

Preparing children for the future

Primary Education Review and Implementation Committee Secretariat



Singapore's education system has achieved high academic standards internationally. However, in an increasingly complex and interconnected world, how will Singapore ensure that its children continue to be effectively prepared for the future?

Singapore's education system is well regarded internationally. It was ranked first for having an education system that best meets the needs of a competitive economy in the International Institute for Management Development World Competitiveness Yearbook for 2008. In a 2007 report by McKinsey & Co. which examines the characteristics of school systems that consistently produce students who perform well in international tests, Singapore was named as having one of the world's best-performing school systems.¹

The strengths of the Singapore education system include a strong foundation in basic literacy, a bilingual education policy, a strong emphasis on Mathematics and Science, the pervasive use of Information and Communications Technology, which is integrated with teaching and learning, as well as participation in Co-Curricular Activities that are conducted in all schools.

In more recent years, Singapore has also introduced several initiatives to help students develop their talents to the full and to give them greater choice in subjects taken at the secondary and post-secondary levels. Future directions seek to strike a good balance between the acquisition of knowledge, skills and values for a more holistic education.

Strong fundamentals, future learnings

Education systems worldwide are evolving in response to changing needs and driving forces. The Singapore education system is no different. The country's small size and open economy make it vulnerable to global trends and forces. Hence, there is a strong public consensus that the Singapore education system must prepare children to face a fast-changing future with confidence. This means that schools must anchor students in strong fundamentals while equipping them with the skills and competencies for the future.

While rapid advancements in technology provide greater connectivity and easier access to information and people, values education remains key to ensuring that the young grow up with a strong moral compass. A core mission of schools is therefore to nurture in students a sense of commitment and service to the community and the nation. Schools will further build on the current strengths in literacy and numeracy. Given the global flow of people and ideas, Singaporeans need to function in multicultural

settings. Strong language skills, as well as civic and multicultural literacies, will become even more important.

The ability to communicate effectively, to work well with others in a team, to take responsibility for one's own learning, to evaluate information critically, and remain steadfast in the face of difficulties, are recognised as some of the universal skills and attitudes that education must address to equip the students for life.

Primary Education Review and Implementation (PERI)

To equip students with the key skills and attitudes necessary to navigate the future, the Singapore Ministry of Education recognises that laying a strong foundation in the early years of formal education is very important. Hence, the Primary Education Review and Implementation (PERI) Committee was formed in October 2008 to study ways to enhance primary education. The Committee comprised representatives from the local community and public and private sectors, including educators, academics, parents and industry representatives. The Committee solicited an extensive range of views by engaging the public and key stakeholders using different channels and platforms.

A holistic education – values, skills and knowledge

Feedback from the public consultation process with stakeholders pointed to the need for a more holistic primary education. This could be achieved through a better balance between the emphasis on academic achievement and acquisition of knowledge, and the development of a broader range of skills, values and dispositions to prepare young people for a fast-changing world. Engaging in effective teaching methods, the introduction of more holistic assessment, the emphasis on non-academic areas within the curriculum, the move towards single-session primary schools and raising the capacity of the teaching service were key strategies identified by the PERI Committee to help achieve this outcome.

In accepting the recommendations of the PERI Committee, the Singapore Ministry of Education will better equip teachers to use more engaging teaching methods to make learning more effective and enjoyable. A distinctive feature of the future curriculum is the inclusion of a modular programme, PAL (Programme for Active Learning), which includes Performing and Visual Arts as well as Sports and Outdoor Education. This signals the seamless integration of traditionally non-academic areas within the curriculum and provides more time, opportunities and resources for

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Professor Ali Seif Mshimba, Vice-Chancellor

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teachers to pay greater attention to character and skills development. Exposure to a broader range of non-academic activities from a young age are intended to facilitate well-rounded development, and give those from less fortunate backgrounds more opportunities to discover and realise the potential of their talents.

There are also plans to adopt more formative school-based assessment for students in lower primary education to complement the national examination system. This is in line with enhancing teaching and assessment practices to support the balancing of content knowledge with the development of important life skills as well as learning in the physical, aesthetic, social and moral domains.

Teachers will be trained to use a variety of assessment methods and will be equipped to provide more meaningful and in-depth feedback on student development that goes beyond their grades, to help students understand their strengths and areas for improvement.

A quality teaching force – knowledge, skills and passion

A quality teaching force is the hallmark of an excellent education system. The Singapore Ministry of Education will focus its efforts to recruit graduates or those who qualify for university as new teachers by 2015. Apart from educational qualifications, it is recognised that passion for teaching and love for children remain the most important traits of good teachers. More teachers and support staff in Art, Physical Education, Music and Language will also be recruited and trained, in line with the emphasis on non-academic areas within the curriculum.

Enhanced infrastructure – creating more space and time

Singapore will also move primary schools to a single-session structure to create more space and time for holistic learning. To facilitate this, the Ministry of Education will build more schools and new facilities to support the desired enhancements in educational outcomes.

Singapore's commitment to holistic education

The Singapore Ministry of Education is committed to placing a strong focus on holistic education, starting at the primary level. This requires sizeable outlay of resources and sustained effort to develop capacity, build infrastructure and garner stakeholder support. The Ministry of Education will continue to uphold its core fundamentals of rigour, order and discipline in the system, while encouraging ground-up innovations for schools to cater for the needs and abilities of their students. It will work closely with stakeholders towards the goal of preparing students to live and work in the 21st century.

Endnote

1. *How the World's Best Performing School Systems Come Out on Top* was a study carried out in 2007 by McKinsey & Company comparing 25 school systems. The full report can be viewed on www.mckinsey.com/locations/ukireland/publications/leadership