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Archives & Oral History Department  
Singapore 14 SEP 1983

Acc No	NARC
83 0058	58

Release NO.: 06/SEP  
06-3/83/09/03

SPEECH BY DR TAY ENG SOON, MINISTER OF STATE FOR EDUCATION,  
AT THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF ST NICHOLAS GIRLS' SCHOOL  
AT THE NEPTUNE THEATRE RESTAURANT  
ON SATURDAY, 3 SEPTEMBER 1983 AT 7.30 PM

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My wife and I have great pleasure in being present at your school's 50th anniversary celebration tonight.

In preparing to speak to you tonight, I had the opportunity to study your school's history. I am particularly impressed by three aspects of your school.

First as a Catholic school, I am impressed by the emphasis that St Nicholas places on moral education and on developing the character of your students. In our competitive society today, some people regard moral education as unnecessary to the school curriculum. Yet it is a fact that long after a person has forgotten what he or she had learnt of school subjects such as geography or #mathematics, the moral values and attitudes remain with him. They shape him and make him the kind of person he is, for better or for worse. Thus, I fully endorse the importance your school places on moral education and religious knowledge.

The second aspect is the high academic standards that you have reached. Your school has consistently achieved over 95 per cent passes at both PSLE and at 'O' level. Because of the good name of the school, you have attracted many good pupils to the school. But without dedicated teachers, the potential of these pupils would not

come into full flower. Anyone who cultivates orchids knows that the best of orchid plants do not bloom unless he takes great care of them. He must water them and give them the right food. The **same** is **true** of children, whatever their potential. Therefore credit must **be** given to the principal and teachers of the school for the high achievements of the school.

The third aspect of **your** school should **become** an example for **other** schools. I refer to **your success** in bilingual education. You have managed to achieve a truly bilingual environment. **Your** students leave your school fully effective in both English and Chinese.

I **want** now to speak on **a subject** which is overlooked because of our emphasis on academic excellence. This is particularly pertinent to a girls' school. I refer to the fact that **most** of **your** students will one day marry and **become** mothers regardless of their academic achievements or careers. This is their natural and proper role in life. My question is: Do schools, especially girls' schools, **recognise** this fact? If so, do they have a role to play in preparing their girls for marriage and motherhood later on, to realise that this is as important and worthwhile as being a career woman? I observe that many of our girls' schools seem to be no different from the boys' schools. They have **the same** ambitions. Girls in the best girls' schools are after the same distinctions and scholarships. And they are doing as well as the boys. Last year eight girls obtained eight distinctions at 'O' level compared with five boys. In 1981 it was four girls compared with five boys. They **have the** same **ECA's**. Girls are as active in computer clubs as boys - **43 per cent** of the **members** are girls. On the other hand, only 12 per cent of girls take domestic science **subjects at 'O' level**. Even at Sec. 1 and 2, only **about half take** domestic science. Is there too much emphasis on

intellectual achievements at the expense of other aspects of life? Girls even join the NCC (National Cadet Corps) - nearly one in four of the land NCC cadets are girls. I have always been puzzled why girls are attracted to the NCC when there are other groups such as the Girl Guides and Girls Brigade. They certainly do well. They even outshoot the **boys** in rifle competitions. These are healthy pursuits. I **am not** against them. **But** girls should be girls. What about schools encouraging and catering more for their feminine interests? For example, music, art, ballet, **literature, etc.** We **must** have a balance. You can do much to help. For example, you can discuss subjects such as marriage and motherhood through debates, moral education classes and assembly talks. But **first** you yourselves must believe that motherhood and raising a good family are very important.

St Nicholas will move to excellent new buildings at Ang Mo Rio in 1985. Tonight's large turnout demonstrates the strong support of the old students for their old school. With such support, I am sure your school will rise to even greater heights. On that note, may I wish your school every success for the future.

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