

Amended after Delivery

SPEECH BY DR NG ENG HEN, MINISTER FOR EDUCATION AND SECOND MINISTER FOR DEFENCE, AT THE MOE WORK PLAN SEMINAR 2008, ON THURSDAY, 25 SEPTEMBER 2008 AT 9.30AM AT THE Ngee ANN POLYTECHNIC CONVENTION CENTRE

Ms Grace Fu, Senior Minister of State

Rear-Admiral Lui Tuck Yew, Senior Minister of State

Mr Masagos Zulkifli, Senior Parliamentary Secretary

Dr Lily Neo, Chairman, Government Parliamentary Committee on Education

Mrs Tan Ching Yee, Permanent Secretary

Ms Yeoh Chee Yan, Second Permanent Secretary,

Ms Seah Jiak Choo, Director-General of Education

Principals,

Colleagues,

NURTURING OUR YOUNG FOR THE FUTURE

Opening

1. I am pleased to join you at MOE's WorkPlan Seminar 2008.

Our Journey in Education – Taking Stock, Forging Ahead

2. At each WPS, we review as one MOE family what we have achieved and set directions for the coming year. We also acknowledge through awards, schools and their leaders who have excelled in bringing out the best in their students. I want to congratulate all recipients for their hard work and going the many extra miles for your students. Awards are important as they help to codify your hard work. But as many have told me, it's not the only thing.

3. We have much to be proud of. Singapore's education system today is highly regarded internationally. However, it was not always so and we did not inherit strong foundations. In fact if you were an observer who watched us in the 1960s, only an

optimistic man would have said that we would succeed. We should have been mediocre as for much of our history, teaching was in disparate school clusters based on communal ties, rather than sound fundamentals of education. Not surprisingly, in the first Primary School Leaving Exam conducted in 1960, only 45% passed. Attrition was high. Up to the late 1970s, almost 30% of primary school pupils did not progress to secondary schools.

4. This is what we inherited but today, we have successfully transformed into a strong national system, renowned for its high standards and achievements. Almost all students receive at least 10 years of education. 93% of each cohort progress to post-secondary education, compared to just 84% as recently as 2000. Earlier this year, the World Competitiveness Yearbook ranked Singapore first for having an education system that best meets the needs of a competitive economy. Last year, McKinsey also named Singapore as one of the world's top-performing education systems. That we have come so far has been through the sheer hard work of you here, our teachers, principals and leaders in MOE. Every progressive step was only possible because the MOE family was not afraid to change but always willing to upgrade ourselves; re-learn, sometimes unlearn old habits and always striving to give our students a better education.

5. I'm acutely aware that each simple tagline in the past masked the significant labour of teachers, principals and HQ staff across the system to achieve new goals. This needed many man-hours of changes, sometimes weeks, sometimes months – from curriculum change to new assessment methods and different ways of teaching. In the 80's, it was "Mass Customization," following Dr Goh Keng Swee's report. Mass customization meant a lot of work for you as we tried to meet the different needs of students. Then in the 90's we sought to have "Thinking Schools, Learning Nation". In year 2000 onwards, "Innovation & Enterprise", "Strategies for Effective and Engaged Development," the IT Masterplan, and recently "Teach Less, Learn More". Simple taglines but each one meant a need for the system to re-gear itself and sometimes change direction. Many times it meant teachers had to move out of their comfort zone to do things differently. And all represented more changes as we moved from one higher plane to another.

6. The hard work by all has reaped rich rewards. I know many of you go out to visit other countries and systems. When you tell them you come from Singapore, there is a pause and almost a mark of respect. Others outside Singapore have noticed how much and quickly we have improved and are now coming to Singapore to learn from us. We also have visitors from both developing and developed countries. This year alone, we received high-level visits from Vietnam, Botswana, Mexico, Australia and France, just to name a few. When they visit our schools, they are invariably impressed. And we don't choose the best schools to show them. We show them typical schools, average schools, and what strikes our international visitors is how well our average schools, and not just top schools, are resourced. I heard a story when I was last in MOE - One of the visiting groups asked to see a

“failed” school, but we couldn’t show them any because we don’t have “failed” schools.

7. To an observer, MOE and our schools are constantly on the move. Even when we have attained high standards, we are still seeking to improve. There is a reason for this unabating activity. The many changes across decades, different ministers, different administrators, do have continuity in purpose and motivation. There is a melody that runs through and a motif that keeps on recurring. Very simply, we treasure our human resource as the most valuable asset in Singapore. As such, we seek to develop every Singaporean child to his full potential, and across the spectrum of abilities and talents.

8. It is timely to reassert this fundamental approach. Our educational outcomes cannot be determined by only a single and narrow measure of academic performance, whether it is in PSLE scores or ‘O’ and ‘A’ levels results. It was never meant to be so. That cannot be the be-all and end-all of education’s quest and mission. It would be myopic and wasteful because if that were the only measure of success, then only a few at the top can succeed. Only a few can have all A*s to enter top schools, while the rest are not so good or have not succeeded. More importantly, measuring success by grades alone does not reflect adequately the value of education that should last a lifetime, long after result slips have been filed, gathered dust and browned. Our education system must prepare our students for life, not as a short sprint but as a marathon. Yes, some do exceptionally well and cross the finish line ahead of everyone. But they are the top few. The majority after them also complete the race of life and leave their mark. Some take longer, but they too finish and are winners in their own right. Our task as educators must be to prepare each child well for the big journey ahead.

9. The awards we give out today reflect this emphasis and encouragement on holistic education. Take for instance the pinnacle awards, the School Excellence Award. Academic achievements account for only 20% of the evaluation process. This is also why in recent years, changes were made to the secondary schools and junior colleges. We wanted our education system to better suit the child and his uniqueness - not the other way around. Now, Normal (Academic) students can take ‘O’ level subjects if they are capable and willing to work hard. Normal (Technical) students have also benefited from a stronger focus on practice-oriented learning, because they learn better that way. If they want to, they can also take up applied learning modules that are offered in collaboration with polytechnics, or with ITE.

10. In 2004, we introduced Direct Schools Admission. It sent a powerful signal to the society at large that other talents beyond academic excellence were also valued and allowed our schools and institutions to admit students with these talents. The Sports School, NUS High School, SOTA (the School of the Arts) and the new School of Science and Technology starting in 2010 are new avenues to suit the system to the student. Similarly, NorthLight School, and Assumption Pathway School starting next year will cater to students who can benefit from a more hands-on curriculum.

But more importantly, it provides teachers with big hearts and special skills that can motivate these students and restore their lost confidence.

11. Across the education landscape, with new schools, changing curriculum and new pedagogies, we have enhanced our education system to provide more opportunities to develop the full spread of talents among our students. But I want to remind us all, that amidst all these, it is the school leaders and teachers, not the political leaders, not even those at HQ, who have been at the forefront driving these improvements. It must be so, because there are so few of us and so many of you.

A more balanced education – ideas from teachers and principals

12. When I returned to MOE in April this year, I wanted to know how much energy was left in the system. After all, MOE had introduced many new measures in the last 10 years. Perhaps it was time to consolidate, wait a while, before setting new directions. So when reporters asked what I wanted to do, I honestly replied that I would listen first. Over the past few months, I, the Permanent Secretaries and DGE have met many principals, vice-principals and teachers and visited many schools to hear your views. My questions were usually simple and the same. What has been the impact of changes? How are you coping with the changes? Should we do more? I was cheered by your replies. Instead of resting on your laurels, most said that more can be done and should be done. Let me summarise what you said.

13. Many of you told us that we need to strengthen the emphasis on nurturing life-ready traits, starting from primary school. You want to place the student at the core and re-balance the teaching of content, to provide more space to nurture life skills and values. This is an extension of the Teach Less Learn More philosophy. Children should enjoy school and learn through play. Our students should learn more of what will be valuable to prepare them for the world and for life.

14. Many shared why it was important to retain the inherent curiosity in the child, to make sure that it was not dampened throughout the course of their education. After all, all young children ask questions. In our classrooms, especially in primary schools, this should be encouraged. Their innate desire to learn, explore and be inventive should be nurtured and celebrated. Stubborn curiosity is a fundamental trait that allows one to push limits and take calculated risks to learn new things.

15. Almost all that we spoke to believed that our children must grow up to be confident young people. They must be secure in their own identity, be able to form their own opinions, and communicate well to convince others. Therefore we must improve oral and communication standards to enable our pupils to articulate their thoughts with confidence. This will equip them to cope better with uncertainty and ambiguity.

16. Many shared how increasingly, learning to work well with others was an essential trait that organizations look out for when recruiting people. In an inter-

connected world, and in our multi-racial society, it is necessary for our young to learn to mix well with others, respect differences and build strong and lasting relationships with those around them.

17. Teachers that I spoke to also wanted the primary schools to provide ample opportunities for students to participate in Co-Curricular Activities (CCAs), which can develop a range of life-skills in pupils, promote leadership, build character and inculcate values. Some suggested using innovative approaches. For instance, introducing modular CCAs for Primary schools within curriculum time. This broad exposure will help pupils identify their interests and talents earlier, and help them develop soft skills. We could also promote the use of drama as a pedagogical tool.

18. Quite a lot of answers to three simple questions. In summary, there was strong alignment among our educators that we should find a better balance between the different learning domains, between knowledge, skills and inculcating values in our education system. The gist was - the individual child and his development should rightly sit in the centre of our continuing endeavors. Not just how the system or the school has done, but how the child has done.

Curriculum 2015 Committee - *Nurturing our Young for the Future*

19. At the same time, another team, the C2015 (Curriculum 2015) Committee, consisting of HQ staff and school personnel, were also asking, from a slightly different direction, what we should teach our students to better prepare them for the future. Their starting point was this: A child born this year will enter our schools in 2014 and start work probably around 2030. How do we prepare that child today to excel in the future environment driven by technological advancements and globalization? To get some answers, they visited systems outside Singapore, talked to educators here and abroad. This is still work in progress but let me share some of their preliminary insights in three broad areas.

New Skills and Competencies

20. First, our children will need to learn better ways to handle information. The struggle now is not with having insufficient information – but the converse, having too much and having to make sense of voluminous inputs.

21. With the Internet Revolution, information on just about anything is collected for you through powerful search engines at a click. When you click on Google you don't get one return but several hundred pages. I seldom go beyond the first two pages. It is not possible for one person to remember the massive amount of information at his fingertips. Even postgraduate medical candidates are allowed to bring in their Personal Digital Assistants (or PDAs for short) with medical textbooks downloaded for reference during examinations. Massachusetts Institute of Technology puts all its courseware on-line for free access. It is their way of saying – it is not what I put there, it is how I teach that makes a difference.

22. The premium is therefore no longer on collecting facts but on critical analysis - knowing what questions to ask, what information you need and the value of different sources of information. I visited one of the JCs recently and asked the students how many of them read the newspapers as a main source of information. Less than half did so. Where do they get the information from? They scan the Internet. That's a problem. You don't know how reliable the source of information may be or how authentic it is.

23. Students cannot be just mere passive conduits of information. They will need to be able to connect between different interfaces and domains. They will need to approach problems with an inter-disciplinary lens and integrate the sciences and humanities to solve problems.

24. Take for instance the new models of phones, including Apple's I-phone or Google's G1. Why are they runaway successes? Not because of technology, fashion or marketing alone, but a combination of all these elements. Behind the product, powerful minds and intensive research went into not just the technology, but also to understand what humans prefer and how they work. Thus the sleek design with touch screens, better icons and seamless navigation. We have to teach our students to go beyond simply acquiring knowledge, towards exploiting it to improve lives. How do you teach this?

People Skills, Working in Teams and Across Cultures

25. Second, globalisation has shrunk our World, or as Thomas Friedman would say, has made it flat again. Our society will become increasingly cosmopolitan and more Singaporeans will work, travel and live in other parts of the world. Just last year, Pricewaterhouse Coopers surveyed almost 3000 new graduates from China, the US and the UK. And in that survey, 94% believed that they would work across geographic borders more than their parents did. And its true. If you speak to those working now, invariably they have to make many trips outside of Singapore.

26. We need to ensure that Singaporeans can excel in the future workplace. Our students will need language skills and a larger worldview, coupled with the ability to work in and lead teams of people with diverse cultures, ideas and perspectives. More than ever, they will need good interpersonal and leadership skills to forge consensus and provide direction. They will also need to be able to find solutions to complex problems in different geographical regions.

Rootedness and Values

27. Third, knowledge and skills must be anchored by values and character development. While we constantly say that we help every child go as far as he can, the ultimate goal is self-sufficiency, not self-centredness. Without a moral and ethical compass that our schools should help provide, all knowing will come to nought. It

takes one mistake to erase all the good work that you have done. Our education system must also impart societal and universal values, such as the aptitude for life-long learning, resilience, integrity, compassion and the responsibility to give back to the larger community. Parents and family continue to be primarily responsible for imparting values to the children but schools have an important supporting role. Each complements the other, and both are needed.

21st Century Skills

28. The Curriculum 2015 Committee talked to others outside, and discovered that education systems elsewhere had also factored in the impact of future trends and challenges on educational demands. And they codified this into skills and competencies. A common thread is the emphasis on equipping our young with the appropriate skills and mindsets to prepare them to navigate a fast changing, globalised world. This is popularly referred to as “21st century skills¹”, which stress the need to develop thinking, communication, collaboration and management skills. As another desired outcome of education, added competencies are also required to produce a confident person, a self-directed learner, a concerned citizen and an active contributor.

Retain Core Strengths in Traditional Curriculum

29. These new dimensions in educational outcomes should not mean that we jettison or dilute our core strengths. We must retain our strengths in maths and science. Technology continues to give countries the decisive edge, bringing about dramatic improvements in growth.

30. Countries around the world – Finland, Korea, China and India for instance – all emphasise a strong foundation in math and science in school. This ensures a strong pipeline for engineering at the tertiary levels. And those that may not have paid adequate attention to this area are rushing to keep up. Several states in the USA are including engineering content in their state science requirements for high schools. At the federal level, starting next year, the U.S. Education Department will also be integrating technology and engineering concepts into national assessments².

Primary Education Review

31. How do we respond to these ideas from teachers and the C2015 Committee? One decisive way is to review our Primary education. Even as we do so, we should continue to maintain our academic standards. Thus the PSLE, as our national examinations that keeps standards up, should not be changed.

¹ The studies include Partnership for 21st Century Skills, enGauge 21st Century Skills and OECD's Project DeSeCo (Definition and Selection of Competencies), which surfaces a set of competencies needed by the young for the future

² “Reading, Writing and Engineering”, Wall Street Journal, 13 March 2008

32. I know that many parents complain that the PSLE gives rise to much stress but that cannot be the reason to change it. All countries need some form of assessment to evaluate their student outcomes. Even if we switched to another system of assessment, stress will still occur if the child does not do as well as expected. If success is measured only by PSLE scores or that of any other exam we change to, then very little else counts or matters.

33. We will have to educate our students, and sometimes parents too, that they can achieve success in a variety of ways. This is what the review should be focused on - to place more emphasis on imparting new skill sets and character traits that will help them to go as far as they can in life, not just exams.

34. Several primary schools that are receiving awards today exemplify enlightened and energetic Principals that are embarking on this wider path. Let me mention just a few.

35. Raffles Girls' Primary for instance, has a Literature-in-Action programme across all levels. Teachers tap on popular literature, to not only teach English, but also impart character education, by drawing on virtues and values demonstrated by characters in the story. The P1 to P5 pupils get to role-play scenes from the stories in front of the class and try their hand at writing their own scripts, while the P6s dabble in poetry as part of creative writing. It exercises their imagination, and builds confidence. At Kong Hwa Primary, to spark pupils' curiosity in learning more about the Life Sciences, the science department has incorporated the learning of DNA and heredity into the P5 science curriculum. I hear the pupils even have a taste of "CSI Science" - forensic science, through "DNA Fingerprinting" lessons at the Science Centre.

36. At Radin Mas Primary, the P1 and P2 pupils look forward to coming to school every Wednesday, because they have modular CCAs for 2 periods. They are exposed to a variety of dances, music and games, which the teachers use to encourage team-building and confidence. It also gives the pupils a chance to identify their own interests and talents.

37. But these new approaches are not only taking place in award winning schools. In my visits to schools, I am positively surprised. I am struck by the vibrancy and activity that is already taking place across the island. People are trying different things. Many schools have on their own started programmes to find creative ways of imparting skills to pupils.

38. Teachers talked about using different pedagogical approaches that will more effectively nurture key skills and values; to have a more interactive and questioning class environment, leveraging on IT and outside the class activities so that children would enjoy learning through self-discovery and a healthy exchange of views; allowing children to experience success in learning, and giving them opportunities to

work in teams and practice their presentation skills. They were convinced that we needed to devote more time to skills development in delivering the formal curriculum.

39. How do we enable these positive aspects to be scaled up further? I have decided to appoint a Committee headed by Senior Minister of State Ms Grace Fu to look into these issues. The Committee will help decide how we can shape primary education to better develop each child. They will produce a road map about what can be done, as well as the priorities, programmes and resources that are needed to bring primary education to the next level. The Committee will engage in widespread consultations with key stakeholders, including principals, teachers, parents, students and the wider community. We want to hear your views, understand your aspirations and find out what is really important to you, before we take the next step. There will be platforms for feedback. We welcome your contributions and suggestions, as we embark on this important journey.

40. For today, I will lay out the broad directions, starting with three major initiatives that will accelerate improvements in primary education and take education to a higher level: single-session primary schools, graduate teachers and more teaching support.

Single-Session Primary Schools

41. First, single-session primary schools. One constraint is quite clear even now. Double session and even partial single-session schools limit the time and space available to achieve educational goals. As a simple example, it is more challenging to timetable and conduct CCAs and other programmes that develop character and values, when you know that you have to vacate the classroom because it is needed by another session.

42. Schools that have gone to a single-session structure have found it a better environment to teach and develop students. When more curriculum time is needed for both formal and informal programs, it has allowed some to lengthen their school day slightly, or have extended school days once or twice a week to have mass CCAs. Others have also experimented with longer periods of 45 minutes instead of 30 minutes. A longer break between lessons is valued by both students and teachers. It also allows for more quality teacher-student interactions and the use of more engaging pedagogies such as group work or for students to practise presentation skills. Teachers find it useful too, as it allows more common time for professional development and sharing among teachers, across all levels from P1 to P6.

43. We should guard against single-session schools becoming full day schools with a heavier workload for students. That's not the aim. It should instead allow for more time and space to develop the child more fully. I am convinced by your arguments. I see great merit in having as a norm, single session for all primary schools. Grace Fu's Committee will study how this can be achieved within a reasonable and achievable timeframe. I think it will be possible for the majority of our schools. But, a number of more popular schools may need a little more time as they

have to cater to a large intake every year. Moving to single-session for all will mean new schools to build and more teachers to staff them, so this is going to be a very significant investment. The Committee should work out the costs and how we can best make use of our resources to achieve a more holistic education.

44. Needless to say, we will also need more facilities for CCAs. MOE is already setting up two more Adventure Centres, customised for the purposes of primary schools, to be ready by mid-2011. But the Committee should study what other facilities are also needed.

45. We will also need to ensure students have the financial resources to participate in more CCAs and enrichment activities. To assist, MOE will increase the contributions to Edusave Accounts for pupils from the current \$180 to \$200 per year for primary students, and \$220 per year to \$240 for secondary students, from next year. We will also remove the age cap of 16 years for secondary level students to be eligible for the contributions. This means an additional injection of \$11 million by MOE. This will support a wider range of enrichment programmes to enhance the holistic learning experiences. These funds must be used wisely but I would be prepared to spend more if Grace Fu's Committee can justify and recommend better programmes.

Developing a New Generation School Team

All Graduate Teacher Recruitment – More basic and postgraduate qualifications

46. More schools, facilities and funds are needed, but it will not be enough to attain broader educational outcomes. Another critical enabler is to strengthen the quality of our teachers and support staff. As the McKinsey report on top-performing education systems put it, the quality of the education system cannot exceed the quality of its teaching force. MOE is on track to recruiting 30,000 teachers by 2010, and will continue to recruit at current levels even beyond that.

47. MOE will continue to select teachers with the aptitude for teaching and those with a heart for nurturing young people. This is a necessary pre-requisite. But with the enhancements we want to bring about at the primary level, we will require teachers to also have a stronger mastery of content and pedagogy.

48. Currently, 69% of primary school teachers and 92% of secondary school teachers recruited have degrees. The remaining have good diploma and 'A' level qualifications. As more of our diploma graduates obtain degrees and with our university cohort participation rate increasing to 30% in 2015, we should be able to recruit all teachers with a degree for our primary schools. It will help raise the standards of education in our primary schools. Grace Fu's Committee will study how this can be done as well as provide more opportunities to those with A-levels or diplomas to obtain their degrees to become teachers.

49. We have at present in our system, many excellent school teachers and even principals who are diploma holders. Let me reassure you that you will continue to be valued and that there will be no change to the schemes you are on, or your route of advancements. You will be assessed based on your performance, as it is now, not on your past educational levels. Even after the changes, there will still be room to employ diploma holders who possess specialised skills in languages, arts and music. These schemes will continue.

50. But our move towards recruiting graduates as new teachers is appropriate as the educational levels of the population have been rising over the years. There are higher expectations - both from parents and from our own desired outcomes of education, which are better met by graduate teachers.

51. We are not alone in deciding to employ all graduate teachers. Korea, New Zealand and Sweden require teachers to be degree holders. Hong Kong started moving towards an all graduate teaching force³ since 1994. In Finland, teachers are required to have Masters degrees either in education or in one or two teaching subjects.

52. Teacher quality is therefore a critical enabler. We must continue to invest heavily in the professional development of our teachers. We will provide more incentives to encourage in-service teachers to pursue undergraduate and postgraduate studies in areas that will benefit their work. To facilitate this, MOE has decided to double the quantum for interest-free study loans with effect from next month, so that officers will have more money to offset their living expenses. This is for both full-time and part-time degree studies, whether local or overseas. Grace Fu's Committee will study how we can further provide more opportunities for teachers.

More teaching support - Allied Educators and a New Career Scheme

53. Teachers do not work alone to educate our children. A core component of the "school team" includes our school executive and administrative staff and allied educators who are our partners in education.

54. Over the years, we have been professionalising the way schools are run. All schools today have an Administration Manager that oversees financial, human resource and general administration matters in the school and an Operations Manager who handles estate management, logistics and security. At the senior leadership level, we are also deploying Vice-Principals (Administration), so that they can drive organizational excellence, resource management and partnerships with stakeholders.

³ In Hong Kong, since 2005, all new graduates from pre-service teacher training programs for primary and secondary school teachers have been awarded degrees.

55. We have also been growing a pool of allied educators, who play a unique and specialized role in partnering teachers in and out of the classroom, to raise the quality of interaction with every child. For instance, our Full-Time School Counselors (FTSCs) dedicate themselves to supporting the social and emotional needs of the students through individual counselling, home visits and working with external agencies such as the Family Service Centre. They work closely with teachers to take care of holistic needs of students. In Bowen Secondary, the FTSC, Ms Venus Ther, works closely with teachers to plan a career guidance programme for all levels of students. She also helps to organize experiential learning activities and counseling sessions, as part of a new mentoring programme to keep at-risk students engaged in school. And students have warmed up to her. They look to her as a friend and mentor.

56. Students with differing abilities and learning difficulties also may need more time and attention. We have learning support programmes in Primary 1 and 2. In many schools, teachers help slower learners in smaller pull-out groups. We also have Special Needs Officers who help students with dyslexia or those with autism who are in our mainstream schools.

57. This year, we also provided 87 schools with Education Associates or EDAs, who co-teach the Normal curriculum with trained teachers in secondary schools.

58. They have provided invaluable help to the teachers, such as providing teaching and learning support, working with FTSCs to help at-risk students and in some cases, developing new special programmes together with teachers. For instance, Shuqun Secondary has an EDA, Miss Louisa Ho, who was able to co-teach the Secondary 3 Elements of Business Skills classes. Louisa used to run her own pre-school centre and could thus bring her real-world experiences into the classroom. At Bedok Town Secondary, Mr Mohamad Hafiz Bin Abas who used to be a free-lance producer, collaborated with a teacher to design and conduct an in-house film-making elective module for the Sec 4NT students this year, which turned out to be very popular with the students.

59. Principals and teachers have given me positive feedback about our allied educators. Going forward, we will therefore expand the pool of EDAs, so that all schools, and not just those with Normal (Course) students, will benefit from the additional manpower resources. By 2015, we will have about 1,900 EDAs in our primary and secondary schools compared to less than 100 today. Schools will have the flexibility to deploy them to meet their needs. With these changes, primary schools will each have about 5 EDAs, where they now have none. Secondary schools will have 7 EDAs compared to one today. These EDAs will partner our teachers to provide teaching and learning support for students, pastoral and welfare support and assistance in CCAs.

60. More importantly, beyond just increasing the numbers, we must recognize the contributions of our allied educators and see to their career development. Therefore, MOE has decided to formalize the teaching support staff scheme as a parallel track

to the teaching scheme. MOE will establish a new career scheme for allied educators. This Allied Educators Scheme (or AES) which takes effect in January 2009, will attract and retain good quality people. It will help to strengthen the professionalism of the school team. Our allied educators can look forward to competitive salaries and enhanced career development and progression opportunities. Good performing officers can upgrade their professional qualifications and join the Education Service as trained teachers. Outstanding officers can aspire to progress up to positions of Superscale grade in MOE HQ.

61. We must also see to their well-being. MOE has decided that since allied educators work closely with students and teachers during term time, they will be placed on the school holiday scheme under the AES, similar to teachers, instead of the vacation leave scheme like other public servants. We will be implementing an option exercise for existing allied educators to opt into this new scheme.

62. Even after these changes, let me emphasise that teachers will still remain primarily responsible for the pupils' holistic development and learning. But allied educators do provide much valuable support to teachers to achieve a more holistic education for our children.

Conclusion

63. At this Workplan seminar, I have outlined the key thrusts in our plans to enhance primary education, to prepare our students better for the future. We must re-balance content, skills and character development to achieve a more holistic education. More time and space needs to be created, and single-session primary schools will help us to overcome those constraints. More facilities and funds will be provided. We are setting up two Adventure Centres, customised for the purposes of primary schools. We are increasing the contributions to Edusave accounts for all students and will lift the age cap for secondary level students so that more students will be eligible for the contributions.

64. At the same time, we need good teachers and teaching support, who continue to make that crucial difference to the quality of our education. We will move towards all graduate teacher recruitment by 2015. The quantum for interest-free study loans will be doubled so that in-service teachers will be encouraged to pursue undergraduate and postgraduate studies. The new Allied Educators Scheme will strengthen the professionalism of our teaching support staff, and more Allied Educators in our schools will support teachers in their work.

65. Grace Fu's Committee will consult key stakeholders on how we can achieve a more holistic primary education, and work closely with them to develop more detailed recommendations and implementation plans to enhance primary education, including how we can move towards single-session primary schools and towards raising the minimum qualifications of new teachers.

66. Despite these heightened efforts and commitment of more resources, MOE and schools cannot accomplish these goals alone. Nurturing the next generation will take the combined efforts of all in our society. We must work together with parents and other stakeholders.

67. The challenge in the next phase of development in education is to find the right balance that will enable us to impart a more holistic education to students of varying abilities, building on the strong fundamentals that are already in place. To succeed will require all of us - schools and parents – to focus on other equally important areas in addition to and beyond academic achievement.

68. I wish you a fruitful discussion at this year's Workplan seminar. Thank you very much.