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SPEECH BY DR TAY ENG SOON, MINISTER OF STATE FOR EDUCATION,
AT THE FAIRFIELD METHODIST SECONDARY SCHOOL'S 100TH
ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION AT DOVER ROAD ON THURSDAY,
4 AUGUST 1988, AT 10.00 *h/h*

I am very pleased to join you in celebrating your school's 100th Anniversary. I feel I am doubly honoured because I was present when your school celebrated its last Founder's Day service at Neil Road and then at your official opening in 1985 when you moved to this site. This will be my third visit. I feel I am almost an honorary Old Boy of Fairfield!

Actually, I can claim some relationship with Fairfield as I am also a Methodist. This gave me the privilege to be involved with the Centenary of three of our oldest Methodist schools in Singapore. ACS, the oldest, celebrated its Centenary in 1986. Last year, MGS celebrated her Centenary. I was invited to both occasions. And now, three in a row, it is Fairfield Methodist School's turn to celebrate its 100th birthday!

The early history of all three schools is closely interwoven. ACS was founded in 1886 by William Oldham, the first Methodist missionary to come to Singapore. One year later, Miss Sophia Blackmore, came from Australia to do missionary work among women. But it turned out that her life's work was to be in education. In 1887, she started a small school for nine Indian girls in Short Street. That was the beginning of MGS.

One year later, she started another school, this time for eight Chinese girls. The school was located in a shophouse at Cross Street. It was later called the Telok Ayer Girls' School. This was how your school got started. At first, the school had difficulty in attracting pupils because the Chinese were against the idea of educating their daughters. They preferred to educate their sons. But the enrolment grew. By 1910, the school needed new premises. Land was available at Neil Road. A very generous donation came from a Mr Fairfield in the US. The school decided to rename itself the Fairfield MGS. That is how you got your name. The school remained at Neil Road as a full girls' school until 1983 when it moved to this present site. Because of the pressing need for a school which could also take in boys, Fairfield MGS graciously agreed with the MOE to become a co-ed school. Your willingness to convert to a co-ed school after nearly a 100 years of being a girls' school is commendable. It shows that you are flexible and able to adapt - qualities which are important.

On this very special occasion, we must ask what is the goal and vision of Fairfield. We could do no better than to go back to your Founder, Miss Blackmore. What was Miss Blackmore's vision when she founded your school? She was asked this when she came for the Golden Jubilee celebrations of the Methodist Church in 1935 (i.e. 50th anniversary). Her reply was significant. She said: "Our chief aim in our work for women and girls was not to educate them only but to let them know of Christ Jesus as their Saviour and Friend". We have in Miss Blackmore's own words the mission of a mission school like Fairfield. The mission is two fold:

- (a) To provide a good education - meaning a good academic and all-round education.
- (b) To enable the children to come to know Jesus Christ.

All schools, government and aided, would have the first goal as their goal, i.e. the providing of a good all-round education. But as a mission school, you have a unique character and a second goal which is not found in any government school. You have the privilege of providing religious education to those of your pupils who choose to receive such an education. Although this is on a voluntary basis, this gives mission schools like yours a distinct quality which even those who are non-Christians can recognise.

Not all our mission aided schools have excellent academic results. Some have average academic results: Yet the interesting thing is that most of them are popular with parents. Clearly, parents do not just place a premium on academic results to the exclusion of everything else. They also value the character development, moral education and guidance which they know their children will receive. They believe that mission schools, with their religious faith and tradition are well able to provide this for their children.

As you reflect upon Fairfield's achievements of the past 100 years and look ahead, you would do well to keep in mind Miss Blackmore's words about the dual mission of a mission school - the academic mission and the spiritual and moral mission. To be able to do this, your most important requirement is to attract back to the school old girls and now, old boys, to become teachers. In that way, you will have continuity of tradition and dedication to the ideals of Fairfield. You need also to strengthen your traditions through the numerous activities that you organise in the school, particularly activities that develop their character and challenge them to care for others. The best testimony that can be given is if your ex-students can say years later that "Fairfield taught me to be the kind of person that I am". This would be so if they have vivid and happy memories of the time they spent at the school.

May I close by wishing for your school, its Management Committee, Principal, Teachers and Pupils the richest blessings of our Lord.

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