

Tanglin Sec may celebrate its 50th birthday by saying bye bye Singapore's pioneer schools should be appreciated like our pioneer generation.

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One of the regular dinner conversations we have with friends is to reminisce about the schools we studied in.

Imagine the day when you have to give the following reply: "I'm from Alexandra Estate Primary School, the one where PM's wife Ho Ching studied in. But it's closed now. Secondary school? Braddell Secondary School. Also shut down liao."

This is the situation facing an illustrious secondary school, Tanglin Secondary School (TSS).

Last week, The Straits Times reported that former students of TSS have written to the Ministry of Education (MOE) to appeal for the school's name to be retained when it merges with the nearby school.

MOE said on July 25, 2014, that eight secondary schools will merge into four in 2016. TSS was one of the schools affected.

The merger came as a surprise for Seow Kang Seng, president of TSS alumni committee, as TSS just had their 50th anniversary celebration.

TSS' history and achievements

Previously it was named Tanglin Integrated Secondary Technical School from 1965 to 1968 and renamed Tanglin Technical Secondary School in 1969. It became Tanglin Secondary School in 1993.

It was Singapore's first technical school where the medium of instruction was in Chinese.

It was also the first to admit female students to its technical courses.

Its alumni: A President Scholar – Lee Cheek Yew – and five other Colombo Plan Scholars; two former Members of Parliament, Chew Heng Ching and Leong Horn Kee; and current MPs (Cedric Foo and Zainudin Nordin)

Passionate and engaged alumni

In his letter to MOE, Seow highlighted the active contributions of the alumni to the school's growth. Some serve as members of the School Advisory Board, others in the TSS Alumni, a few are now teaching in their alma mater.

At its recent 50th Anniversary Homecoming Dinner, more than 100 old boys and old girls of TSS came back to their alma mater to celebrate with their former teachers, classmates, and principals. Their guest of honour was ex MP Chew Heng Ching.

The KeepOurTanglin Facebook group now has more than 1,700 Facebook fans. One of the alumnus, Edmond Ho, hopes the group “can further bring our fellow Tanglinians together to reconnect with one another, and where we can also continue to actively participate and engage with our alma mater through our Alumni”.

How about moving illustrious schools to young neighbourhoods? Or naming community spaces after them?

It must be tough to choose between the names of two schools during a school merger. But has MOE considered whether the schools can be relocated to young housing estates in Punggol and Sengkang? TSS was moved to West Coast Road in 1993, and was renamed Tanglin Secondary School.

In a recent commentary about Singapore’s unsung pioneer schools that have closed down, Leong Chan-Hoong from the Institute of Policy Studies suggested that we can honour “the pioneers of these neighbourhood schools by naming community spaces or buildings after them”. Another of his suggestion was to revamp schools to teach other education models such as social enterprise.

School closures will lead to loss of our local heritage and affect Singapore’s identity

During TSS’ 25th Anniversary Celebrations in 1989, Tay Eng Soon, Senior Minister of State for Education, said: “Tanglin Technical can take pride in being one of the pioneer technical schools which helped prepare young Singaporeans for industrialisation. In that sense, Tanglin Technical is part of Singapore’s history.”

Tanglin’s core values of character (德), knowledge (智), physical well-being (体), team spirit (群), and aesthetics (美) also mirror the founding pillars of modern Singapore.

Since founding of the school in 1964, Seow said that more than 30,000 students have graduated from the school. The unceremonious school closures announcement will lead to the irreversible loss of our local heritage and Singapore’s identity.