



FEATURE ADDRESS BY
THE HONOURABLE CAROLYN SEEPERSAD-BACHAN,
MINISTER OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION
MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FOR SAN FERNANDO WEST
AT THE
GRADUATION CEREMONY
VISTABELLA PRESBYTERIAN SCHOOL
FRIDAY JUNE 15, 2012
SUSAMACHAR PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
SAN FERNANDO



Ministry of
Public Administration

SALUTATIONS:

Principal of the Vistabella Primary School, Mrs Merle Shah

Representative of the Ministry of Education

Representative of the Presbyterian Primary School Board

School Manager

Representative of the PTA

Members of staff

Parents

Most importantly graduates here today

I would like to thank the Principal, Staff and Students for inviting me to today's very important ceremony. It is an honour and pleasure to be here this morning. I want to say a special hello to all of you - the Principal, teachers, parents and children gathered here today for this most significant milestone in the lives of all the students who recently completed this year's Secondary Education Assessment. You should give yourselves a round of applause for your success and many achievements.

As your Principal indicates I grew up here in Vistabella and I've known this school as long as I have been alive. I remember well when the old school building was condemned, and when Ibis College was closed, they moved Vistabella Primary School into Agnes Street, Marabella. I recall that the demand for spaces was so high and the facilities themselves so inadequate that a shift system had to be put in place to accommodate all those seeking the high quality education that this school has always provided.

I am therefore not surprised to hear of the high demand on this school, Principal and Staff. I will join with your School Supervisor in ensuring that you get the adequate space and resources required to make sure that this school continues to excel.

Well, I don't have to tell you here today how very far the school has come since then – the new school opened in January 1969 at Cane Street, Vistabella with a capacity that can hold almost 500 students.

Since then, it has produced students who have excelled in the field of academics, with over 15 students placing in the Top 100 of the SEA in the last five years, and students who have gone on to compete in the final rounds of competitions like the Mental Mathematics Competition and the prestigious and challenging Powergen Spelling Bee. There are facilities here that encourage a well-rounded student and holistic lifestyle – athletics, cricket and

hockey being available here for students to engage in, keeping them healthy and active.

But a school is much more than facilities, more than bricks and mortar, more than steel, glass and concrete.

In the old days our education system was centered on the 3'R's – reading, writing and arithmetic. And while these are still the bases of schooling, the curriculum has expanded way beyond these.

The demands placed on children are so much greater now with the advent of the Secondary Entrance Assessment. My son wrote SEA this year and I'm sure the parents in this room can relate to how stressful it can be on us...but even more so on our children, which in turn just stresses you out even more as a concerned and loving parent.

It is my hope that as we develop as a nation, and as our education system and processes develop, some of that stress would be relieved partly by technology but mostly by developing other options. It must change and I am committed to doing what I can in my capacity as Minister of Public Administration to see that stress alleviated. I know this is something that Minister of Education, Dr the Honourable Tim Gopeesingh and his technical staff are also deeply concerned about.

As some of you may be aware, the Telecommunications Authority of Trinidad and Tobago falls under the purview of my Ministry and so I know a thing or two about Telecommunications, Information Technology and the importance of exploiting information technology to maximize the efficiency of how we operate, how we educate, and how we track and appraise our children's performance as they progress through their academic lives.

It is my vision that one day, sometime in the future, the Secondary Entrance Assessment can be written online, in the comfort of our homes, with the necessary controls in place to ensure that the process is transparent and efficient.

We need to look at today's children and accept that our generation grew up in a different, slower, less demanding environment. Today's children have to make critical decisions about life from the time they are as young as ten years old!

They are faced with issues at this age that we probably didn't encounter until we were well into young adulthood, and yet somehow, they cope. They deal with the reality of sex and drugs and other elements of life and society that can rob them of that innocence and youth that is such a privilege and luxury in this day and age.

Now let me talk to the kids, the graduates here today.

You should all be **extremely** proud of yourselves.

You should take with you from here on out a tremendous pride in your school and what it represents, what it stands for and the hope that your teachers and Principal have for you for the future.

Have pride in your family – no matter how rich or how poor, they have sacrificed in their way so you can get an opportunity, an opportunity that some children still do not have, an opportunity that some of them never had.

Some words of advice to you the graduating class.

Never accept second best. Strive always for excellence. As you enter your various secondary schools, seek always to be in the top five students in your class. Read widely, pay attention in class and never be scared to ask for help if at first you do not understand what the teacher is saying. In this regard you should always complete your readings before classes. Essentially your classes should always be revision ones since you have done your readings before.

Secondly, you will receive laptops which are to be used to help you in your studies. As with everything there is an up and downside to the use of everything. Computers could, in the wrong hands, become distractions from your studies. Used in the right way however, they can become powerful tools for the independent acquisition of the latest information and information which will place you on par with students in any part of the world.

One of the seven interconnected pillars of this government is
Pillar 4: Information and Communication Technology and
Connecting Trinidad and Tobago Building the New Economy.

ICT and the systems that they can create are fundamental to the
development of every progressive society.

Government continues in its plans for an IT based learning to be
infused in education at primary and secondary school levels to
support and complement other forms of teaching, learning and
basic research.

In this knowledge driven era, distance does not matter and you
have the capability with your laptops to have the same information
available to you as students in New Zealand or Singapore. I urge
you to make the right use of these laptops.

Thirdly, we are now in a global era. In your school you competed with other students in your classes. In the SEA examinations you competed with students throughout the country. Next term, when you go to your respective secondary schools and you will compete with a wider pool of students. But in the global village you will compete with students from the entire globe. Your SAT scores, for example which are useful in accessing scholarships, will be benchmarked against those from the US and a host of other countries. As you strive for excellence therefore remember that your competition exists not only with your classmates or with your fellow citizens, but with all others in the global village.

As you continue to excel in your studies, find time to exercise by adopting healthy recreational activities which can range from cricket, to tennis, to sailing, or hiking. Choose something which brings you happiness. At the same time learn to play a musical

instrument such as the piano or steelpan or sitar or a tabla or a violin. As you travel abroad to study, you may well find yourself as an international student in a university being called upon to play some musical instrument. You may well find yourself appearing to be less than enlightened -- if you have to apologise because your education was not broad enough and was limited only to books.

But more than that it assists with the development of the emotional competence. Many students have a high IQ students with first class honours do not progress to leadership positions because they lack the emotional intelligence.

Remember to become Ambassadors of our country, carrying the flag of our country, make our country proud.

While I am giving advice, I would urge you to consider occupations other than engineering, law and medicine. I know parents may agree with me for this, because we, I am a parent also, all want our children to be doctors, lawyers and engineers.

I therefore urge you to explore the opportunities in the global village. Use your laptops to read about these jobs and the qualifications needed for them.

Another one of the seven interconnected pillars is Pillar 5: A More Diversified Knowledge Intensive Economy Building the Native Genius of our People. Innovation is the decisive competitive advantage. Human initiative and creative capacity represent an enormous asset for this nation. It is this Government's intention to develop a society in which creativity and innovation are encouraged.

The emphasis is on linkages among our creative sectors, technological and design sectors. This is how we will create the new economy and you the students of this graduation class must play a significant role in realizing this goal.

Some of you may even consider politics although I would ask you to think very, very carefully - and seek lots of advice – if you ever think about becoming a politician. It is very useful if you are desirous of making positive changes in your country but seek lots of advice first.

My last bit of advice is to remember the God of your understanding and seek always his blessings, direction, solice and advice. You are fortunate to have attended a denominational school where your spiritual growth and development was given

priority and a proper foundation was laid in your life. Build upon this spiritual foundation and draw sustenance from it whenever you are tempted to do wrong or when life appears to be getting the better of you. In stressful times, God is always there to support you and see you through your difficulties.

So, congratulations to all the students graduating today. You have done your school proud. Your parents and teachers are beaming with pride. Some of you may not get the secondary school of your choice. If that is so, remember there is a bigger reason for things which happen in our lives. Maybe there is someone in that particular school whose life God wishes you to impact upon and he has placed you there for that reason. Or he may wish you to get a particular kind of experience which will be useful for you later on in life. We cannot always know what God has planned for us. Our duty is to do the best always in whatever circumstances we may find ourselves.

And for those of you who may come in the first 100 and go to the school of your choice, I want you to remember your friends who have come this far with you. You will meet new friends, and some of you will go on in life to be great success. I can see it I your faces. I just want to remind you of the words of our Honourable Prime Minister at the swearing in of Cabinet Ministers in 2010.

Do not become arrogant, approach everyone with humility, it is one of God's gifts to us.

Do not forget your friends, they will always be there for you.

I have read your names, I will be following your careers. I expect great things from all of you. Whether you are a businessman, a commisioner of police , a doctor, a teacher, or that person who will find a cure for AIDS or a member of Government one day, I expect great things from all of you.

You have a great future ahead of you. You have had excellent teachers so far. You have come from a great school. You have done well in your exams. I expect you to continue the great work which was started by your teachers. I expect you to rise up and take advantage of all the opportunities available to you.

As I close, I pray that God will continue to shower his blessings on all of you students of this SEA class of 2012 throughout the rest of your lives.

May he continue to guide all of you. I ask God's blessings on your parents as they continue to support you. May he continue to give you the strength, courage and wisdom to guide and mould the future leaders of our nation.

These children will soar to greater heights.

God Bless all of you

I thank you...