

**SPEECH BY MRS MARY SEAH**  
**PRINCIPAL, SCHOOL OF THE ARTS**  
**SOTA AWARDS 2019**  
**16 MAY 2019, THURSDAY, CONCERT HALL, LEVEL 2**

Mr Baey Yam Keng, Senior Parliamentary Secretary for Ministry of Culture,  
Community and Youth & Ministry of Transport

Mr Loh Lik Peng, Chairman and members of the SOTA Board

Representatives from MCCY and MOE,

Distinguished Guests

Teachers, Students and Parents

1 Good Afternoon! Thank you for joining us here at our 2019 SOTA Awards Day! Last week, we celebrated the achievements of our current students at an in-house ceremony. We had their parents, siblings, and even grandparents present them their awards. The sense of coming together in support of our young students' growth was both heartwarming and powerfully encouraging!

2 Today, we are gathered here with a larger, 'extended SOTA family', to celebrate the achievements of our 2018 cohort and some of our most outstanding current students. We are happy that the Class of 2018 has done well in both the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme and the Career-related Programme. The IBDP cohort achieved the highest mean IB score in the last 5 years, while the IBCP cohort surpassed their peers in the rest of the world in a number of art forms. I wish to thank the teachers and the leadership team for their patient guidance. In particular, I would like to thank former Principal Ms Lim Geok Cheng, I think the school owes a debt of gratitude to you for your dedicated leadership and we are glad to welcome you back today!

**Deep Learning at Intersections**

3 Here at SOTA, we aim to nurture deep *disciplinarity* in the arts and academic fields. For students who demonstrate outstanding capacity, the

school seizes every opportunity to expose them to a range of learning contexts, locally and overseas, in alignment with the philosophy of an IB education. Last year, a group of Year 4 Visual Arts students visited the Sichuan Fine Arts Institute in Chongqing, China. Learning about calligraphy, architecture and age-old yarn weaving techniques, it was an experience that truly transcended artistic boundaries, and contextualized for our students fresh insights into the rich traditions of China.

4 In addition, the school has made credible attempts to encourage staff and students to explore the elements, processes and concepts that lie at the intersections of the arts and academic domains. Joshua Ngoh, a Year 4 Visual Arts student, found himself getting drawn to the relationship between Math Vectors and Art. Inspired by Artist and Statistician Edward Tufte, Joshua desired to represent his understanding of the galaxy through his artwork, 'Space'. Leveraging mathematical calculations, Joshua painstakingly plotted a visual 2D map, exploring his identity in the vastness of the 3D universe.

5 If you had been at our 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebrations last year, you might remember the performance by our Dance and Music alumni, Alison and Shiva. Shiva composed and played the music on an ocarina, while Dance alumna Alison choreographed and performed a dance based on the music.

6 There is a movement advocating *deep learning* as the way to go to foster engagement, and perhaps an attempt to insulate students against the uncertainties and volatility of the future. Deep learning can come about when we encourage students to unravel their own art forms to find the elements, concepts and processes that could bridge another.

7 Michael Fullan, Joanne Quinn and Joanne McEachen - thought leaders in the field of education wrote that "Deep learning... is about finding our place in a complex, indeed scary world. It is about transforming our reality through learning, both individually and with others." What is perhaps most significant about the "deep learning movement" is that it is not driven by policy, but that it gets its strength from the "middle"...

8 I certainly want to encourage a culture of learning that is led in dynamic ways from the “middle”- i.e. in classrooms and studios of SOTA. We will continue to leverage and build upon the signature pedagogies of Arts Integration and Inter-disciplinary Arts, and to nurture the intellectual humility and integrity in our students as they anchor themselves in deep learning.

### **Pursuing passions in and beyond the arts**

9 Our students are a H.I.P.P bunch! (HIPP stands for the school values of humility, integrity, people-centredness and passion) I would now like to talk a little more about the unique passions of our students manifested in their achievements in, and beyond the arts.

10 In Theatre, Year 3 student Batrisya Soffian won the Most Promising Actor/Actress Award for her role in a social drama Bantal Buruk Saloma at the Pesta Perdana, Mediacorp Suria's awards show.

11 In Dance, Year 3 student Kenzo Seah was awarded the Gold medal in the Junior A category of the Asian Grand Prix International Ballet Competition. This young man who is just fourteen, he is turning fifteen this year, received scholarships from the New Zealand School of Dance, English National Ballet School and the National Ballet School of Canada.

12 In Music, Year 2 student Parveen Kaur embraced the Chinese culture and topped the Pipa Youth Category in the 2018 National Chinese Music Competition.

13 Some of our students pursue passions beyond the arts and take them to a very high level. Kyra Poh, our Year 5 Visual Arts student first picked up skydiving 8 years ago when it was a little known sport. She and her primary school friend and sky-diving partner Choo Yi Xuan have since represented Singapore and won many accolades at the Wind Games and the FAI World Cup of Indoor Skydiving Championships. Last September, Kyra recovered from

a fractured rib just in time to participate at the Asiana Indoor Skydiving Championships, winning two golds! The duo also set a new Asian record in achieving the fastest time in the dynamic 2-way tournament at the FAI World Cup. I had asked Kyra about how skydiving squares with the Arts. She shared that she engages with flight themes in her art-making, while the exposure to dance has certainly shaped the way she choreographs her moves in the air tunnel. I am proud to announce that Kyra, together with Yi Xuan, was recently awarded the 2019 Singapore Sportsboy/Sportsgirl Team of the Year Award! [I believe Kyra is here with her parents. Can I now invite Kyra to stand? Congratulations once again!]

14 Following in Kyra's footsteps of flying the Singapore flag high, is Year 2 Dance student, Freja Young, who was selected to represent Singapore in the UEFA – FAS Under 15 Girls' Tournament.

15 Under the guidance of Ms Wynn Chew, our Tchoukball CAS team has done us very proud indeed, despite not being a formal CCA like in the other schools. On Monday this week, they competed in the 2019 A Division Tchoukball Championships (against very strong opponents from HCI and NYJC). I am happy to announce that the Girls Team defended their Runners-Up title, while the Boys Team emerged champions, for the 3<sup>rd</sup> year running! Thank you for flying the SOTA flag high!

### **Nurturing cultural leaders of tomorrow**

16 The last of our school values that I haven't quite mentioned is 'People-Centredness'. From the recent student dialogues with Ambassador Thambyinathan and Senior Parliamentary Secretary Sun Xueling, I learnt that our students do spend a lot of time thinking about how they could serve as "creative citizens of the future", which is our school vision. Year 6 Theatre student Marcus Chiau demonstrated much maturity in his thoughts and a burden for social causes, while Music student Natasha da Costa hopes to be a cultural ambassador, and Tamie Wong, a Dance student, has already acted on her plans to serve in the Airforce.

17 Dawn Lim, one of the recipients of the Dr Lee Boon Yang award, is an active volunteer with the Youth Corps and she works mainly with the elderly. Tapping on her arts training, she uses theatre exercises to encourage healthy aging for the elderly at Monfort Care. She was also a volunteer with *'Both Sides, Now'*, a community engagement project that encouraged an open and safe space to talk about death for seniors and the need to prepare for this eventuality.

18 On a more upbeat note, a string quintet made up of Year 4 Music students will be performing on electric instruments (which they are playing for the very first time!) at the Singapore Youth Festival celebrations. They will sharing the stage with peers from the Ang Mo Kio Secondary School Band. Our Visual Arts students will also be bringing the arts to the community at Kampung Admiralty. Using the artwork 'Liu Kang's life by the river', they will be engaging members of the public to share their memories of kampong life, and invite them to create art using lino stamps.

### **Teachers pushing creative, pedagogical and technological boundaries**

19 Our teachers are an integral part of the SOTA learning experience. They play an important role in nurturing a sense of cultural leadership in our students and are an inspiration to them. In this light, many of our teachers continue to practise their craft and push creative and pedagogical boundaries.

20 Technology is an area that SOTA hopes to explore more deeply in the near future. Some of our teachers already lead the way - Senior Teacher Ms Teo Oi Mei is a strong proponent of the Apple Classroom while Visual Arts teacher, Yeo Ker Siang leverages technology in his artworks such as 'Original Simulations', where he collaborated with physics students from the University of Bristol.

**Honouring teachers, partners, students**

21 To ALL our staff, every award given out at this ceremony is also a celebration of your work. Thank you for going the extra mile to bring up a generation who learns the values of integrity, humility, people-centredness and passion. I look towards you to lead SOTA from the “middle” so that our students can be well prepared to take their places as “creative citizens of the future”.

22 To the partners, parents and donors who are here today, we thank you for your faith in SOTA. To MCCY, MOE and the SOTA Board, you have offered your leadership, expertise and guidance in matters of governance and strategic importance. I look forward to your thought partnership as we lead the school into its next decade. To The Ngee Ann Kongsi and Temasek Foundation, your partnership has enriched the programmes we offer our students and made SOTA education accessible for many. Thank you for your belief in our mission and for making a difference!

23 To all alumni and students who are receiving awards today, I congratulate you for your outstanding achievements. All of you have worked hard, shown much grit and distinguished yourselves in your pursuit of excellence. Most importantly, each cohort tried to set themselves apart from previous ones (and for the 2018 cohort, I understand that many of these “little movements” that you started in SOTA, these include the use hand signs to communicate with one another, illegal iron-on patches and flash mobs, and I believe these will really be the things you will remember of the school days for a long time). The world is now yours to take on and explore. My wish for you is to be a good steward of your talents, and truly be a shining light for humanity through the arts and culture, wherever you are placed.

24 To everyone here, thank you for joining us. May you have a very enjoyable afternoon indeed!