

# EDUCATION IN SINGAPORE



Ministry of Education  
SINGAPORE



# A part of Singapore's success story

The Singapore education system aims to help our students discover their talents, realise their potential, and develop a passion for learning that lasts through life.

This brochure provides an overview of the Singapore education landscape and explains the programmes and curricula available to cater to the diverse aptitudes and interests of students.

Over  
**350**  
schools for  
primary,  
secondary  
and post-  
secondary  
education

Annual  
education  
budget of  
\$8 billion  
in 2008

**An international  
mix of world-class  
higher learning  
institutions**

**29,000**  
strong teaching  
force



# Holistic education

Among the key strengths of the Singapore education system are our bilingual policy, emphasis on broad-based and holistic learning, focus on teacher quality and integration of information and communication technologies (ICT) into the classroom. We also believe that our schools should work closely with parents and the community.

## Bilingual advantage

Bilingualism is a key feature of Singapore's education system. The bilingual language policy is intended to equip our students with the language competencies to access both eastern and western cultures, and to develop a global outlook. These strengths will give students a distinct competitive edge, helping them to relate with people from different backgrounds, and to adapt and thrive in a globalised world.

All students learn the English language and an official Mother Tongue language. English is the main medium of instruction in school.

## Broad-based and holistic learning

Our schools provide a rich diversity of experiences to help students grow holistically. Apart from the academic curriculum, our students can develop themselves in music, arts and sports through co-curricular programmes. Participation in community service is part and parcel of school life. These help nurture in students qualities such as creativity, confidence and perseverance – life skills essential in a rapidly changing world.

## Good teachers and school leaders

Teachers and school leaders form the cornerstone of Singapore's education system. We aim to nurture and motivate our teachers to achieve their best, taking into account their aspirations and interests. Our teachers receive comprehensive pre-teacher training at the National Institute of Education (NIE) and have many opportunities for continual development to build up their capabilities as teaching professionals.



## ICT-infused curriculum

We are constantly working to enrich and transform the learning environments of our students and to equip them with the critical competencies to succeed in a knowledge economy. A key thrust is the integration of ICT into lessons to enhance students' learning.

Additional funding and resources enable schools to seed innovative teaching methods. A group of 'future schools' are partnering industry players to use state-of-the-art technology to pilot new teaching and learning experiences.

## Partnership with parents

We value parents' involvement in, and support for, school programmes, and actively encourage parents and the community to work together with schools to help our children learn better.



# A system that stands out

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Singapore ranked 1st in quality in education system

– Global Competitiveness Report 2007–2008

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Singapore ranked one of the world's best-performing school systems

– McKinsey Report, published September 2007

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Singapore students ranked among the top in Mathematics and Science

– Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) 2003

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Singapore ranked 4th among 45 education systems

– Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) 2006

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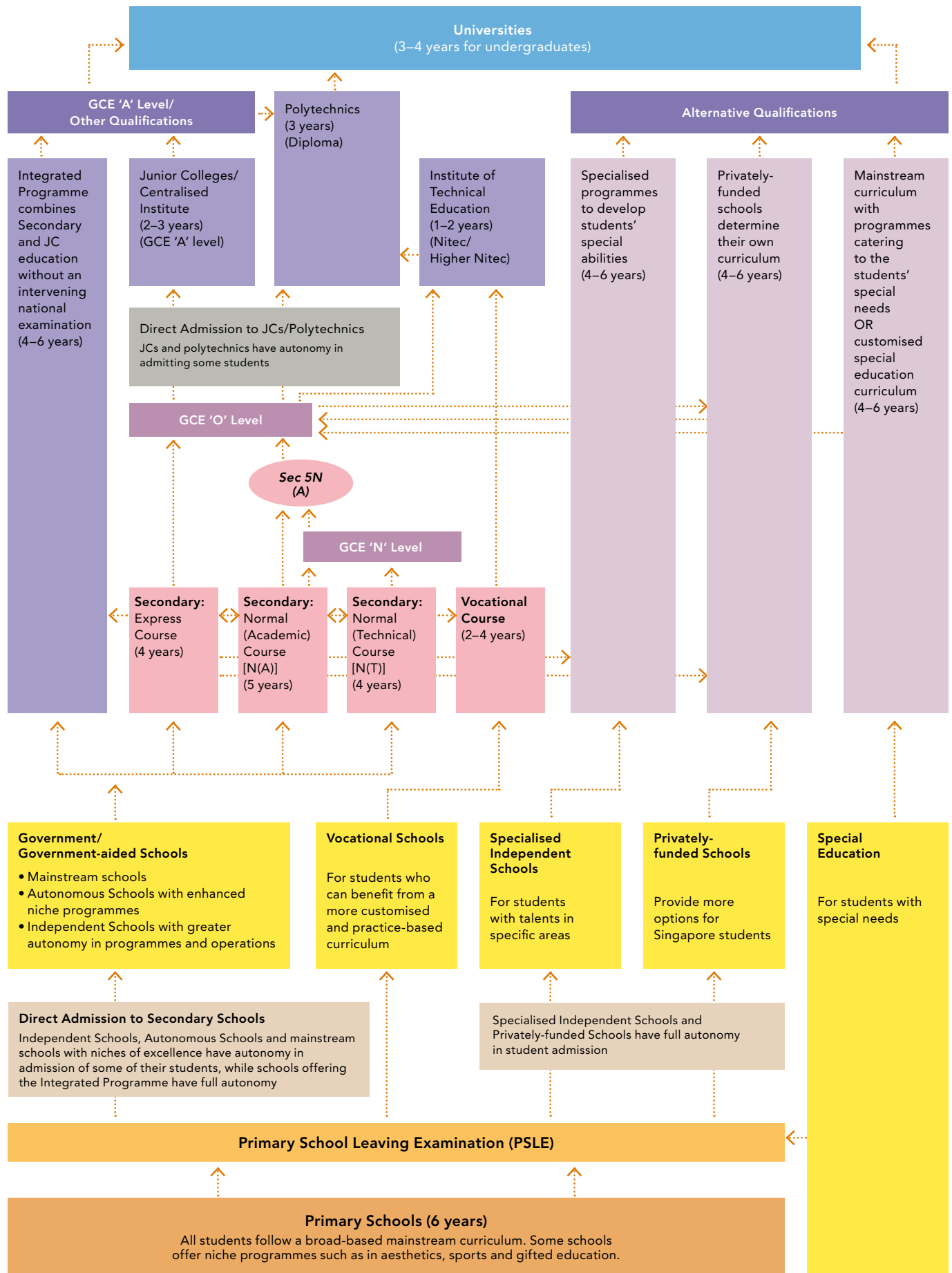
## One of the world's best-performing school systems

The McKinsey Report, which examines the characteristics of school systems that consistently produce students who perform well in international tests, placed Singapore high on its list of the world's best-performing school systems. Quality teachers and first-rate instruction are just some of the factors highlighted in the report, which enable our school system to produce bright and ambitious students. In the Global Competitiveness Report, Singapore is also ranked No. 1 in terms of the ability to meet the needs of a competitive economy.

We set ourselves apart with our consistent and outstanding accomplishments in the areas of Mathematics and Science. We have repeatedly excelled in the Trends in Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS). We have also performed well in the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS).



# The Singapore education journey



# Laying a strong foundation

## Primary School Education

Primary school students learn three core subjects: English Language, a second language (Mother Tongue) and Mathematics. These core subjects help our students to develop literacy and problem-solving skills – skills that provide a strong foundation as they progress on their educational journey.

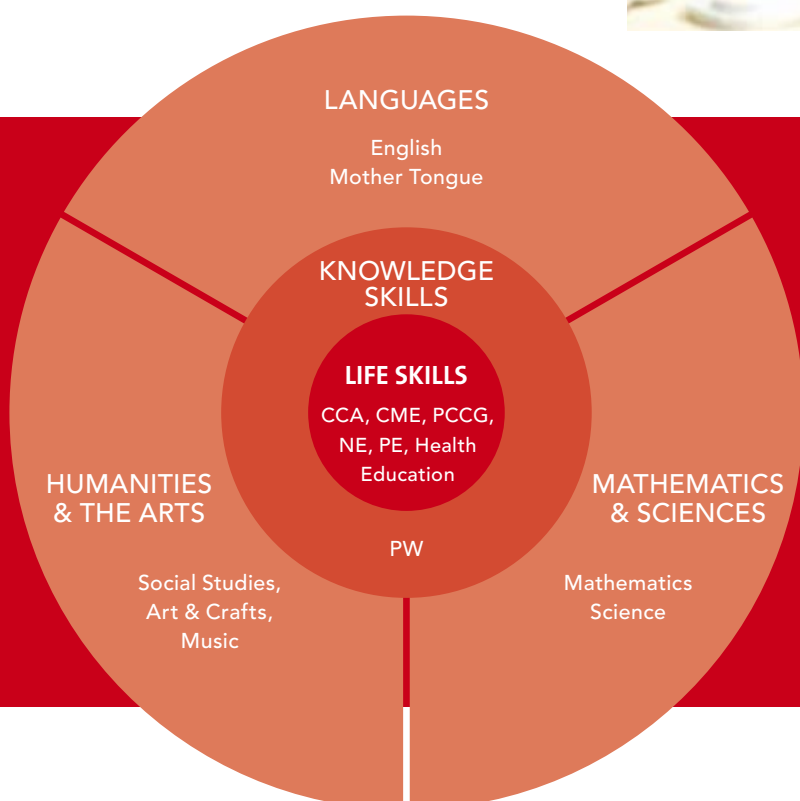
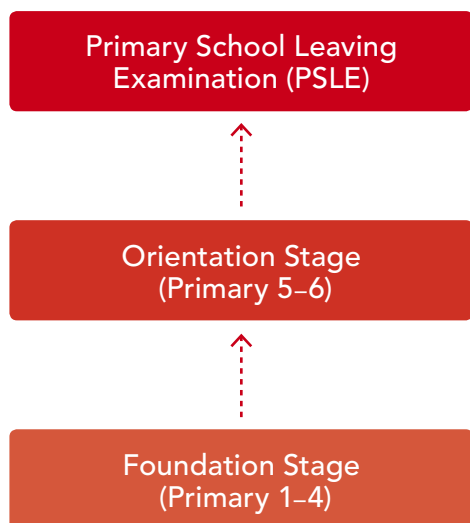
Students also take up other subjects like Arts & Crafts, Civics & Moral Education, Music, Social Studies and Physical Education. Science is introduced from Primary 3 onwards. Students also have a chance to engage in Project Work, which is offered as a non-examination subject. These subjects not only expose students to different areas of study at an early stage by equipping them with knowledge and skills, but also instil in them values and competencies for life.

After the initial foundation stage (Primary 1 to Primary 4), the three core subjects are taught according to the abilities of the students. Each core subject is offered to students at either the foundation or standard level at Primary 5 to Primary 6. This means that teachers will take into account the ability of their students in designing their lessons and assessment tasks. Students will thus learn at a pace that suits them.

At the end of Primary 6, all students sit for the Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE), which assesses their abilities for placement in a secondary school course that suits their learning pace and aptitude. Students can also seek admission to a secondary school through the Direct School Admission exercise which allows some schools to admit students based on their achievements and talents in areas such as the arts and sports.

<b>Key features:</b>
6 years of education (Primary 1 to Primary 6)
Typical age of student enrolled in Primary 1 is 7 years old
Students attend either morning or afternoon school session





#### LEGEND

CCA	Co-Curricular Activities
CME	Civics and Moral Education
PCCG	Pastoral Care & Career Guidance
NE	National Education
PE	Physical Education
PW	Project Work

#### SUBJECTS TESTED IN PSLE

##### Standard Subjects:

English, Mother Tongue,  
Mathematics, Science

##### Optional:

Higher Mother Tongue

##### Foundation Subjects:

Foundation English, Basic Mother  
Tongue, Foundation Mathematics



# Building up strengths

## Secondary School Education

At the secondary level, students are placed in the Express, Normal (Academic) or Normal (Technical) course based on their PSLE scores. The different curricular emphases are designed to match their learning abilities and interests. Students can move from one course to another based on their academic performance.

Students in the Express course offer 6 to 8 subjects at the Singapore-Cambridge General Certificate of Education (Ordinary Level) Examination. Those with exceptional academic ability may offer a ninth subject.

Students in the Normal (Academic) course will offer academically-based subjects while those in the Normal (Technical) course will follow a curriculum that is more practice-oriented and hands-on. Students in both courses have to sit for the Singapore-Cambridge General Certificate of Education (Normal Level) Examination. After the GCE 'N' level examination, students from the Normal (Academic) course who satisfy the requirements go on to a fifth year of study, where they will sit for the GCE 'O' level examination at the end of the year.

Students with a passion for the arts, music and languages can select from a range of elective programmes that focus on these specific areas of interests. They can also choose to take up advanced elective modules in applied areas such as Information Technology, Business, and Engineering offered in some schools.

Some schools also offer the Integrated Programme (IP), which provides a seamless education where secondary school students can proceed to pre-university without sitting for the GCE 'O' level examination. Schools offering IP will optimise the time freed up from preparing for the 'O' level examination to stretch the brighter students and provide greater breadth in the academic and non-academic curriculum.

### Key features:

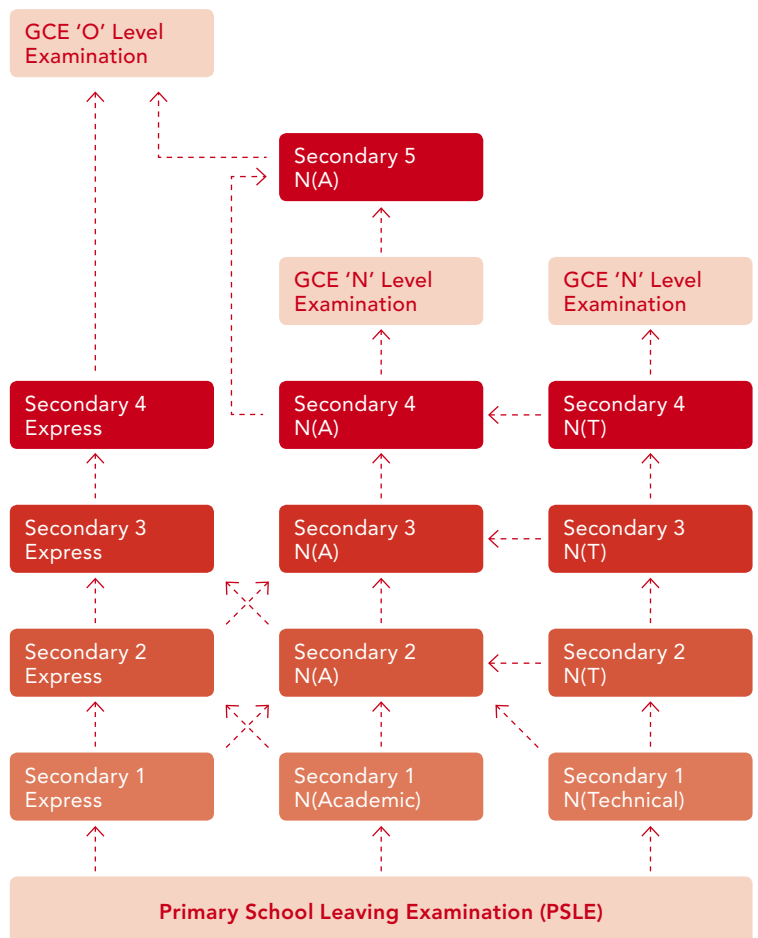
4 to 5 years of education (4 years for Express and Normal (Technical) courses, and 5 years for Normal (Academic) course)

Typical age of student enrolled in Secondary 1 is 13 years old

Students attend single-session school

Students participate in co-curricular activities, such as sports, the arts, uniformed groups, clubs and societies

### Flexibility Between Courses





## Diverse pathways

We recognise the talents of our students in both academic and non-academic areas. Specialised Independent Schools offer programmes to develop our students in areas such as the arts, sports, mathematics and science.

Through direct admission exercises, junior colleges and polytechnics have some flexibility in selecting students with a diverse range of talent, based on transparent and meritocratic criteria.

### Key features:

Specialised Independent Schools such as the NUS High School of Mathematics and Science, Singapore Sports School, School of the Arts and School of Science and Technology focus on developing students' specific talents and abilities to an even higher level than what is normally offered.

Vocational Schools such as NorthLight School and Assumption Pathway School offer programmes that are customised for students inclined towards hands-on and practical learning.



### LEGEND

CCA	Co-Curricular Activities
CIP	Community Involvement Programme
NE	National Education
PCCG	Pastoral Care & Career Guidance
PE	Physical Education
CME	Civics and Moral Education
PW	Project Work

# Gearing up for tertiary education

## Pre-University Education

A pre-university course leading to the Singapore-Cambridge General Certificate of Education (Advanced Level) Examination prepares students for further education by equipping them with essential skills and knowledge required for tertiary education.

Students may choose from a wide range of subjects from different academic areas such as Humanities and the Arts, Languages and Mathematics and Sciences. To ensure breadth of skills and knowledge, students are required to offer at least one contrasting subject – i.e. a Science student should take a subject from the Arts or Humanities, and vice versa.

Students offer subjects at three levels of study – Higher 1 (H1), Higher 2 (H2) and Higher 3 (H3). H1 subjects offer students breadth and sufficient depth for them to acquire foundational knowledge and skills in a subject area that will support their future studies at university level. H3 subjects offer students a variety of learning opportunities to study a subject area in more specialised depth.

Most students will offer a combination of three H2 subjects and a single H1 subject and compulsory subjects of Mother Tongue, General Paper and Project Work. Students with the ability and passion for a particular subject or subject areas can offer an expanded curriculum by taking an additional H1 or H2 subject to broaden their range of subjects and intellectual horizons, or by offering up to two H3 subjects for deeper specialisation.

### Key features:

2 to 3 years of education

Typical age of a pre-university student is 17 to 19 years old

#### H1

Half of H2 in breadth but similar to H2 in depth.

#### H2

Equivalent to 'A' level subjects prior to 2006.

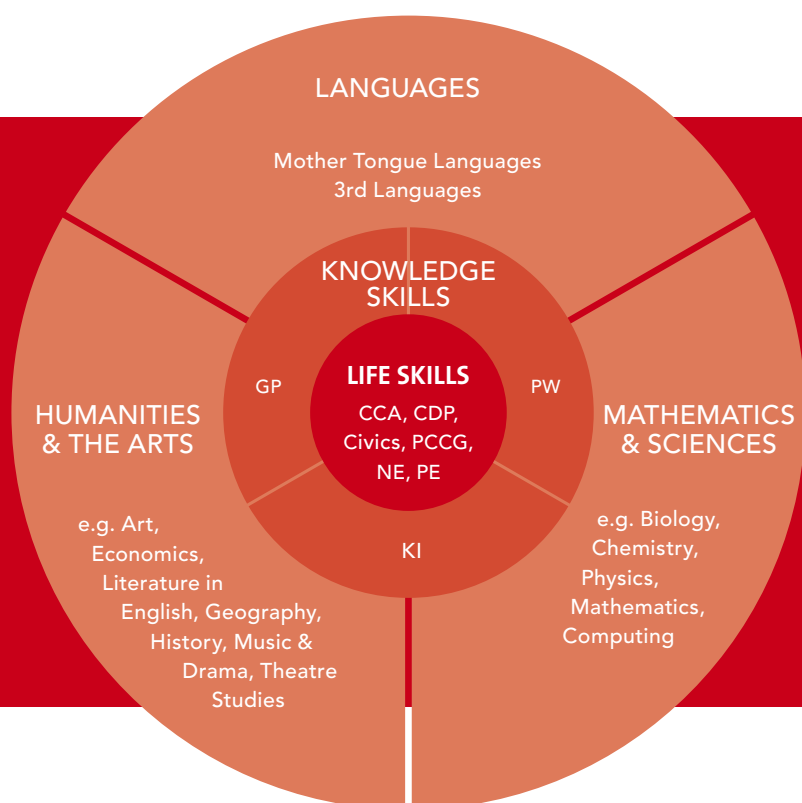
#### H3

Subjects with diverse learning opportunities for in-depth study (e.g. advanced content research project/paper, university-conducted programmes).



Special elective programmes are also available to students with talents in specific areas, such as art, music, drama, languages and the humanities. These elective programmes are offered as supplementary courses to the students' core specialisation.

Besides content knowledge, life skills are an integral part of pre-university education. Students are given ample opportunities to engage in activities that will help them cultivate important qualities such as initiative, leadership, social responsibility and strength of character.



#### LEGEND

CCA	Co-Curricular Activities
CDP	Character Development Programme
NE	National Education
PCCG	Pastoral Care & Career Guidance
PE	Physical Education
GP	General Paper
PW	Project Work
KI	Knowledge & Inquiry

# Sharpening skills and abilities

## Institute of Technical Education/Polytechnics/Universities

### Institute of Technical Education

The Institute of Technical Education (ITE) aims to equip students with technical skills and knowledge to meet the workforce needs of various industry sectors. ITE provides full-time institutional training and traineeship programmes for school leavers as well as continuing education and training programmes for working adults.

ITE offers a broad-based, multi-disciplinary curriculum that ranges from engineering to technical, business and service skills areas. Through its many collaborations with global industry partners, ITE is able to enrich students' learning experience and enhance their technical and professional knowledge.

Modern amenities and advanced facilities available on the ITE campuses allow students to be immersed in vibrant learning environments, and engage in hands-on learning.

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#### Key features:

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Full-time or part-time education with different durations of study

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Typical age of an ITE student is 17 to 20 years old

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Students can choose to take up the ITE Skills Certificate (ISC), National ITE Certificate (NITEC) or Higher NITEC in industries such as aerospace, automation, electronics, marine and fabrication, and precision engineering

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Emphasis on hands-on training

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## Polytechnics

There are currently five polytechnics in Singapore: Singapore Polytechnic, Ngee Ann Polytechnic, Temasek Polytechnic, Nanyang Polytechnic and Republic Polytechnic.

Polytechnics provide quality practice-oriented training to equip students with skills to contribute to the technological and economic development of Singapore. Our polytechnic graduates are valued as practice-oriented and knowledgeable middle-level professionals, and are much sought after by industry.

The five polytechnics offer a wide range of courses that focus on students' interests and development in various fields of study. The curricular emphases are designed in close consultation with industry to meet market demands and requirements. This ensures that students keep abreast of changing technologies and developments in their chosen industry and enter the workforce with skilled technical and professional knowledge.

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### Key features:

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Full-time or part-time education with different durations of study

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Typical age of a polytechnic student is 17 to 20 years old

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Students can choose to take up Diploma and Higher Diploma courses in disciplines such as business, chemical and bio-sciences, communication, design, digital media, engineering and manufacturing

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Global collaborations with overseas educational partners such as Wheelock College, University of Newcastle, Chapman University and University of Sterling to provide degree opportunities in niche areas

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# Universities

There are currently three publicly-funded local universities offering full-time degree programmes: the National University of Singapore (NUS), the Nanyang Technological University (NTU) and the Singapore Management University (SMU). In addition, SIM University offers publicly-subsidised part-time degree programmes to adult learners and working professionals.

The three publicly-funded autonomous universities maintain high standards of admission and performance and have developed programmes to nurture and groom top talents. Our universities have a culture of excellence and a tradition of success that help motivate and equip students to achieve their full potential.

NUS and NTU have established themselves as world-class research universities, ranked amongst the top 100 universities in the world by the Times Higher Education Supplement World University Rankings in 2007. SMU has also established a reputation for producing high-quality graduates who are confident, street-smart and articulate.

Our universities establish close partnerships and collaborations with other top universities worldwide to provide their students and faculty with expanded opportunities in learning and research, and to offer them a diversity of educational experiences and programmes.

## Key features:

Three publicly-funded autonomous universities, with a fourth university in the pipeline

Global partnerships with leading universities and educational institutions overseas such as the Eindhoven University of Technology, Georgia Institute of Technology, JFK School of Government, Cornell University, Duke University, University of Adelaide, Washington State University, Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), Stanford University and University of California, Berkeley

NUS and NTU ranked among the top 100 universities in the world

SIM University offers a university education for adult learners and working professionals

Private universities with campuses here include INSEAD, Chicago GSB, S P Jain, University of Nevada, Las Vegas Singapore, ESSEC, Digipen Institute of Technology and New York Tisch School of the Arts Asia



# Leave of Absence Scheme

## The Boarding Awards Scheme

### Returning to Singapore?

#### Back to School for Returning Singaporean Children

In recognition of the different needs of the returning Singaporeans, the Ministry of Education (MOE) has provided several options for school admission so that Returning Singaporeans can choose one or more options based on their individual needs.

For instance, returning Singaporeans who have a strong preference for a particular school may choose to approach the school directly to seek admission. They can also apply to MOE for assistance to be placed in a school. Alternatively, returning Singaporeans may apply to participate in the special school placement exercises, such as the School Placement Exercise for Returning Singaporeans or the Direct School Admission Exercise, to seek admission.

More details on the different options are summarised below:

	Apply directly to Schools / Institutions (anytime)	Apply to MOE to facilitate placement (anytime)	Primary One Registration (Jul - Aug)	Direct School Admission Exercise (May - Aug)	School Placement Exercise (SPERS) (End Jul - Oct)
<b>Primary</b>					
Primary 1	✓	✓	✓		
Primary 2 to 5	✓	✓			
<b>Secondary</b>					
Secondary 1	✓	✓		✓	✓
Secondary 2 to 3	✓	✓			✓
<b>Post-Secondary</b>					
Junior College / Millennia Institute (Pre-U 1)	✓			✓	✓
Polytechnics	✓				
Institute of Technical Education (ITE)	✓				



#### Additional Information

Useful websites and links (taken from previous brochure)

- <http://www.moe.gov.sg>  
– For more information on the Ministry of Education and the Singapore Education System
- <http://www.moe.gov.sg/espe/eduinfo/> – For information on schooling matters for Returning Singaporeans.
- <http://www.overseassingapore.sg/> – For information on Government services available to Overseas Singaporeans.



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The information contained in this  
booklet is correct as of September 2008