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Synchronising care for elderly

## Education is about learning for life

**E**DUCATION Minister Heng Swee Keat's determination to stick to the decision not to name the top scorers of national examinations, including the Primary School Leaving Examination, reiterates the new direction of Singapore's education system. This, as he made clear at The Straits Times' inaugural Education Forum last week, includes debunking the idea among some parents that education equals grades, when in reality, intangibles such as character and values matter a great deal. Mr Heng's emphasis on these qualities is a reminder that grades are a means to the next stage of the education system or to working life; they are not the end of education and certainly not of life.

The purpose of education must lie in providing a sound academic foundation for the development of a rounded and confident individual. Such a person would be capable, not only of participating in the economy as an educated and motivated worker but in society as well, as a thoughtful and engaged citizen. By contrast, an unhealthy fixation with scores limits the mental horizons of even the best students; demoralises those who perform less well; and subjects all to the crushing power of expectations. There is a danger of producing one-examination wonders – stars who believe that their future is foretold in their success – even as lesser mortals are overwhelmed by the fear of sinking

into mediocrity. Singapore's young deserve much better.

While meritocracy is essential in education, and while examinations are one way of gauging merit, success in life demands other attributes. Mr Heng, a high-flying public servant before he entered politics, noted that he had crossed paths with many top performers at their jobs who did not have top grades. What distinguished them were their leadership skills. This was a good illustration of the point that the key to success lies in picking up and honing skills while meeting challenges, including the ability to get along and work well with others, as well as show empathy for all.

Whether the young view examina-

tions as a part of a process of living and growing would depend on the support they receive from their parents. If parents themselves see education as a zero-sum game, they are unlikely to inspire their children with a holistic attitude to learning and life. The truth is that education does not guarantee a good future but should be a good preparation for it. Innovation, creativity, social skills and the ability to learn on the job will be skills demanded even more of all in the years to come. Examination grades will matter only up to a point. High academic standards would continue to be critical but their purpose would be to equip Singaporeans to meet the evolving challenges of life.