

Malayan Christian Schools Council (MCSC) Symposium

Mission Schools – Meeting the Needs of the Nation

Saturday, 16 August 2008 | Methodist College, Kuala Lumpur.

Closing Address by YB Ir Dr Wee Ka Siong

Deputy Minister of Education Malaysia

Ladies and gentlemen,

A very good afternoon to all of you.

First of all, I wish to thank the Malayan Christian Schools' Council for extending the invitation to officiate at the symposium entitled Mission Schools Meeting the Needs of the Nation. It is indeed an honour to be in such august Company.

The symposium is timely as we reflect on the issues and challenges facing our education system in this new millennium. By having this symposium, the Malayan Christian Schools Council has shown its concern and determination to meet issues head on and to ensure that the schools under their purview continue to remain at the forefront of meeting the challenges. We in the MOE wish to extend our appreciation and wish to acknowledge the contribution of the mission schools to our nation.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Over the last 150 years, schools have been established by the Catholic, Methodist, Anglican, Presbyterian and Brethren churches. Now 410 schools remain throughout the country with 289 primary schools and 121 secondary schools. These schools, each with their different heritage, have contributed much to the building of an ethos that should rightly be reflected in all schools in Malaysia. When one walks around these old mission school buildings, one cannot help but sense the history and the unique heritage of each of these schools.

Mission schools though started by Christian missionaries, strove to provide education for all the people in the country regardless of race, religion, creed and social class or gender. In many towns, mission schools broke barriers by offering education to young women. The history of these schools often record stories of how the founders went into homes to persuade parents that the education of women was a worthwhile cause, which ultimately would benefit society and the nation at large. To these pioneers we in Malaysia owe a debt of gratitude.

Further, mission schools are also known for providing education that was not only of the highest quality but education with religious, moral and spiritual values. These values helped to build up a generation of Malaysians that are tolerant with a strong spirit of service to society and the nation. The fact that many of the mission schools were staffed by teachers who themselves were products of mission schools helped to ensure the traditions and ethos were passed from one generation to the next.

The education provided by mission schools not only covered the formal curriculum but also the informal curriculum that provided a broad spectrum of educational experiences for the students. These experiences have helped build independent, self reliant students with a strong school spirit who continue to contribute to the school both in service and material terms.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Changes in the economic, social, religious and political landscape in Malaysia and the world pose a multitude of challenges to education in Malaysia. The rapid growth in knowledge and the globalisation of the economy has implications for the education of our students. Firstly, It is not so much how much knowledge that we can impart to our students that matters but rather that we develop in our students the skills to be able to acquire new knowledge as and when they need it. Life long learning is the key to future success. Secondly, we need to develop in our students, problem solving skills. We need to create environments in schools where our students can develop their creativity and thinking skill and learn to be independent. Thirdly, we need to ensure our students develop good communication skills to articulate, promote and package ideas and solutions to issues and problems in a fast changing world.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am quite confident that mission schools with its long tradition of developing students' potential will be able to educate young people meet the challenges I have outlined. The MOE recognises this contribution and has awarded cluster school status to 6 mission schools. I hope that in the future more mission schools will be selected as cluster schools.

I understand that this symposium was convened as a platform for Boards of Governors, Parent-Teacher Associations, Alumni, Heads of school and other stake holders with the purpose of learning from each other on how to maintain the quality and prestige of mission schools which has been under threat due to various policy initiatives in the past.

Amongst the concerns raised is the issue of maintenance grants for aging school buildings, many of which can be described as heritage buildings. I wish to assure all of you that all schools will be treated equally and will be eligible for grants that will ensure that schools are well maintained.

The safety, security and well being of our students will have to be the paramount concern of the MOE.

As mission schools build their ethos values based on the Christian faith, concern has been raised that some of these schools are being managed by head teachers who lack the sensitivity to build on existing traditions. I understand that mission boards want the assurance that there will be “maximum consultation” on issues with regard to the appointment of head teachers and the opening up of opportunities for Christian teachers to serve in these schools.

These indeed are serious issues and the MOE wants to assure all concerned that it is committed to uphold the principle of “maximum consultation”. We will also look for ways for Christian teachers to serve in mission schools.

Currently, I understand a number of mission schools have been built on leasehold land which would be expiring in the next 5-20 years. Mission Boards are looking for the assurances that that these leases would be extended at minimum cost and the quit rent would be maintained at the nominal one ringgit per annum. The MOE is committed to maintaining these schools and I would like to assure all mission boards that they need not be unduly concerned. The MOE undertakes to facilitate the renewal of leases and to maintain the quit rent at the nominal one ringgit per year.

Concern has also been raised that children studying in primary mission schools have not been given automatic entry to secondary mission schools. I want to assure parents that we will endeavour to ensure that children studying in primary mission schools will be given automatic entry to the secondary school. The MOE will ask state education departments to be co-operative in this matter.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I wish to reiterate once again that the MOE values the contribution of mission schools not only to nation building but also educating our young people to excel in the workplace. I hope that the mission boards and the MOE can work closely together to protect the unique heritage of the mission schools. Let me give you our assurance that we will continue to look after the interests of mission schools and provide the necessary funding and support needed. In return, I ask that mission schools continue in their quest for excellence and uphold the values and traditions that contribute to an open and united Malaysia.

Thank you.