

**SPEECH BY MR LAWRENCE WONG, ACTING MINISTER FOR CULTURE,
COMMUNITY AND YOUTH, AT THE SCHOOL OF THE ARTS AWARDS DAY 2013,
FRIDAY, 5 APRIL 2013, 2.00PM AT THE SOTA CONCERT HALL**

Mr Lee Tzu Yang, Chairman, Board of Directors, Singapore Arts School Limited
Ms Lim Geok Cheng, Principal, School of the Arts
Distinguished guests
Teachers and staff
Parents and students,

Good afternoon. It is my pleasure to join you at SOTA's Awards Day today to celebrate with you the achievements of SOTA students who have excelled in various aspects of their education.

2. SOTA has come a long way since its inception in 2008. Within these few years, SOTA has established itself as the premier pre-tertiary specialised arts school in Singapore. Last year, your first cohort of International Baccalaureate students graduated with 100% Diploma passes. Some of these graduates obtained placements in prestigious overseas universities such as the Berklee College of Music, Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama, and University of Oxford even before the release of the IBDP results.

3. Let me congratulate all of you in SOTA on these achievements. I want to thank the family members who have been so supportive of SOTA all these years. And I also want to specially recognize the teachers at SOTA, who have done so much in guiding and mentoring our students in their arts education journey.

4. I'm a firm believer in the importance of a quality arts education. It lays the foundation for developing citizens who are adept, active and able to flourish. It imparts skills and values such as self-awareness, self-expression and the confidence to experiment; and also teamwork, empathy, and an appreciation of other cultures.

5. More importantly, an arts education imparts the ability to critically appreciate and find beauty, not just in isolated works of art, but in all things around us. And from appreciation comes the reflection and thoughtfulness that enables us to be better citizens, both of Singapore and the world. By giving students both the aptitude and the ambition to improve society, an arts education prepares students to thrive as members of their communities, and in turn help these communities to also flourish.

6. By developing young talents like yourselves, SOTA plays an important role in shaping the future of our cultural landscape. When you graduate, some of you will take on roles in arts and culture management. Others may end up with arts organisations to drive growth in the arts. Others will end up in occupations and sectors not directly related to the arts. But whatever the path you choose, I am confident all of you will continue to champion the arts, with the same passion with which you are now pursuing it in SOTA.

7. Through MCCY and our partner agencies, the Government will continue to invest in the development of our arts landscape and institutions, including arts education. Over the years, we are already seeing the arts grow in importance in the lives of all Singaporeans. Over time, I am confident we will mature as a society with a stronger sense of aesthetics and artistic sensitivity, and a people with a deep appreciation of the arts as an enriching part of all our lives.

8. While the Government can and will do its part, it is even more vital that people are willing to step up and make it possible for arts to thrive in our society. So it is heartening to see the community continually lending its strong support and playing an active role in supporting our cultural scene. Organisations such as Temasek Holdings, Louis Vuitton and SC Global have partnered SOTA, in various capacities. Such partnerships not only enrich the students' learning; they also enhance their education experience by giving them exposure to authentic environments beyond the school context, through competitions and platforms to showcase their works.

9. In addition to support from corporate organisations, SOTA has also been benefitting from the generosity of Ngee Ann Kongsi and Singapore Indian Education Trust, which have been generously contributing through scholarships and bursaries. This year, the David Marshall Year 1 Study Award, sponsored by the Temasek Education Foundation will also be given out to deserving Year 1 students. With these generous contributions, SOTA has been able to extend its quality educational offerings to students from all socioeconomic backgrounds. Of the pioneering cohort of SOTA graduates, 20% of them received financial assistance. These students have all done well in their IB Diploma. And the financial support they received has no doubt been instrumental in enabling them to complete their education journey successfully.

10. SOTA has also benefited from individual well-wishers who have supported SOTA through their generous gifts. Dr Lee Boon Yang, our former Arts Minister is one such individual. Having worked closely with the school in its early years, he continues to encourage outstanding SOTA students in their pursuit of all-round excellence with the annual Dr Lee Boon Yang Student of the Year Award.

11. This year, the Prime Minister's Valedictorian Award is also given out for the first time to the top graduate who has achieved all round excellence in her six years in SOTA. This award is supported by Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, and is given to one graduate each year who has demonstrated excellence in the academic disciplines, the arts, leadership and service to the community consistently over the years in SOTA.

12. Today, it also gives me great pleasure to announce the introduction of the Lee Kuan Yew-J.P. Morgan Grant. This Grant will be given to Year 4 and 5 SOTA students who demonstrate strong artistic achievement and potential, and who need financial support for their Overseas Service Learning and Global Perspectives programmes. The award demonstrates the strong partnership between the private and public sectors in their support of arts education, and enables promising students from lower-income families to develop their artistic talents. I would like to thank JP Morgan for their generous donation to the school to fund the grant.

13. This is what it takes to develop our arts, culture and heritage in Singapore – it's not something that MCCY or SOTA can do alone. It really requires a whole-of-society partnership. Through our collective efforts, we can develop a rich and distinctive Singapore culture. We can develop iconic arts and heritage institutions that make us proud to be Singaporeans. And we can continue to nurture young talents in the arts, while providing a vibrant environment for them to excel academically and holistically.

14. Finally, let me extend my congratulations once again to the SOTA Awards recipients. All of you here in SOTA have worked hard and shown grit and determination in your pursuit of artistic excellence. I am hopeful and excited about what you can achieve in the years ahead. Congratulations once again on your graduation, and I wish you every success in your future endeavours.