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# School sets up culinary centre

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TO accommodate students who may not be academically inclined, St Mary's Secondary School in Kuala Lumpur has launched a Hospitality and Culinary Arts Centre.

It's the first of its kind housed within a government school in the country and is named after the late Tan Sri Dr Siti Saleha Mohd Ali, an ex-student of St Mary's, and elder sister of Tun Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali.

Completed last December under the auspices of the school's board of governors, the Saleha Hospitality and Culinary Arts Centre cost RM1mil, with funding coming from the Federal Government, Sunway Group, Lee Foundation, Taman Equine, school alumni and many well-wishers.

The centre is equipped with a hot kitchen, patisserie, store room, hospitality suite, an indoor dining hall and an al fresco dining space.

Dr Siti Hasmah, an ex-student herself, or, in her own words, "an old, very old student" officiated at the opening of the centre earlier this month, together with Sunway Group exco member Puan Sri Susan Cheah and Lee Foundation director Datuk Lee Seng Chuan.

At the launch, Dr Siti Hasmah, affectionately referred to as *ibu sekolah* (mother of the school) said: "The school is sensitive to the needs of its students, some of whom are not academically inclined."

"So this means these students are trained to get a set of skills to prepare them for the job market," she said.

Students, she added, do not just learn how to cook, but also learn about nutrition and health.

"Don't think being a chef or working in hospitality have no potential. These are noble professions.

"There are many hotels and restaurants these days that need capable employees. "I hope parents will encourage their children to join the programme," she said.

As this was a tribute to her sister, Dr Siti Hasmah gave 700 copies of a book she wrote about Dr Siti Saleha to the school. In the foreword of *Tan Sri Datuk Paduka Dr Hajjah Siti Saleha Mohd Ali, 1923-2011: A Tribute to Courageous Woman*, she wrote: "Saleha was a student of St Mary's and excelled in sewing, smocking and knitting, and also in baking pastries, scones, fruit cake



(From left) Cheah, Dr Siti Hasmah and Lee launch the Saleha Hospitality and Culinary Arts Centre at the school.

and making jam, like our mother."

The book had added passages that stated that in the past five years, the number of students coming from the low-cost PPR Intan Baiduri flats in Selayang to St Mary's has increased, bringing with them various socio-economic challenges.

"Most of these girls have little or no interest in academic subjects at all. The current education system does not adequately provide for these," she added.

To give these students an alternative, the Saleha Hospitality and Culinary Arts Centre will offer Home Science (Ekonomi Rumah Tangga) classes as an elective under the Living Skills subject for Forms One to Three, and Home Science and Catering classes for the Technical Elective Subjects for Forms Four and Five.

The school introduced these subjects to its students in March, and will see the first batch of graduates next year.

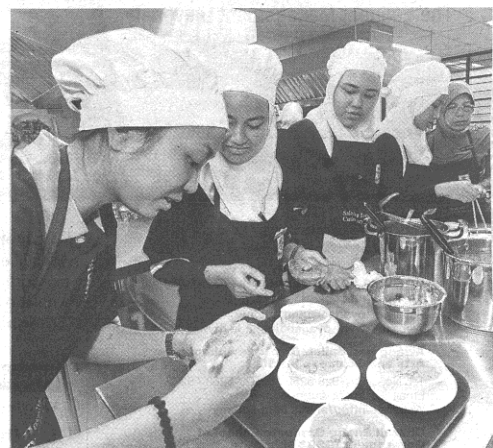
Among the students who are looking forward to taking Home Science as an elective is Yee Shan, 14, who can opt for the subject in two years. "I really like to cook because I like to do hands-on work. My parents support my decision."

Home Science teacher Nazirah Mohiden Abd Kadir was brought in to St Mary's this year to teach the students this subject. "The students are very excited each time they step into the kitchen."

Eighteen students in Form Four and 35 in Form One have opted to take the Home Science classes.

St Mary's also hopes to partner with Sunway Group in offering short-term courses with certification as a stepping stone for students' tertiary education.

To date, the school has worked with several educational institutions such as the Pastry Institute of St Honore, HELP College of Arts & Technology, and KDU University College to hold culinary workshops.



Budding chefs putting the finishing touch to the bowls of creamy soup.