

## COUNTRY REPORT (SINGAPORE)

### Land & People

Singapore consists of the island of Singapore and some 50-odd islets within its territorial waters. The main island is about 41.84 km in length, 22.53 km in breadth and 571.6 sq km in area. It has a coastline of 131.5 km. Total land area including the islets is 617.9 sq km.

Singapore's immediate neighbours are Peninsular Malaysia to the north; East Malaysia to the east; and Indonesia to the south. It is linked with Peninsular Malaysia by a 1,056m causeway which carries a road, a railway and a water pipeline across the Strait of Johor.

The population of 2.5 million comprised 76.8% Chinese, 14.6% Malays, 6.4% Indians and 2.2% other ethnic groups. 51% of the population are males and 49% are females.

### Education System

Education in Singapore aims at an all-round development of the child for his own needs and the needs of the nation.

Primary Education is free and universal although it is not compulsory. Parents may choose for their children any of the four official languages - Malay, Chinese, Tamil and English as the main medium of instruction.

Pupils are required to study 2 official languages, with either English as a first or as a second language. The first 3 years of primary education will emphasize the learning of languages instead of the acquisition of factual knowledge. At the end of primary 3, pupils will be streamed according to their performance in the first 3 years into:

- (a) the normal bi-lingual course (3 years);
- (b) the extended bi-lingual course (5 years); or
- (c) the mono-lingual course (5 years)

Pupils in the normal and extended bi-lingual courses will study 2 languages in addition to the other subjects and they will complete their primary education in 6 and 8 years respectively. They will take the Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE) and then proceed to the secondary stage of their education. Pupils of the mono-lingual course will have to study for another 5 years after the streaming at the end of primary 3. At the end of the course, they will sit for an examination and be awarded a certificate. They can then join the Vocational and Industrial Training Board for vocational training.

### Secondary Education

Based on their performance in the PSLE, pupils will be streamed into:

- (a) the secondary special course;
- (b) the secondary express course; or
- (c) the secondary normal course.

Pupils in the special course will do both English and Chinese at the first language level.

Pupils in both the express and normal courses will do 2 languages at the first and second language levels, respectively. At the end of the fourth year, pupils in the special and express courses will take the General Certificate of Education 'O' Level examinations before proceeding to the pre-university courses.

Pupils in the normal course will follow a modified curriculum that will prepare them for the Certificate of Secondary Education Examination at the end of the fourth year. Those who have done well in the (GSEE) may proceed to sit for the GCE 'O' level examination after an extra year of study. The others may go for vocational training or take up employment.

#### Pre-University

At the Pre-U level, pupils are streamed into 2-year courses in junior colleges or 3-year courses in school centres. To be put on the 2-year course, students have to perform well in their GCE 'O' level examinations and be good in English as well as in the second language.

Those doing the 3-year course are weak in English and will have to spend a significant proportion of their curriculum time achieving a better grounding in the language.

#### Welfare Services and Facilities

Special education in Singapore is provided mainly by voluntary organisations with partial assistance from the Government. The Social Welfare Department provides financial assistance in the form of block grants for administrative expenses and per capita grants for the maintenance of residents in institutions run by voluntary organisations. The department maintains a central register of disabled persons. There were 5,777 mentally retarded children and adults on this register as at December 1982. Vocational guidance, family counselling and job placement services are also provided for these retardates.

#### The Singapore Association for Retarded Children

The SARC has been providing training for retarded children since its inception in 1962. The aims and objectives of the Association are:-

- (a) to secure improvement in the general welfare of mentally retarded children, regardless of the degree of handicap, cause or classification and whether or not the children live at home or in institutions;
- (b) to secure for all mentally retarded children the benefits of care, treatment and training appropriate to their disability and to encourage the development of statutory and voluntary effort on their behalf;
- (c) to promote and stimulate research into the causes, cure and prevention of mental retardation for developing locally appropriate methods of treatment and training for retarded children;

- (d) to develop a better public understanding of the needs of retarded children;
- (e) to encourage the formation of Parents' Groups and provide support and assistance through mutual co-operation with such group; and
- (f) to solicit funds for the accomplishments of these objects.

To date, the Association maintains 4 training centres, 2 sheltered workshops and a residential Home.

#### Objectives of Training Centres:

- (1) Help pupils to be independent - able to dress, feed and look after themselves.
- (2) Train pupils to be acceptable by society - character building.
- (3) Equip pupils with hand skills - to earn a living, to fend for themselves, be useful to society.

The Training Centres operate as day-care centres. The children whose ages range from 4 to 18 years attend the morning or afternoon sessions. The areas of training include social skills, language skills, arithmetic skills, housecraft, physical education, music and movement, swimming, art and crafts. There are 720 children receiving training and 360 children on the waiting list.

#### Sheltered Workshops

The 2 sheltered workshops have as their objective, the extension of training for the mentally handicapped over 18 years old. The programme of the workshops is geared towards preparing the young trainees for open employment. The jobs at the workshops for the less capable vary from packing of drinking straws into plastic bags, folding and pasting of paper-bags, stacking of tea-leaves wrappers to making of cookies and wafers. Those more capable are placed in open employment at the factories and offices whenever possible.

#### Residential Home (Tampines Home)

Tampines Home provides residential care for the severely retarded. Admission is limited to retardates from families with problems of a short term or long term nature. Length of stay for short term cases is up to a maximum of 6 months. Long term stay residents usually have no families or come from very deprived family background. A doctor from the Woodbridge Hospital makes weekly visits to the Home to see to the general health of the residents.

### New Programmes

The Home-Based training programme aims primarily at training parents to teach self-help skills (eg feeding, dressing and toileting) to their young retarded children at home. The programme caters for pre-schoolers aged 6 years and below who are awaiting admission to the training centres. The criteria for selection are based on parents' motivation and needs of the child.

We have also introduced a physiotherapy programme for the severely retarded residents of Tampines Home to help them develop their physical potentials.

### Social Work Service

Professionally trained Social Workers handle all referrals to the Association from hospitals, schools, health services and clinic. In their first contact with the parents, the Social Workers not only introduce the Association and its facilities but also clarify the concept of mental retardation and their causes to allay unnecessary fears and anxieties. Case-work methods are used to help the parents and families understand their problems and difficulties facing them and make the necessary social and emotional adjustments. Home visits and liaison with other agencies are made to enhance the functioning of the retarded child at home or in the Centre, his family and society.

### Parents' Group

At the moment, we have 2 Parents' Groups namely the HOPE (Helping Our Parents Emerge) group and the Ang Mo Kio Parents' Group.

HOPE comprises parents of mostly pre-school age children. They run a weekly play-group on Saturday afternoons with the help of student volunteers.

The Ang Mo Kio Parents' Group intends to set up a vocational training and activity centre for adolescent retardates. The aim is to train these young adults for open employment as well as hold other occupational activities for those not suitable for open employment.

### The Association for Educationally Subnormal Children

The Association, a welfare organisation was formed in 1976. The Association runs 2 schools with a total enrolment of 261 and 30 pre-employment students. The pre-employment workshop is an extension of its schooling programme to provide a training ground for the ESN children to go into open employment. These 30 students are engaged mainly in doing contract jobs.

**Conclusion:**

It is our fervent hope that special education in Singapore would soon be the full responsibility of the Government so that the needs of the mentally handicapped of all age groups would be better catered for.

BY YIP MOH CHING  
30 August 1983

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- (1st Regional Conference 1972)
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- 4 Children's Charities - Annual Report & Accounts - 1982/83