

A very good morning to all of you. Thank you for coming to support your child or children in this yearly event. This year our school sets 2 records: we have a record no. of K2 graduating students: 13 of them and a record no. of siblings in our school: 8 pairs and 2 cousin pairs, and 12 students are siblings of ex students. Thank you for your belief in our school. Please continue to have more children and send them to us.

I was very heartened by 3 things which our education minister Mr Heng Swee Keat mentioned about the upcoming changes to the education system. They are: making every school a good school, homework policy and a focus on building character values.

Let me touch on the good school and homework policy first.

1. Judging from the balloting exercises conducted for Primary 1 registration, the current situation seems to suggest that some schools are better than others based on their popularity. The good news is: there are good teachers in every school. For those K2 parents who did not get a school of your choice, don't worry. It might be a blessing in disguise. I believe most of you have read an article which I emailed to you regarding the Big Fish Small Pond theory when picking a school. My son Marcus is a good example. I wasn't successful in balloting for Holy Innocents' and had to send him to Montfort Junior which still had more than 80 vacancies during phase 3. He was fortunate to have an excellent form teacher in primary 4 & 5 who spurred his interest in Science. He achieved a High Distinction in the University of New South Wales Science Competition in P5.
2. There is this belief that there is a higher chance of academic success if your child goes through a popular school. However, there is a trade-off, that is, more homework and more competition. I learnt from a parent whose child was so stressed by the hours of homework given daily by the school even though she was only in Primary 1. The parents were equally stressed. So you have to be prepared to support your child if you want to send him or her to a popular school. I'm so glad that both my children do not have much homework to do and they are doing fine. There was an article in the newspaper which highlighted that repetitive homework only works for Mathematics. You need other kinds of study techniques for languages and science. I hope MOE will encourage all schools to use more current techniques which are based on research studies and not just give homework indiscriminately.
3. It is important to match your children's abilities to the school which you intend to send them to ensure the best outcomes. We have an ex-student whose parent was very happy when she balloted successfully for a popular school. However, the student struggled with the workload there and had to drop her Higher Chinese in P5. Last year we successfully persuaded a parent to enrol her child in a mission school against a popular school even though the popular school was nearer. This parent feedback to us that her child has difficulties coping with her work and was glad that she did not put her in the popular school. Whether your child is in a popular school or not, here are some pointers which you may consider to help your child.
 - a. As parents, we will always feel that our children are not putting in enough effort and want to stretch them. If their results are not satisfactory, we have to help them identify the possible causes. Was it due to lack of understanding? Or not enough practise? Or carelessness and so on.

If after covering all aspects and the results are not up to our expectations, I think we should accept that that is their standard. Don't be too hard on yourselves and more importantly, don't be too hard on your child. I learnt the hard way when I pushed my son in his Chinese so much that my relationship with him was strained. I have to accept that his standard is at best Band 3.

- b. Focus on your child's strengths and build up your child's self-esteem first. Once they have confidence in what they like, they will be more willing to work on the other weaker subjects. I let Marcus focus on Science and relaxed my expectations for his Chinese. Turned out that after I let go, he didn't do too badly for his Prelims for Chinese, which was band 2.

As for the new emphasis on building character values, it is actually not something new but I see it as a public declaration of MOE's focus. Most schools already have their own set of values, usually displayed prominently on the walls of the schools.

Our theme this year focuses on some of the popular fables which teach about moral values. The last item before the finale is about achieving happiness by bringing joy to others. This is something close to my heart and has been one of my life's principles. My primary 4 form teacher wrote in my autograph book 7 Chinese words which were etched deeply in my mind, “助人为快乐之本”, which means, help others as the basis of happiness. You might wonder: can we be helpful in a society that emphasises meritocracy? Can our children help their fellow classmates who will eventually compete for the same vacancies in top secondary schools? Have we become selfish because we are fighting for the same scholarship? Think of it another way: Does it matter who gets the job if he does it well and benefit others? Everyone has a role in life: cleaners, bus drivers, sales people, hawkers, entertainers and so on. How we look at such occupations will influence how our children view them. I always make an effort to greet the cleaners, gardeners and garbage man at my condo. I can't imagine how our living environments will look like without them. People who have been given natural abilities will have to bear more responsibilities. The more capable you are, the more responsibilities you will have and the more you can contribute to society. So my answer is yes, we can be helpful if we think of the overall picture and think long term. (Do I sound like a politician?) I remember helping one of my friends who was weak in some subjects in Sec 2. In the end, he did better than me by finishing honours in Computer Science in NUS. We are now contributing to society in different ways. It doesn't matter to me that he is doing better than me now. It makes me happy thinking that I have helped someone who eventually did well in life. I know it's a bit thick-skinned of me to claim credit but it makes me happy, so why not?

I'm glad that MOE took feedback from the public and announced some proposed changes to the education system. I am invited by MOE to join a parent dialogue session tonight organised by COMPASS (which stands for COMmunity and PArents in Support of Schools). My next wish list is the replacement of PSLE with other kinds of assessment. I believe this is achievable when all primary schools become good schools. I welcome all your suggestions and inputs. Please pen down your thoughts and email them to me.

I think I had better stop here or else the children will have to Fast Forward a lot when they watch the DVD. Thank you.