

Speech of Hon. (Mrs) L.D. Dookun - LUCHOOMUN
Minister of Education and Human Resources,
Tertiary Education & Scientific Research
Prize Giving Ceremony
Royal College Port Louis
11 May 2017

Distinguished Guests,
Good Morning to all of you.

It gives me great pleasure to be amongst you this morning for the annual Prize-Giving Ceremony of your school. Allow me, at the very outset, to express my deep appreciation for the invitation to join you on this very special occasion.

Today, we are celebrating the success of students, the recognition of their consistent and sustained effort for excellence in academic subjects as well as for achievement in co- and extracurricular activities. It is a fact that success does not come at one's mere beckoning. Rather, it is the result of hard work, sacrifice and dedication and it is a reflection of a collective and collaborative effort of students, parents and teachers who each, in their individual endeavour and way, contribute towards the success and achievement of the school.

I will certainly not fail to mention the role played by the School Leader in shaping and driving success in a school. The leader sets a direction, redesigns the school since she is called upon to initiate changes that help the school move towards newer and improved goals. As importantly, she is the prime motivator leading students and teachers to exploit their full potential and always aim higher. One other key function is that of engaging parents and the community in school activities, thus creating a synergy for a shared vision and mission as far as the wellbeing of students is concerned.

Is this happening at the Royal College of Port Louis? I believe it is, if I am to go by the presence of parents, of the several guests and the rallied support of staff and students. So congratulations to you, Mr Rector and your staff for so ably driving the College to reach new heights.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Royal College Port Louis is in fact one of the oldest and most prestigious educational institutions in Mauritius. The past 88 years have placed the

institution at the forefront in the provision of quality education in Mauritius. Indeed, the 2016 results for the Higher School Certificate and the School Certificate bear testimony to the culture of excellence that prevails here. Obtaining five laureates, as well as having eleven students with an aggregate of six units at School Certificate speak highly about the school's achievements.

I am also pleased to hear that the excellent results go much beyond the academic domain to encompass success in various co and extra-curricular activities, such as the Duke of Edinburgh's International Award, the Rajiv Gandhi Science Competition, the Zonal, National and International Model United Nations. I am confident that the young men who leave the Royal College of Port-Louis are precisely the kind of persons who will make a positive difference to the country, to the world, from the domestic sphere to the international stage, and at all points in between.

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Government believes that the future of a state depends upon the level and quality of education dispensed to its youth. Empowerment of our young people through education is the new name of the game. If we successfully empower them, they will emerge as the mainstays of our country.

Obviously, we must all assume our responsibilities.

I, as Minister responsible for the Education portfolio, am assuming my responsibility as well in creating the conducive conditions whereby our youth are provided with values and skills that promote their personal growth, enhance their critical thinking and encourage them to innovate and adapt to change in an increasingly globalised environment.

You are all aware that major reforms are currently underway in the education system. These reforms are all-encompassing and cut across the sub-sectors—stretching from the primary, to secondary, to TVET and to the tertiary levels. Again, and this needs to be pointed out, the reforms are directly in line with our Vision 2030 as well as with the international commitment we took alongside the global community in September 2015 at the United Nations. Do check out the SDG 4 and you will notice the reforms are grounded in and aligned with the goal of ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education for ALL.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like for a minute or so to pause on the word 'ALL'.

You will agree that our system of education cannot and should not leave anybody behind. Education is an instrument for social mobility and responsible behaviour but it is also the main agent for creating a just society.

Now, a just society thrives upon '*Inclusiveness*'. We have to adopt an inclusive approach towards all learners, taking them all on board and, where necessary, provide some with additional facilities as part of the positive discrimination or affirmative action process.

This is why my Ministry is currently working on a new strategy for children with Special Education Needs. This Strategy paper is designed to work towards necessary improvements in the quality of education for students with various abilities from the early years of childhood to early adulthood.

And it fills me with pride to know that this institution already caters for the inclusion of physically impaired students.

At this point, let me also take up the issue of special needs as applicable to high flyers and the gifted.

I know that discussions are ongoing—probably even among some of you present here—as to the future of your school, the future of Royal College of Port Louis. Indeed, as from January 2018, this College will no more be having any Grade 7 intake.

RCPL will henceforth be called upon to become one of the 12 Academies and will be admitting students in Grade 10 as from 2021.

As is presently the case, the brightest students will be admitted to the RCPL so the changes will be no way do away with the historical heritage of RCPL.

In fact this institutions is expected to develop into a centre of Excellence.

Dear Students,

I believe it is also vital for you to realise that we are providing a variety of post-secondary education pathways to suit the aptitudes and interests of each and every one of you.

Let me explain.

Traditionally, a student has always felt that the natural thing to do after the completion of A level studies is to move on to a degree level programme for me shall need highly competent, young people in the country.

Another credible alternative to the academic route will also be offered as from this year. The setting up of Polytechnics means that there will now be the possibility to go in for a type of technical education that will develop the relevant high level skills that are very much in demand. These will open the doors to a number of high-paid jobs of the future.

Remember that the very configuration of the jobs of the future will change – and as Mauritius embarks on the new growth areas. Embarking on further education and training that provides an opening on career-oriented fields may well prove to be extremely rewarding to young school leavers.

Dear Rector, Staff and Parents,

I have but sketchily spoken on the reform agenda that we have already put on the rails. I am convinced that I can rely upon your collaboration in the fulfilment of this major agenda. True, some hurdles may crop up—mind-sets don't change overnight! But I know we all have at heart the future of our students and we are all ready to offer them the very best of what we can.

As for you, students, I believe in the unique talent and potential of each one of you. It is primordial that you believe in yourselves and cherish the qualities and gifts that lie in each of you.

For today's prize winners, let me remind you that, whatever be the prize that will come your way, be assured that the school, your teachers and your parents are very proud of you. Congratulations to each and every one of you.

As for those of you who are not today's prize winners, it is imperative that you understand and remember that, as long as your will to succeed gets stronger, nothing can discourage you from succeeding in life.

My advice to you is to keep dreaming of excellence. Transform your vision into your mission. Set yourselves some personal targets for the year ahead and work hard towards achieving them.

As Theodore Roosevelt put it in very inspirational words,

“Believe you can and you're halfway there.”

Sir Winston Churchill went even further when he stated that

“Success is not final, failure is not fatal: it is the courage to continue that counts.”

My best wishes to you all for a successful and committed educational

journey.

I thank you for your kind attention.