



# A FITTING FAREWELL

By Wilson McCaskill

For those students completing primary school this year, the very important ritual of their departure is approaching.

I know schools go to considerable effort to make this event a memorable and photo worthy experience. Some will prelude the event with special dinners replete with speeches, humorous anecdotes, awards and gifts. Others will wait until the big night and place the parents of departing students in special reserved seating to watch a show that has taken much effort, energy and creativity to produce and that will hopefully be remembered long after the lights go down.

The nights are invariably a mix of laughter, poignancy, nostalgia, hopefulness and appreciation. Few people would dismiss the importance of the night and everyone associated with it willingly makes an effort to make it something out of the ordinary, something that effectively acknowledges the journey travelled, the obstacles overcome, the friendships formed, the inspirations, hope and promise of those whose turn it is to move onwards and upwards.

I can't help but feel that the most important part of the ritual is acknowledging, in a significant and symbolic way, each child's journey through primary school. What better way to do this than for each child to move along a line of teachers that represents that journey and shake their hands, share a smile, a meaningful look, a supportive comment or indeed a humorous remark.

To move from their very first teacher to their final year teacher and recognise all who have been a part of their development, tells them something of the investment made by so many in preparing them for fruitful adolescence and fulfilling adulthood.

It will also remind them of the highs and lows of that journey, the years they loved and the years they didn't, the teachers that inspired them and the ones that were unable to. But above all, it will remind them of the part they played in their own preparation to move on.

Some will walk the line and reach the end feeling confident and ready for the next step. Others will sense their own nervousness about the years to come and others will reach the end and wish they could return to the beginning.

Whatever reaction each child has it will be significant and memorable. Does it matter if they didn't start at the school in their first year or that the teachers of earlier years are no longer at the school? No, it doesn't. The line of teachers is symbolic and representative.

And what a powerful visual statement it makes for the audience. They too are reminded of the journey each child has taken. I dare say it will trigger memories of



their own journey and perhaps a tinge of appreciation for teachers entrusted with the task of preparing children to live and learn well.

I know of some schools that use this symbolic “learning journey” as the centrepiece of the ceremony and they all talk of its impact on the entire school community.

### **POINTING THE SPOTLIGHT**

Care does need to be taken in how it is set up. Parents like to see the faces of their children as they meet the teachers and though this may not be entirely possible, clever staging can amplify the visual appeal of this process.

In too many school this final ceremony, apart from putting the spotlight on students, puts it firmly on the final year teacher/s, the principal and the deputies. In many instances, the other members of staff are happy for it to be like that. Teachers, in general, dislike being in public view. I have no doubt that a moment when the entire teaching staff stands before the audience looking confident, happy and sincerely appreciative of the journey made by the departing class, will have the parent community equally appreciative of the teachers.

It’s a public relations exercise not to be missed and I hope more schools will embrace the idea of making the end of primary school ceremony, a rite of passage that not only acknowledges the child but the dedicated adults who helped them along the way.