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## **Speech by Ms Indranee Rajah, Second Minister for Education, at the 2018 Inspiring Teacher of English Awards Ceremony**

1. I am delighted to join all of you here this evening, to celebrate our teachers who have been instrumental in igniting in our students a love for the English Language, and steering them towards fluency in both spoken and written English.

2. I love language teachers as well. They were great because they gave me a legacy of being able to speak well, which led eventually to public speaking. Indeed, English teachers have a great impact.

3. I would like to extend my heartiest congratulations to all the nominees, award winners, and their schools. The ITEA alumni forms a powerful core that can inspire the use of standard English by the teaching fraternity, peers and the community. I want to ask you to continue to encourage, inspire and challenge your students, the teaching fraternity, peers and the community to be excellent communicators of English. I also want to express appreciation to the Speak Good English Movement and The Straits Times for their unflagging commitment to the annual ITEA through the years.

### **ENGLISH IN SINGAPORE TODAY**

4. In Singapore, the English Language plays an exceptionally important role.

5. At the global level, competence in the English Language has allowed Singaporeans to participate intelligibly and actively in a knowledge-based, global economy, where English remains the lingua franca. Growing world trade and interconnectivity has led to a greater need for English as a common language to facilitate transnational communication in a global economy.

6. In the workplace, proficiency in English is an essential skill. Regardless of the jobs we do or the industry we are in, having a sound and confident command of the language is an asset. The importance of English is not lost on others. In China, for example, out of those who had studied a foreign language, more than 90% were found to have chosen to learn English. They

did so because they felt it gave them a competitive edge in the job market, especially with China's increasingly open door strategy to business.

7. At the local level, English continues to be the common language that facilitates communication, understanding and bonding among the diverse groups in our country. These are essential to help us combat threats that can potentially cause divisions among Singaporeans.

8. The English Language also plays a significant role in the continuing development of a unique Singaporean culture. Our growing literary scene enriches our local culture and identity, and also as well as strengthens Singapore's position on the global literary stage.

9. But our relationship with the English Language is not one-way. Singapore has contributed to the evolution of internationally-accepted English. In March 2016, 19 new Singapore English words were added to the Oxford English Dictionary including "hawker centre", "wet market" and "Chilli Crab". In using the language, Singapore has added richness to it.

10. Hence, the English Language is vital for Singapore and Singaporeans, and we have an advantage in this area. Our students learn English as a first language in school. Our performance in international benchmarking tests such as PISA and PIRLS, affirm our students' strong foundation in literacy and language. It is imperative for Singaporeans to be intelligible to the rest of the English-speaking world as Singapore continues to punch above her weight in the global arena politically, economically and culturally.

11. The way forward for us is to ensure that all our children continue to develop the competencies and confidence to speak and write well in English. That is why there has been constant emphasis placed on the learning of the English Language in our schools, so that our students can use it accurately, fluently, and appropriately, for effective communication.

## **THE ROLE OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHERS**

12. Our English Language teachers are central to this endeavour. Our teachers role-model the effective use of English, and employ innovative methods to ensure that our students develop the ability to communicate effectively, with clarity and with confidence. The nine award winners this evening have demonstrated the qualities and commitment essential for inspiring greater passion for, and mastery in, the English Language.

13. Helping our students to find joy in learning the language, and to deepen their proficiency and mastery, is not a simple task. A teacher has to masterfully apply a range of strategies so that all students – regardless of their background and level of development in the language – can enjoy learning the English Language daily in the classroom, and out of it. It is also critical for an English Language teacher to consistently draw connections to real world contexts to make learning meaningful and come alive. This requires both resourcefulness and flexibility on the part of the teacher in curating appropriate materials, leveraging technology, and providing opportunities for students to apply their learning to authentic situations. Finally, the English Language teacher needs to adopt a forward-looking approach in the crafting of lessons and programmes to ensure that our students are future-ready – for example, by focusing on developing emerging competencies in our students, such as being discerning readers and persuasive communicators.

14. But beyond ensuring that students learn English well, I would like to encourage our teachers to continue to harness the power of the English Language and words to uplift your young charges to be better than what they could possibly imagine themselves to be, to open up their paths to new possibilities and new worlds, and help them discern and seek what is truthful and good. In your daily work, you role-model to your students how they can likewise use the English Language to communicate positively and confidently, and in time, to shape the community's conversations towards what is truthful and what is good.

## **CONCLUSION**

15. At the end of the day you are not merely teaching a subject, nor are you merely teaching a tool. You are teaching something which is extremely powerful, which is going to help your students later in life, and help them achieve things which they might not have imagined.

16. A very good example of this is what John F Kennedy said when he conferred Winston Churchill with honorary United States citizenship. What he said about Churchill was that “he mobilized the English language and sent it into battle”. Anybody who is familiar with the history of the Second World War would know that is exactly what Winston Churchill did. When all the odds were stacked against that little island, that was the power of language because he essentially got parliament to agree to the plan that he had put forward, and it was in doubt at that moment whether they could go forward with that plan. But it is not just about

going into battles. It is about using language to inspire, to arouse emotions, to encourage, to hurt, to wound, but at the same time also to uplift, to do so many things with emotions which are then able to translate themselves into actions.

17. So as English teachers, you are not just teaching your students a subject, you are teaching your students an intangible thing that will enable them in due course to move mountains. So with that, thank you all once again for having me here and I look forward to giving out the awards. Thank you very much.