given to the school all these years. May I wish you every success in your future endeavours.

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