

**PARENTS AND SCHOOLING IN SINGAPORE:
FINDINGS FROM THE 2026 SURVEY ON
SINGAPORE'S EDUCATION SYSTEM**

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**PARENTS AND SCHOOLING IN SINGAPORE:
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents findings from the Survey on Singapore's Education System, which comprised a nationally representative sample of 1,500 Singapore Citizen and Permanent Resident parents with children attending local primary schools, and compares selected findings with an earlier IPS survey conducted in 2016. It examines Singaporean parents' attitudes towards their children's education across four broad areas: (a) the education system; (b) schooling choices; (c) educational stress and tuition/enrichment; and (d) education policies.

Over the past decade, parental attitudes towards education in Singapore have shifted towards holistic development. Parents increasingly value happy learning environments, social-emotional development and allowing children to learn from failure. They are also less likely to see academic performance indicators (e.g., Primary School Leaving Examination or PSLE cut-off points) as the sole marker of success when choosing schools. This has not displaced academic aspirations. Many parents remain concerned about their children's longer-term prospects, continue to invest in tuition and enrichment, and rely on markers of academic school standing (such as school cut-off points and branding) when making schooling decisions. We observe

that some parents increasingly want both academic success and holistic development for their children. Tension arises when parents perceive that pursuing one may come at the expense of the other. This tension is reflected across the findings: concerns about school placement, future pathways, wider social comparisons, and their own desire to safeguard their children's opportunities can make it difficult for parents to act fully on their holistic preferences. The challenge is therefore to help parents weigh their competing desires, while reducing the trade-offs that parents feel they must make between holistic development and longer-term or academic outcomes.

The Education System

- ***Parents increasingly value holistic development, but concerns about their children's future continue to drive stress about their children's education, and pressure to perform academically.***

Attitudes towards the education system and its competitiveness have remained largely unchanged since 2016. Parents continue to rate Singapore's education system as among the best in the world (90.2 per cent agreed in 2026, similar to 90.3 per cent in 2016), and fewer parents today believe the system causes children unnecessary stress – down from 76.3 per cent in 2016 to 68.7 per cent in 2026.

Compared to 2016, more parents now agree that children should be allowed to fail and learn from their mistakes (up from 62.2 per cent in 2016 to 79 per cent in 2026), while fewer endorse disciplining children for poor examination results (down from 66.7 per cent in 2016 to 50 per cent in 2026).

Yet this increased value placed on holistic development has not translated into a reduction in parental stress: the proportion of parents who reported arguing with their spouses over their children's education – ranging from at least once in the past year or up to once a week or more - increased from 42.8 per cent in 2016 to 59.7 per cent in 2026, while those who reported feeling stressed rose from 73.1 per cent to 87.9 per cent. The nature of that stress has also shifted: worries about tests, examinations, schoolwork, and projects have become less prominent, while concerns that children are not reaching their full potential, or may fall behind in the long run, have grown.

Schooling Choices

- ***Parents are placing greater weight on holistic fit when choosing schools, but markers of academic school standing remain important.***

When asked how important various characteristics are in determining a good primary school, teachers who care for students' social-emotional development remained the highest-rated factor. In contrast, the importance placed on competitive environments and alumni networks saw the largest declines since 2016, falling by 19.9 and 14.2 percentage points respectively. Similarly, the importance placed on records of good PSLE scores and history of students enrolling into reputable secondary schools also declined by around seven to ten percentage points.

For secondary schools, parents most prioritised the holistic fit of the school for their child – with character and values (95 per cent), discipline (91 per cent), and the child's own preference (88.8 per cent) all rated highly – followed by practical considerations such as transport convenience (85 per cent) and proximity (76.6 per cent). Markers of

academic school standing remain salient. School cut-off points were still considered important by 75.8 per cent of parents, followed by 'O' or 'N'-level scores of secondary school graduates (66.5 per cent), school branding (52.5 per cent), and competitive environment (50.6 per cent).

Tuition and Enrichment

- ***Parents are critical of excessive tuition and enrichment, but continue to invest due to the risks of opting out.***

Nearly nine in 10 parents (89.8 per cent) agree that children in Singapore spend too much time on tuition and enrichment. Yet seven in 10 (70.2 per cent) said they would spend more on tuition and enrichment for their own children if they had the resources, and around half (51.9 per cent) reported feeling pressure because other parents did so.

The above sentiment is also reflected in the expenditure and time spent on tuition and enrichment, which have generally risen. Mean monthly tuition expenditure increased from \$318 in 2016 (or \$386 adjusting for inflation) to \$677 in 2026, while mean monthly enrichment expenditure increased from \$125 (or \$152 adjusting for inflation) to \$355 over the same time period. While time spent on school homework fell, time spent on tuition and enrichment rose.

Tuition is viewed primarily as a means to give their children an advantage in the PSLE (84.9 per cent) and help them reach their potential (59.5 per cent), while enrichment is more commonly associated with developing skills outside the classroom (88.9 per

cent) – though a minority (31.8 per cent) also use it to prepare for Direct School Admission (DSA).

Education Policies

- ***Parents desire lower-stakes assessments and broader recognition of strengths but remain attached to familiar markers of merit and certainty.***

Parents remain broadly supportive of the PSLE, with more than eight in 10 (85.9 per cent) viewing it as an important checkpoint that helps students set goals, work hard and prepare for secondary school. At the same time, nearly three in four parents (73.7 per cent) preferred some change to the current PSLE arrangement, though no single option commands majority support: reducing its high-stakes nature (45.6 per cent), postponing it to a later age (12.4 per cent), removing it altogether (10.3 per cent), and making it optional (5.4 per cent). Around one in five (19.4 per cent) preferred retaining the PSLE in its current form, while 6.9 per cent did not have a view or preference vis-à-vis the PSLE.

Yet this preference for reduced stakes coexists with concerns about reduced differentiation under the current PSLE Achievement Level (AL) scoring system compared to the previous PSLE T-score system. Around two-thirds of parents (66.3 per cent) said the PSLE AL scoring system makes it harder for their children to get into their school of choice, and 85.6 per cent were of the view that it still causes significant stress.

The DSA scheme is viewed positively by over four in 10 parents (43.2 per cent). Nearly six in 10 parents (57.5 per cent) were considering DSA as a possible option for their child, while the same proportion agreed that their child's strengths were better recognised through DSA than through PSLE. A similar proportion (58.5 per cent) expressed concerns that DSA preparation might distract their children from the PSLE, though this did not dampen broader enthusiasm for the scheme: 78.2 per cent saw it as a useful hedge against underperforming in the PSLE, and 70.4 per cent felt it offered their children a better chance of getting into top schools. That said, a smaller proportion of parents were familiar with the specific schools and programmes offered through DSA (62.9 per cent), compared to the majority who understood how the scheme works (74.6 per cent). Overall, parents still preferred PSLE-based posting, with 75.8 per cent indicating they would prefer their child to enter secondary school based on PSLE results rather than through DSA.

Parental Archetypes

- ***Achievement orientation and holistic orientation are not opposites: the two increasingly coexist, sometimes uneasily, within the same parent.***

Cluster analysis identified three parental archetypes broadly similar to those found in 2016: Loving Lions, New-School Parents, and Detached Realists (evolved from Old-School Parents in 2016).

Loving Lions, who make up 40.8 per cent of the sample (a slight increase from 37.5 per cent in 2016), prioritise both holistic and academic outcomes, are the most intensely involved, and report the highest levels of stress among the three archetypes.

They were the most likely to believe that parents need to invest heavily in quality tuition (85.5 per cent agreed) and that the system causes unnecessary stress (74.8 per cent), and spent the most on tuition on average (\$743).

New-School Parents comprised 34.3 per cent of the sample (similar to 33.9 per cent in 2016), are more holistically oriented, report lower stress, and tend to be more socio-economically advantaged. Despite being least likely to say they would spend more on supplementary education even if they had the resources, they already spent the most on enrichment on average (\$433 per month). This suggests that they are selective about external investment but do not reject tuition and enrichment altogether.

The remaining 24.9 per cent of the sample were Detached Realists (a slight decrease from 28.6 per cent in 2016), evolved from "Old-School Parents" in 2016. Old-School Parents placed greater emphasis on achievement and held stronger views about what parents ought to do to support their children, though they were less stressed and less intensely achievement-oriented than Loving Lions. By 2026, this group has evolved into Detached Realists, who are less likely to organise their parenting around a strong academic or holistic ideal. Instead, they tend to approach education more pragmatically, seeing it as a practical necessity, and are less likely to closely direct or manage their children's educational development.

Overall Implications

Taken together, the findings paint a picture of parents caught between a shift towards holistic outcomes and the pressures of a competitive society.

Mindset shifts take time, and the findings suggest that both parents and the education system are still adapting to what a broader conception of success means in practice. Reforms that reduce the stakes of any single examination may ease some immediate academic pressures, but persistent anxieties about children's longer-term prospects and eventual success in life amidst a competitive employment market suggest that broader socio-economic forces and mindsets are also at play, beyond the education system. These pressures can also be reinforced by parents' choices and expectations, as families respond to what they perceive as necessary for their children to succeed. Policy changes will also affect families differently depending on their circumstances.

Reducing pressure will therefore require solutions that go beyond adjustments to PSLE or DSA or the education system. The work ahead lies in ensuring that all students have meaningful opportunities to develop both academically and beyond the classroom, regardless of background, while continuing to shift mindsets so that parents feel less compelled to chase after academic achievement at the expense of holistic development.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and literature review

In 2016, the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) conducted a survey on Perceptions of Singapore's Primary School System. The findings showed that a majority of parents indicated satisfaction with the education system's structure, processes and outcomes, as well as facilities and support networks in their child's primary school. But even as most parents supported measures that emphasise character building and reducing homework load and also expressed a desire for more holistic, less academically intensive education, helping children with tests and examinations emerged as the top stressor for parents. Less than half (42.5 per cent) indicated a preference for the Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE) to be postponed to a later age, suggesting that a slight majority still viewed it as an important educational checkpoint for their children (Mathew et al., 2017). In 2026, IPS conducted this study again, updating some questions and sections based on the policy changes that have occurred since 2016. We present the results here to examine how parents' sentiments have changed or remain the same over the course of 10 years.

1.1.1 *Analytical framework*

The reforms examined here form part of a longer movement towards student-centred, values-driven and lifelong learning. Yet reviews of Singapore's assessment policies argue that holistic aims have accumulated alongside, rather than fully displaced, consequential examinations and selective pathways (Wong et al., 2020; Ng, 2020).

Parents therefore respond both to official messages about broader definitions of success and to the consequences they continue to perceive at examination and school-entry points.

Singapore's education is globally admired for its results, but it is also widely characterised as a system of "keen competitiveness and high pressure" (Ng, 2020, p. 437). Recent findings from the 2025 IPS-CNA Study on National Identity suggest that educational competitiveness may also be embedded in Singaporeans' sense of national identity (Mathew et al., 2025). In addition, when 2,000 residents were asked what traits define a Singaporean, "valuing education" and "being kiasu" emerged as the two most common responses, indicating that the education "arms race" may be sustained not only by policy incentives, but also by everyday social expectations about what it means to be Singaporean (Mathew & Tay, 2026).

Ethnographic accounts have suggested that parental anxiety remains despite the increasing promotion of holistic development by the Ministry of Education (MOE). Göransson (2023) suggests that Singaporean middle-class parents are caught between two competing desires: wanting their children to have a happy childhood and fearing the consequences of falling behind academically. This tension results in more intensive parenting as parents try to manage both goals at once.

The pattern is usefully situated within the wider literature on intensive parenting. This literature treats intensive parenting not simply as high involvement, but as a child-centred ideal requiring sustained time, money and expert-informed management, with parents held morally responsible for anticipating and minimising future risks. Shirani

et al. (2012) show how uncertainty can intensify such risk-management work. In a high-stakes education setting, reducing the salience of any one examination may therefore not remove anxiety; parental labour may instead migrate into continuous monitoring, coaching and the cultivation of a wider portfolio of skills and credentials.

Since the PSLE is seen to be highly consequential for a child's life trajectory, passive acceptance of the sorting process is rejected as an impossibly risky choice. Instead, parents try to "game" the systematic sorting process through intensive parental labour (Göransson, 2025). These patterns of behaviour support Doepke and Zilibotti's (2019) broader argument that intensive, achievement-oriented parenting is a rational response to economic inequality and high returns on educational investment, which adds nuance to the popular "kiasu parent" narrative that simply attributes these behaviours to individual parents' psychological dispositions.

Two related concepts clarify how this labour becomes socially stratified. Brown (1990) coined *parentocracy* to describe a shift towards educational outcomes increasingly shaped by parents' wealth and wishes rather than pupils' ability and effort; Barrett DeWiele and Edgerton (2016) extend the concept to both consumer choice and proactive management of structured, skill-enhancing experiences. Lareau (2011) calls the corresponding middle-class child-rearing logic *concerted cultivation*, involving organised activities, reasoned interaction and intervention in institutions. Vincent and Ball (2007) similarly show how enrichment activities can be used to "make up" the middle-class child. Holistic development and competition are therefore not necessarily opposites: creativity, socio-emotional growth, sport and other activities may become additional domains in which families cultivate advantage.

Parental anxiety over their children's education is also channelled into market behaviour, namely private tuition. Tan (2022), studying parents' tuition decisions in Singapore and South Korea, suggests a "subjective rationalities" framework, where these decisions are not impulsive but reflect coherent cost-benefit reasoning given the incentives they face. These choices are also deeply linked to the availability of resources, where a child's outcomes depend increasingly on parental wealth and choices rather than on the child's own ability or effort (Tan, 2017).

Tuition and enrichment should also be placed in the international literature on *shadow education*—private learning outside regular school hours that supplements or extends formal schooling. Comparative reviews document its worldwide expansion and show that it can serve remediation, insurance against falling behind and competition for relative advantage, with participation shaped by family resources (Park et al., 2016; Zhang & Bray, 2020). The present pattern could therefore reflect a collective-action dilemma where parents may judge that children spend too much time in supplementary classes and still purchase them because opting out appears risky. In Singapore, the extension of private provision from curriculum tutoring into DSA preparation and non-academic enrichment may thus represent a diversification, rather than the disappearance, of the educational arms race.

Since 2016, the Singapore Government has implemented several assessment reforms. The PSLE Achievement Level (AL) system, introduced in 2021, replaced the fine-grained T-score with eight broader bands intended to reduce excessive differentiation, although secondary-school posting continues to use the overall PSLE

score, school choices and tie-breakers (MOE, 2020). All weighted assessments and examinations for Primary 1 and 2 students were removed from 2019, while mid-year examinations at the remaining primary and secondary levels were progressively removed by 2023. MOE framed these changes as reducing an excessive focus on testing and freeing curriculum time for engaged learning and holistic development, rather than eliminating assessment or stress per se (MOE, 2022a; 2023).

Recent reforms have sought to broaden pathways and reduce the rigidity of earlier forms of academic sorting. Full Subject-Based Banding was piloted from 2020 and fully implemented from the 2024 Secondary 1 cohort, replacing the Express, Normal (Academic) and Normal (Technical) course streams while retaining differentiated subject levels (MOE, 2019). At the same time, secondary-school access continues to be shaped by alternative and priority-based admission routes. Under Direct School Admission (DSA), schools may admit students based on talents and achievements beyond the PSLE, with places capped at up to 20 per cent of the non-Integrated Programme Secondary 1 intake; caps for Integrated Programme schools differ (MOE, 2022b). Affiliation rules are separate from DSA and should not be conflated: affiliated secondary schools must reserve at least 20 per cent of Secondary 1 places in each posting group for non-affiliated students (MOE, 2025). The transition from the current Gifted Education Programme, announced in 2024, similarly reflects a move towards broader school-based provision, though the programme will cease admitting new Primary 4 pupils only from 2027 (MOE, 2026).

However, Christensen and Tan (2025), drawing on interviews conducted since 2013, have found that the more “progressive” reforms aimed at 21st-century skills have

extended shadow education into new domains, namely enrichment classes and DSA preparation. Analysing the shift from streaming to Full Subject-Based Banding (Full SBB), Tan (2025, pp. 394, 396) presents a cautious verdict, observing that it “eliminates the rigidity engendered by streaming while retaining and fine-tuning the principle of curriculum customisation”, but “may have inadvertently maintained between-school segregation for elite and non-elite schools by supporting the existing policy of school posting based on students’ exam scores”.

Research on school choice in other country contexts likewise cautions against treating stated preferences as if every family faced the same set of feasible options. Burgess et al. (2015) find that families in England generally value academic performance, school social composition and distance, but that advantaged parents tend to place greater weight on performance and have access to a more favourable choice set. Back home, Debs and Cheung (2021) describe “structure-reinforced privilege” in Singapore as complex registration arrangements and multiple priority channels that convert pre-existing economic, cultural and social resources into admissions advantage. Differences in the importance attached to fit, practicality, opportunity, standing and belonging should therefore be interpreted relationally. They may reflect unequal information, transport, networks and confidence, as well as differences in which schools and pathways families regard as realistically attainable.

These findings echo Lim’s (2013, p. 2) observation that meritocracy can “in fact give the veneer of equality while simultaneously masking the real advantages and disadvantages that have been differentially distributed across a society”. Teo (2026) similarly observes that parents with different levels of economic resources respond to

educational stress through different strategies. Her interviews suggest that working-class parents make do with what they can provide in the hope that “their children can survive in a Singapore where costs are high and rising” (p. 182); middle-class parents stretch their resources (p. 191); and upper-middle-class parents “intervene in ways that prevent their children from falling, spending large amounts of effort and money to keep them on track and in the ‘mainstream’” (p. 192).

Singaporean research also complicates a simple contrast between intensely involved affluent parents and disengaged lower-income parents. In qualitative work with low-income Malay parents, Chiong and Dimmock (2020) found that families internalised responsibility for educational success while maintaining deep trust in schools and the state. Chiong and Lim’s (2022) study of low-income families similarly shows that families actively interpret and respond to policy shifts promoting higher-order thinking, but do so within uneven resource constraints. As a result, policy ideals may be experienced differently by families at the socio-economic margins. This distinction between aspiration and capacity is important to acknowledge. Lower spending or less visible forms of parental intervention should not be read as weaker commitment. Instead, support for standardised examinations or alternative admissions routes may reflect parents’ desire for clear, publicly recognised pathways to educational mobility. Finally, the literature distinguishes the amount of parental involvement from its form and emotional quality. Pomerantz et al. (2007) argue that greater parental involvement does not always lead to better outcomes. What matters is the type and tone of involvement. Support that encourages autonomy, focuses on effort and learning, and maintains a positive emotional climate differs from involvement that is controlling, narrowly focused on results, or critical of the child’s performance. This distinction offers

a way to understand how greater support for allowing children to learn from failure can coexist with more frequent arguing and expressions of stress. A shift away from punitive or narrowly grade-oriented ideals may mark a reconfiguration of intensive involvement rather than its decline.

More recently, the current (at the time of writing) Minister for Education Desmond Lee described the existing system as an educational “arms race” and acknowledged that parents treat the PSLE and DSA as “measures of success”, driven by the belief that entry into popular schools is a pathway to future success (2026). He has emphasised a shift towards holistic education, citing the new AL system, reduction in subjects required for Junior College (JC) admission, and adjustments to polytechnic admissions as measures aimed at reducing the overemphasis on academic grades. However, these emphases currently still “coexist in tension” alongside the “dominant examination-oriented culture” (Ng, 2020, p. 439). In fact, our findings show that there is still a strong preference for the PSLE to remain in some form. Regardless, the shift towards reconsidering different milestones of a Singaporean student’s education journey is a continued conversation, and our paper hopes to present an overview of contemporary parents’ self-reported attitudes and experiences.

1.1.2 Research gap and questions

Taken together, this literature suggests that education reforms in Singapore operate within a context of persistent positional competition and uncertainty. These conditions can sustain intensive parenting and shadow education, even when reforms seek to broaden definitions of success or reduce academic pressure. Families also respond unevenly, as their strategies are shaped by differences in economic, cultural, social

and time resources. While existing Singapore research has offered important qualitative, policy-analytic and topic-specific insights, there is less repeated population-survey evidence tracking how parents' ideals, practices, school choices, stress and private spending have changed across a decade of reforms. The present study addresses this gap descriptively, although it is unable to identify the causal effects of individual reforms.

Against this backdrop, the paper distils findings from selected questions of the 2026 study to primarily make comparisons with those from 2016. It addresses four questions: (1) how parents' attitudes, self-reported experiences and education-related practices differed between 2016 and 2026; (2) how aspirations for holistic development coexist with continuing academic competition; (3) how schooling choices, stress, tuition and enrichment may differ by socio-economic resources; and (4) what parental archetypes emerge across the two survey waves.

1.2 Methodology

1.2.1 Study design and target population

The findings presented in this paper are primarily derived from the 2026 Survey on Singapore's Education System. The survey forms the latest phase of a broader programme of research examining parents' attitudes, beliefs, concerns and behaviours in relation to their children's education. It builds on earlier IPS research, most notably the 2016 Survey on Parental Perceptions of Education, while updating

the scope of inquiry to reflect changes in Singapore's education system and parents' contemporary decision-making environment.

The 2026 survey was designed as a cross-sectional survey of parents of primary school children. The eligibility criteria for respondents were limited to Singapore Citizens or Permanent Residents aged 21 to 65 years, who had at least one child currently studying in a local MOE primary school in Singapore at the point of participation, and who were literate in English. The study sought, where applicable, the parent who was principally involved in decisions relating to the child's primary-school education, such as school choice, academic matters, co-curricular activities and tuition. Eligibility and relevant characteristics of the parent and child were verified through screening questions at the beginning of the questionnaire.

The screening process also collected information on respondents' age, citizenship, race, gender and housing type, amongst other demographic data. Respondents confirmed the number of children they had and the number of children they had currently attending local primary schools. They were subsequently asked about the age, school level, gender and school of the child referred to in the invitation letter. The programmed questionnaire included consistency and range checks; for example, respondents indicating that they had no child currently in a local primary school were screened out, while implausible reported ages for the primary-school child prompted respondents to confirm or correct their response. A final analytical sample of 1,500 completed and quality-validated respondents was retained.

1.2.2 Questionnaire design

The 2026 survey instrument was designed to fulfil two related objectives. The first was to provide a contemporary assessment of parents' perceptions and behaviours in relation to Singapore's education system. The second was to retain a sufficiently large set of comparable constructs and question items from earlier IPS research to allow examination of continuity and change over time.

Accordingly, the questionnaire contained both a historical-comparison core and a current-issues component. Items retained or adapted from the 2016 survey covered areas including perceptions of the education system, conceptions of what constitutes a good primary-school education, parental responsibilities, characteristics of a good school, education-related stress, and the amount of time and resources devoted to children's education. Newer items addressed issues that had become more salient following changes to the education landscape, including the current PSLE AL scoring system, secondary-school posting, DSA, contemporary secondary-school choice considerations, and changing patterns of tuition and enrichment.

The questionnaire comprised six main sections covering: general views on education in Singapore; parents' recent schooling experiences and related stress and time use; factors influencing secondary school choice; opinions on key education policies such as PSLE, AL scoring and DSA; attitudes towards tuition and enrichment; and respondents' demographic and socio-economic backgrounds. The programmed instrument comprised over 170 close-ended question items, six open-ended items and two embedded attention-check items.

1.2.3 Sampling, recruitment, and administration

The sampling frame comprised households associated with children enrolled in MOE primary schools. The sampling and recruitment approach was intended to produce a broad and highly representative cross-section of parents within the study's target population, rather than a convenience sample of parents who independently volunteered for an education survey.

Selected households were first contacted through a personalised invitation letter mailed to the residential address associated with the sampled child. The letter was addressed to a parent of the named child and explained the purpose of the study, the eligibility criteria, confidentiality arrangements, expected survey duration and available modes of participation. Each invited household was provided with unique credentials and a QR code through which an eligible parent could access the questionnaire online. After an initial period of approximately two weeks following the mailing of invitation letters, IPS Social Lab surveyors also began visiting sampled residential addresses from which a completed response had not been received. This sequential mixed-mode recruitment strategy allowed respondents who preferred to participate independently to do so online, while retaining a door-to-door fieldwork component to reach sampled parents who might otherwise not respond to an online invitation.

Fieldwork was administered by IPS Social Lab between May and August 2026. The survey took approximately 30 minutes to complete in a single sitting, and respondents could complete the questionnaire through one of two principal modes. First, respondents could self-complete the questionnaire online using the QR code and unique login details provided in their invitation letter. Eligibility screening and consent

acknowledgement were incorporated into the online questionnaire before respondents could proceed to the substantive questions.

Second, respondents could participate during an in-person household visit by an IPS Social Lab surveyor. Surveyors first explained the study and provided a Participant Information Sheet. Eligibility was then assessed and verbal consent obtained together with an electronic acknowledgement of consent. The respondent ordinarily self-completed the questionnaire on a tablet device, such as an iPad or Galaxy Tab. Where required, surveyors could clarify survey instructions and assist with administration; study materials also allowed questions and response options to be read aloud and responses entered on the respondent's behalf. The same programmed questionnaire was used across the electronic modes, thereby reducing differences in question wording, routing and response coding arising from mode of administration.

1.2.4 Data quality assurance

A series of quality-assurance measures was incorporated into both the questionnaire programming and subsequent data processing. First, item order was randomised within many of the longer attitudinal batteries. Responses to these batteries were also flagged for potential straightlining, where respondents repeatedly selected an identical response without apparent differentiation across items. Second, two explicit attention-check items were embedded at approximately the one-third and two-thirds points of the questionnaire. Under the programmed quality rules, respondents who failed either attention check were disqualified. In addition, automated consistency and plausibility checks were applied to selected numeric responses. These included validation of the relationship between the reported total number of children and the number attending

primary school; checks on the age of the referenced primary-school child; maximum-value checks on reported weekly hours spent on education-related activities; and expenditure-range checks for tuition and enrichment. Lastly, incomplete survey submissions were not included in the analytical dataset; only completed submissions that passed the study's quality-validation procedures were retained.

Following these checks, the final dataset comprised 1,500 unique respondents. These measures were particularly important given the mixed-mode fieldwork design, as they provided common quality-control standards for both independently completed online questionnaires and tablet-based household completions.

1.2.5 Ethics, confidentiality and respondent reimbursement

The study received ethics approval via the National University of Singapore's Institutional Review Board. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed that they could withdraw at any time prior to submitting their responses. Because completed survey responses were anonymised and could no longer be linked to personal identifiers after submission, withdrawal of an individual respondent's data was not possible after the completed questionnaire had been submitted.

Personal information required for study administration was separated from substantive questionnaire responses. In particular, information required for incentive disbursement, auditing, or optional consent to be contacted about future IPS Social Lab research was not linked to respondents' survey answers. Survey findings were analysed and reported only in aggregate.

Respondents received a token of appreciation for successful completion of the survey. The standard incentive was S\$20 via PayNow. Respondents who completed the questionnaire through the online self-completion mode during the stipulated early-completion period received an additional S\$10, for a total of S\$30.

1.2.6 Sample weighting and population inference

The survey was intended to provide estimates of the views of the eligible population of Singapore Citizen and Permanent Resident parents of children in local primary schools, rather than of Singapore's resident adult population as a whole. Hence, post-stratification weighting was applied only by housing type, to account for differences between the dwelling profile of the achieved sample and the estimated dwelling distribution of households with primary-school-aged children. Other respondent characteristics, such as age, race, gender and educational attainment, were not incorporated into the survey weights.

As there is no published population distribution corresponding exactly to households with children currently attending local primary schools, the housing benchmark was approximated using the Singapore Census of Population 2020. The closest available population group comprised resident married-couple households headed by persons aged 35 to 49 whose youngest child was below 12 years old. These Census proportions were used as the basis for the weighting targets, with a small adjustment to recognise that the survey population was not restricted to married-couple households and also included eligible parents in other household arrangements, such as single-parent families.

The housing benchmark should therefore be understood as an approximation of the dwelling profile of Singapore resident households with primary-school-going children, rather than the dwelling distribution of Singapore resident households generally. This distinction is important because the overall resident-household population includes household types, such as older-person and one-person households, that fall outside the target population of the study and are distributed differently across housing types.

Unless otherwise stated, the overall 2026 estimates reported in this paper are based on these housing-weighted data. The weighting corrects for observable differences in housing composition but does not adjust the sample for differences in other demographic or socio-economic characteristics. Section 1.3 provides an indication of the sample's demographic composition and potential sources of under- or over-representation.

As with all sample surveys, weighting cannot eliminate non-response or selection bias associated with characteristics not captured by the weighting variable. The results should consequently be interpreted as estimates of the views of the study's target population, subject to these sampling and measurement limitations.

1.2.7 Comparability of the 2016 and 2026 surveys

A principal objective of the 2026 study was to assess how selected parental attitudes and experiences had changed over approximately a decade. For this purpose, selected results were compared with *IPS' Survey on Parental Perceptions of Education*, conducted from December 2015 to March 2016, with most fieldwork taking place between January and March 2016. The 2016 study employed a different

sampling and fieldwork design from the present survey. IPS obtained a customised listing of 3,000 randomly selected households with a child aged between five and 14 years. Interviewers visited these addresses and established whether a child currently attending a local primary school was living in the household. Because the sampling frame could not precisely identify households containing a child of primary-school age, predefined household substitution procedures were permitted where the selected household did not contain an eligible child.

Eligible respondents were Singapore Citizens or Permanent Residents aged at least 21 years who had a child attending a local primary school. Where there was more than one possible parent respondent, the survey sought the parent who had the greatest involvement in the child's education. The principal method of administration was a drop-off and pick-up self-administered household questionnaire. Surveyors delivered the paper questionnaire to eligible households and subsequently returned to collect the completed form. Respondents who preferred to provide answers directly to the interviewer could also have their answers recorded by the interviewer. This design was intended to minimise interviewer influence over responses and reduce social-desirability pressures while retaining the advantages of probability-based household recruitment.

A total of 1,500 Singapore Citizen and Permanent Resident parents completed the 2016 survey. The questionnaire took approximately 30 minutes and comprised four sections: general opinions of education in Singapore; experiences in choosing a primary school; changes related to schooling and education; and respondents'

demographic profiles. Respondents received a S\$10 NTUC shopping voucher and stationery as a token of appreciation.

Against this backdrop, the 2016 and 2026 surveys should be understood as two independent cross-sectional surveys of parents, rather than as a longitudinal panel following the same individuals over time. For comparability, the 2016 survey responses have also been weighted according to similar considerations as the 2026 survey. Regardless, differences between the 2016- and 2026-point estimates should not automatically be attributed to changes in parental attitudes alone. Observed changes may also partly reflect differences in sample composition, coverage, administration mode or other contextual effects. Comparisons in this paper therefore place greatest weight on items with close measurement equivalence, the magnitude and consistency of observed differences, and whether related indicators point in the same direction.

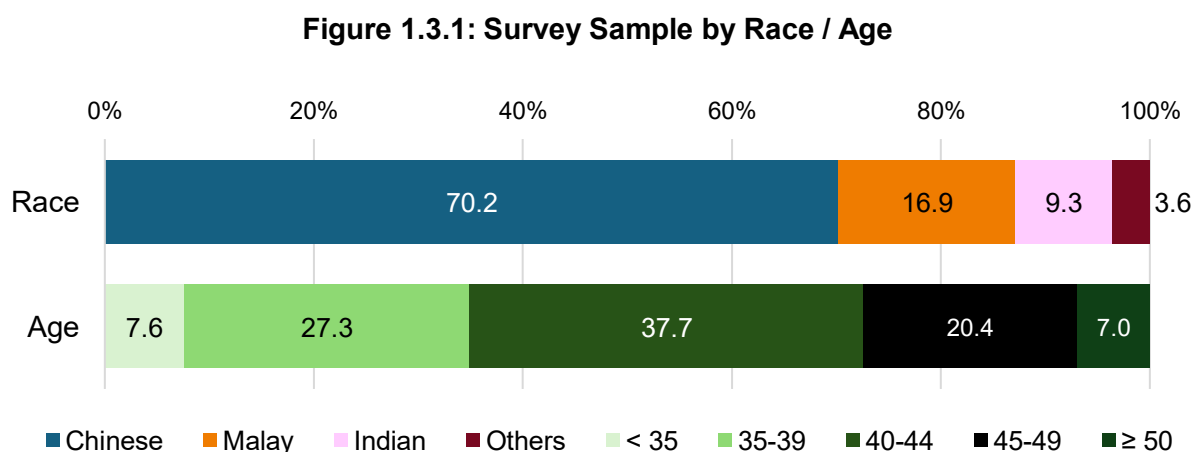
Nonetheless, considerable effort was made in the design of the 2026 questionnaire to preserve comparability on key measures. Where question wording and response categories were retained unchanged, distributions could be compared directly across the two surveys. Examples include selected measures relating to perceptions of the overall education system, educational outcomes regarded as important for children, parental roles, education-related stress and characteristics of good schools.

1.3 Sample demographics

The overall responses for survey questions reported in the ensuing chapters have been weighted. We present here some key demographic breakdowns of the sample to provide a better overview of the profile of our respondents.

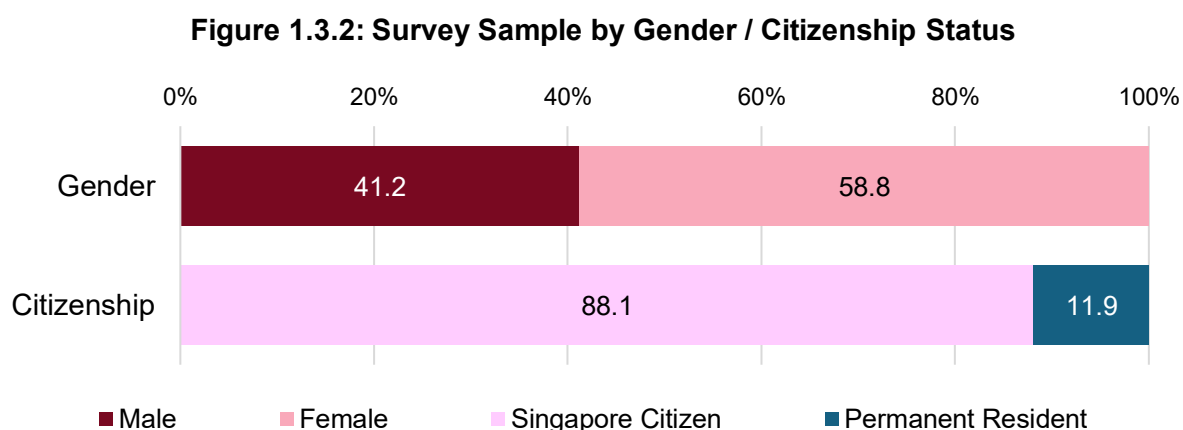
1.3.1 Race and age profiles

A majority of respondents, or 70.2 per cent, were Chinese, with the rest comprising 16.9 per cent Malays, 9.3 per cent Indians, and 3.6 per cent Others. Age distribution was more skewed towards those in their late 30s to early 40s, with 27.3 per cent of respondents aged between 35 and 39, and another 37.7 per cent aged between 40 and 44 years old.



1.3.2 Gender and citizen breakdowns

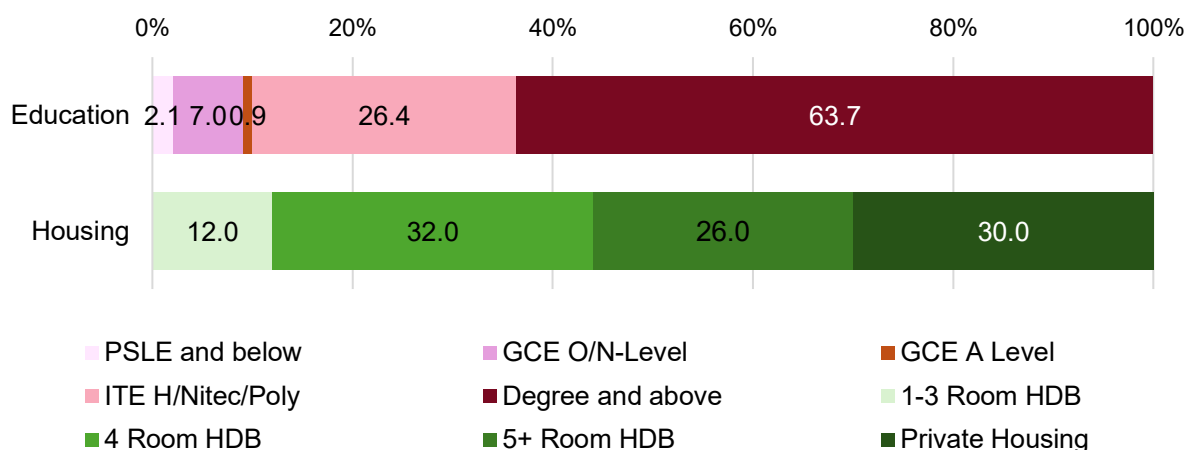
Mothers were more likely to respond to the survey, taking up 58.8 per cent of the sample compared to 41.2 per cent of fathers. Meanwhile, 88.1 per cent were Singapore Citizens, while 11.9 per cent were Permanent Residents.



1.3.3 Education and housing breakdowns

Respondents were relatively highly educated, with 63.7 per cent holding a degree and another 26.4 per cent with diploma or Nitec/Higher Nitec qualifications. In terms of housing, the spread was more even for those staying in 4-room Housing Development Board (HDB) flats, 5-room HDB flats, and private housing, while the remaining 12 per cent indicated residing in 1- to 3-room HDB flats.

Figure 1.3.3: Survey Sample by Highest Educational Qualifications Attained / Housing Type



1.4 Analysis strategy

For the survey results, we have condensed the findings using a two-step approach to augment the relative accessibility of the content and ease of understanding for a non-academic, general audience by:

- presenting single- and two-way cross-tabulations for the most salient findings, with comparisons to 2016 where available; and
- performing cluster analysis to derive parental archetypes for comparison with the 2016 sample.

2 POLICY ATTITUDES, PERCEPTIONS, AND BEHAVIOURS

Between the previous survey in 2016 and the present day, MOE has introduced numerous policy changes across the primary and secondary education system. For instance, the numerical PSLE T-score was replaced by the AL scoring system in 2021; mid-year examinations were progressively removed across all primary and secondary levels by 2023; and the Express, Normal (Academic) and Normal (Technical) course structure has been replaced by Full Subject-Based Banding (Full SBB), fully implemented from the 2024 Secondary 1 cohort. These reforms, alongside others, have been framed by politicians and policymakers in terms of reducing “stress levels of both students and parents” and making major examinations less high-stakes (Ong, 2019). But have parental attitudes changed alongside these reforms?

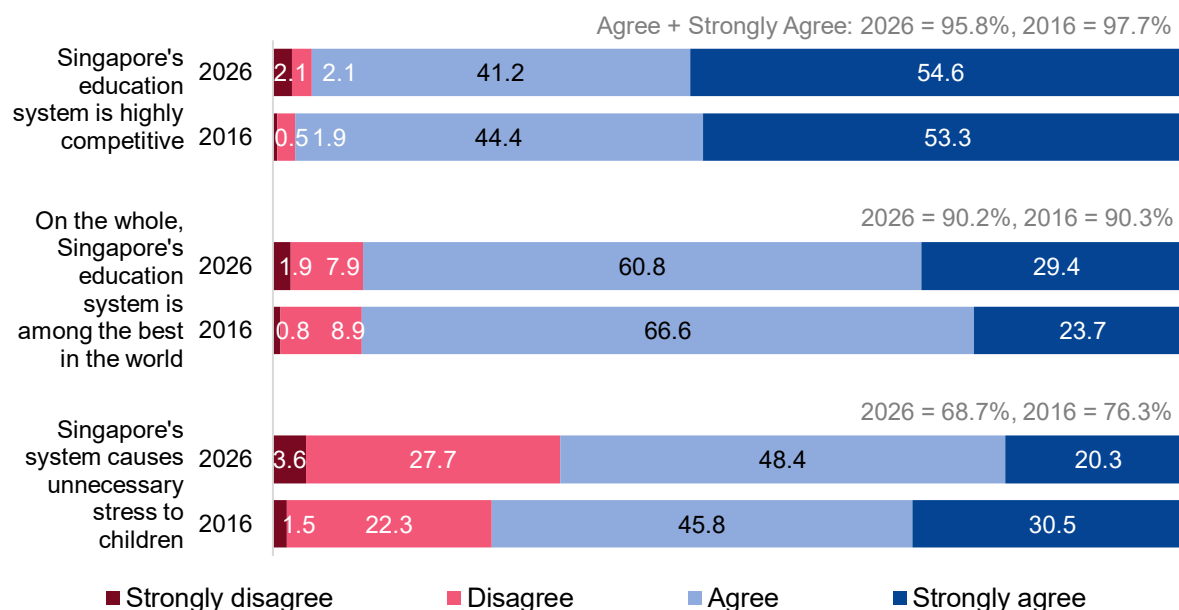
The ensuing sections illustrate that parents’ broad confidence in Singapore’s education system has remained high. Views of the system as highly competitive have also remained broadly stable, while fewer parents in 2026 agreed that the education system causes unnecessary stress to children. At the same time, nearly three-quarters continued to believe that substantial investment in quality tuition is necessary for success, despite a slight decline from 2016. Parents were also less likely than in 2016 to agree that Singapore’s education system provides equal opportunities for children from different socio-economic backgrounds. Perceptions of equal opportunity differed across housing types in 2026, pointing to variation in how different groups of parents experience or view the education system.

2.1 Overall attitudes towards education system

2.1.1 Attitudes towards the education system and competitiveness remain broadly stable, while fewer parents attribute unnecessary stress to the system

Parents continued to rate Singapore's educational system as amongst the best in the world, with a slight increase in the proportion of "strongly agree" and a corresponding drop in the proportion of "agree" responses. As for their views on the competitiveness of the system as a whole, while the overall trend remains unchanged, there is a slight decrease in the number of "agree" responses, while the proportion of "strongly agree" responses remains unchanged. Meanwhile, views on the system causing unnecessary stress to children have moderated from 76.3 per cent in 2016 agreeing with this statement to under seven in 10 in 2026; largely due to a 10.2-percentage-point decline in the number of respondents strongly agreeing with the statement.

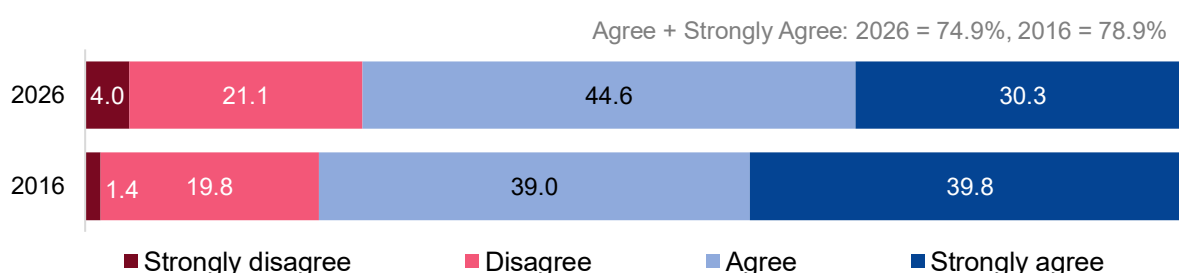
Figure 2.1.1: How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about Singapore's education system?, responses by wave



2.1.2 While proportions of those viewing tuition as crucial to academic success have decreased slightly over time, nearly three-quarters still think this way

When asked about the importance of tuition, parents in 2026 were slightly less likely to agree or strongly agree that it was necessary (74.9 per cent, vs 78.9 per cent in 2016). Nevertheless, those who thought so remained the majority.

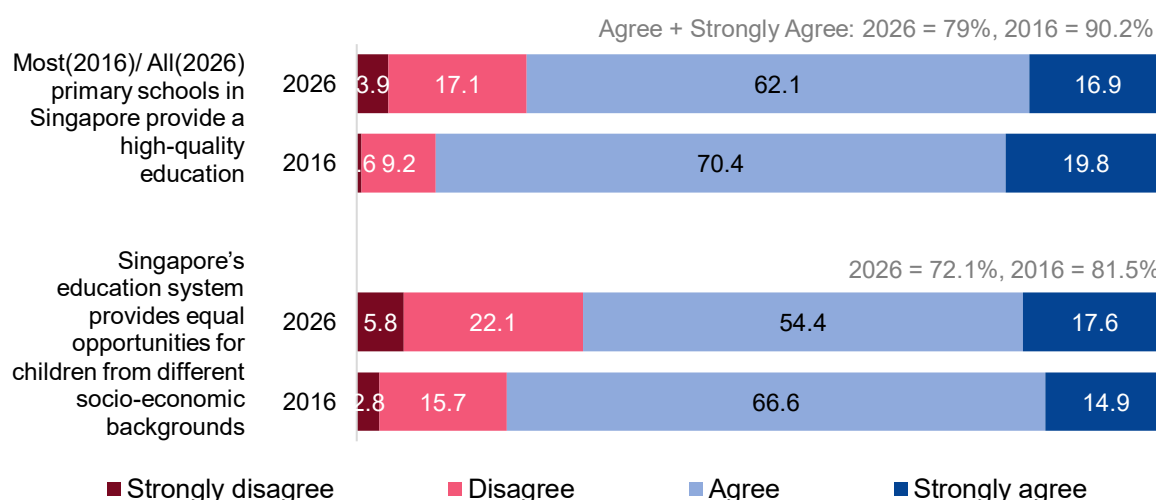
Figure 2.1.2: To succeed in Singapore's education system, parents need to heavily invest in quality tuition, responses by wave



2.1.3 Fewer parents believe the education system provides equal opportunities across socio-economic backgrounds

The proportion of parents who agreed that Singapore's education system provides equal opportunities for children from different socio-economic backgrounds fell from 81.5 per cent in 2016 to 72.1 per cent in 2026. Unlike the separate item on whether "most" or "all" primary schools provide a high-quality education (presented in the figure for reference), the wording of the item on equal opportunities was retained across both survey waves, allowing a more direct comparison.

Figure 2.1.3a: How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about Singapore's education system?, responses by wave

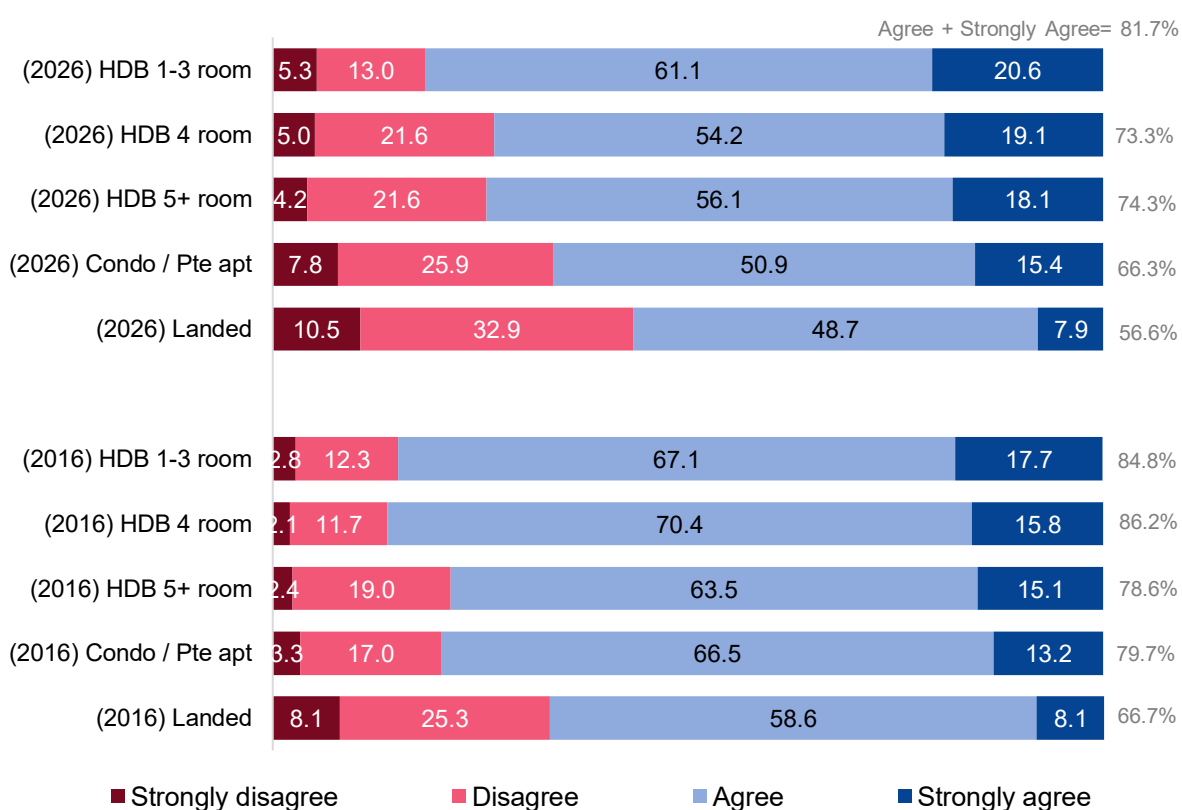


Views on equality of opportunity also differed by housing type. In 2026, agreement that Singapore's education system provides equal opportunities for children from different socio-economic backgrounds was highest among parents living in HDB 1–3-room flats (81.7 per cent). This was followed by those living in HDB 5-room or larger flats (74.3 per cent) and HDB 4-room flats (73.3 per cent). Agreement was lower

among parents living in condominiums or private apartments (66.3 per cent), and lowest among those living in landed properties (56.6 per cent).

Compared with 2016, agreement fell across all housing categories, although the size of the decline varied. The decreases were particularly pronounced among parents living in HDB 4-room flats and private housing. Taken together, the findings indicate that the decline in perceived equality of opportunity was fairly broad-based, while differences in perceptions across housing groups were also more apparent in 2026.

Figure 2.1.3b: Singapore's education system provides equal opportunities for children from different socio-economic backgrounds, responses by wave and housing type



3 SCHOOLING CHOICES

With the overall attitudes they hold towards education and Singapore's education system, what, then, do parents prioritise when it comes to choosing a school for their children? In this chapter, we deep-dive into the characteristics that parents focus on when thinking about primary and secondary schools for their children. Where comparisons with 2016 are available, we note that holistic features of a good primary school remain highly valued, while the importance of several traditional achievement-oriented markers has declined. Parents also continue to emphasise character, self-discipline and other developmental outcomes as important goals of primary education.

For secondary-school choice, however, the picture is not simply a shift away from academics. Parents placed the greatest overall weight on child-school fit, followed by practical considerations, but markers of academic standing (particularly school cut-off points) remained important. These priorities also varied somewhat across housing types. Taken together, the findings suggest that holistic fit and academic opportunity continue to coexist in parents' schooling decisions.

3.1 What makes a “good school”?

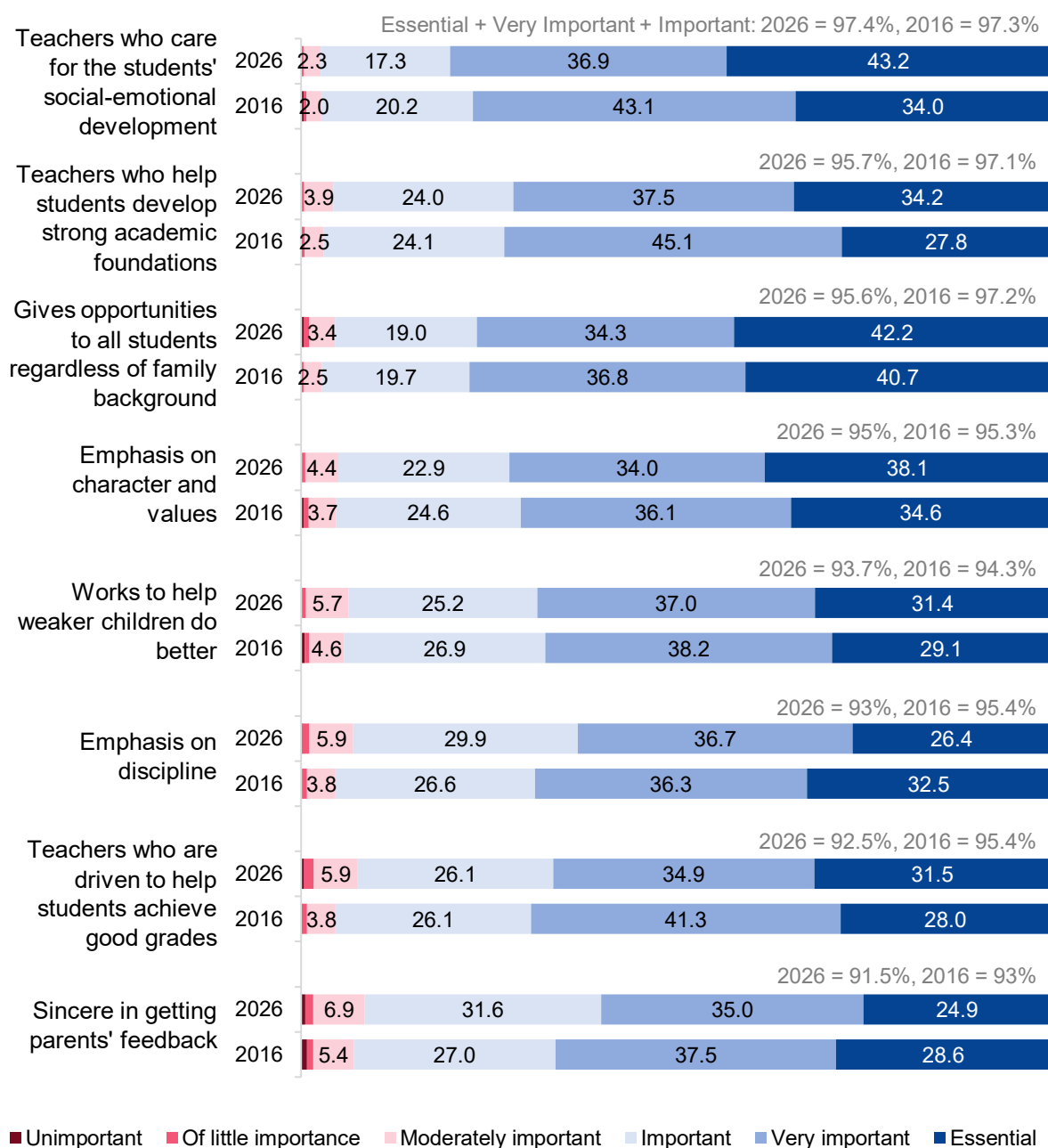
Respondents were asked about the characteristics in determining a “good primary school”. Similar to the 2016 survey, these can be divided into Process-Development-Environment (PDE) and Results-Achievement (RA) factors.

PDE items pertain to the school environment and culture, and include teachers who care about their students' social-emotional development, emphasising discipline and character, and sincerity in obtaining parental feedback. Meanwhile, RA factors point to items that look mostly at how well the school does in preparing students for academic achievements (Mathews et al., 2017).

3.1.1 Perceptions about PDE features of “good schools” have remained fairly similar over time

Parental opinions towards PDE factors remained largely unchanged between 2016 and 2026. Teachers who cared about their students' socio-emotional development continued to be the highest-rated PDE factor, with a 3-percentage-point increase in the proportion of parents who rated this factor as essential or very important. Emphasis on discipline and teachers being driven to get good grades also remained broadly stable. Notably, being sincere in getting parents' feedback saw a 6.1-percentage-point drop in parents who rated the factor as “essential” or “very important”. This drop may be due to the increased perception that schools are being more receptive to public feedback, reducing the salience of the factor.

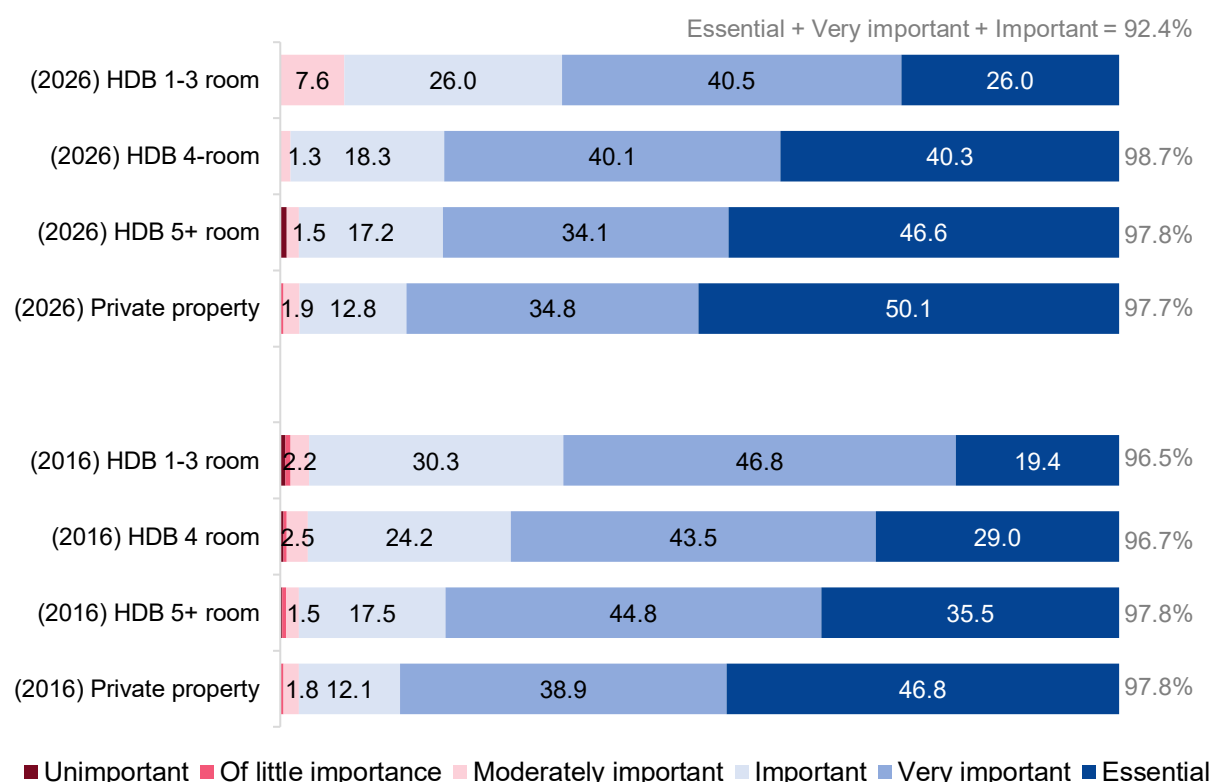
Figure 3.1.1: In your opinion, how important are the following characteristics in determining a GOOD primary school?, responses by wave



3.1.2 Holistic school features were highly valued across dwelling types, although the intensity of preferences differed

Similar patterns across housing types were observed over the two waves. In general, parents who lived in larger HDB flats, or private housing were more likely to be interested in socio-emotional development than their peers. Nevertheless, a majority of those living in smaller 1-3 room HDB flats (92.4 per cent in 2026) also thought that this was important.

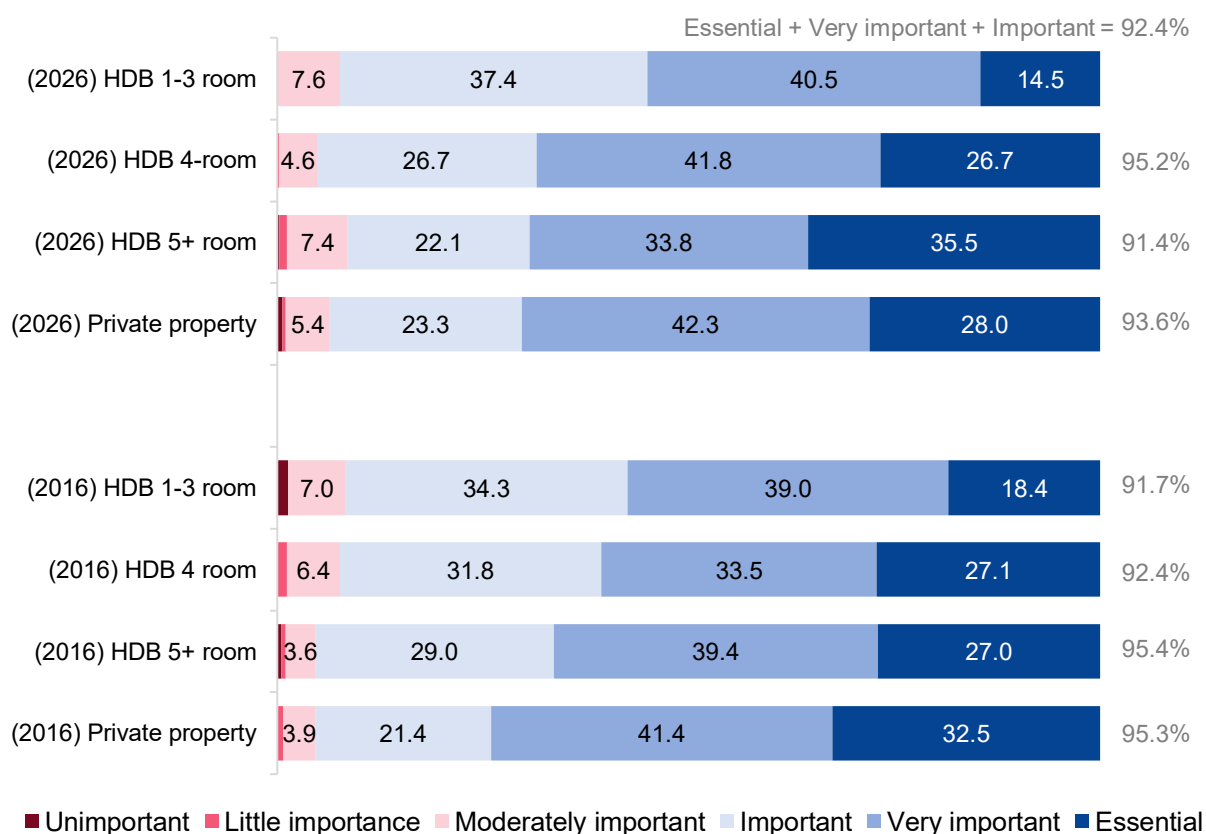
Figure 3.1.2a: In your opinion, how important are the following characteristics in determining a GOOD primary school? - "Teachers who care for the students' social-emotional development", responses by wave and housing type



Teachers' attention to students' social-emotional development was highly valued across all dwelling types, although parents in larger HDB flats and private housing

were somewhat more likely to assign the strongest ratings. A similar pattern was observed for schools catering to individual students' needs, interests and strengths, but differences across dwelling groups were less pronounced in 2026 than in 2016. The results therefore point to differences in intensity rather than a sharp divide in whether parents value holistic development.

Figure 3.1.2b: In your opinion, how important are the following characteristics in determining a GOOD primary school? - "Caters to individual students' needs, interests and strengths", responses by wave and housing type

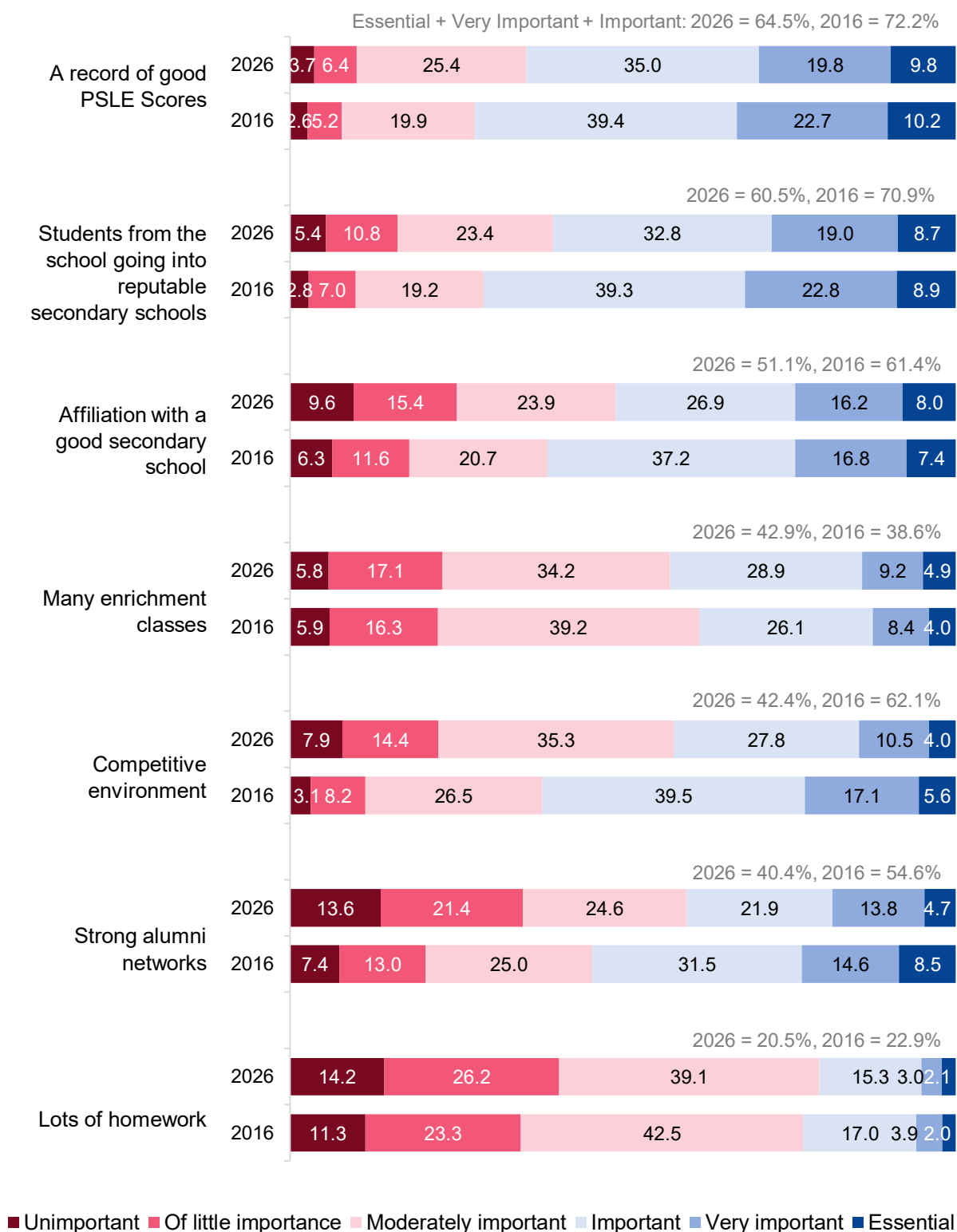


3.1.3 Importance of RA features of “good schools” dropped in 2026

The importance of most conventional RA factors declined between 2016 and 2026, reflecting reduced emphasis on several conventional results-oriented markers. The

importance placed on “lots of homework” remained broadly stable, while “many enrichment classes” was the only factor to increase (by 4.4 percentage points); this may reflect parents’ preferences for more holistic and varied forms of education over traditional academics. A primary school’s record of good PSLE scores, and history of students enrolling into reputable secondary schools meanwhile remained the most important factors, despite drops in proportions of around seven to 10 percentage points of parents who viewed them as important. The largest drops were observed for the “competitive environment” (down 19.9 percentage points) and “strong alumni networks” (down 14.2 percentage points), reflecting parents’ increasing aversion to stressful primary school environments.

Figure 3.1.3: In your opinion, how important are the following characteristics in determining a GOOD primary school?, responses by wave



3.1.4 Parents staying in 1- to 3-room HDB flats were more likely to value alumni networks and religious affiliation of schools

Across the board, the proportion of parents seeing alumni networks and religious affiliations as important factors of a good primary school has decreased in 2026 compared to 2016. Contrary to the stereotype that parents with high socio-economic statuses value alumni networks as a means of perpetuating culture and status, we also find that parents living in HDB 1–3-room flats were more likely than other dwelling groups to place importance on alumni networks and religious affiliation. However, the survey does not establish *why* these differences arise, and the findings cannot be interpreted as indicating weaker commitment among parents with fewer resources.

Figure 3.1.4a: In your opinion, how important are the following characteristics in determining a GOOD primary school? - "Strong alumni networks", responses by wave and housing type

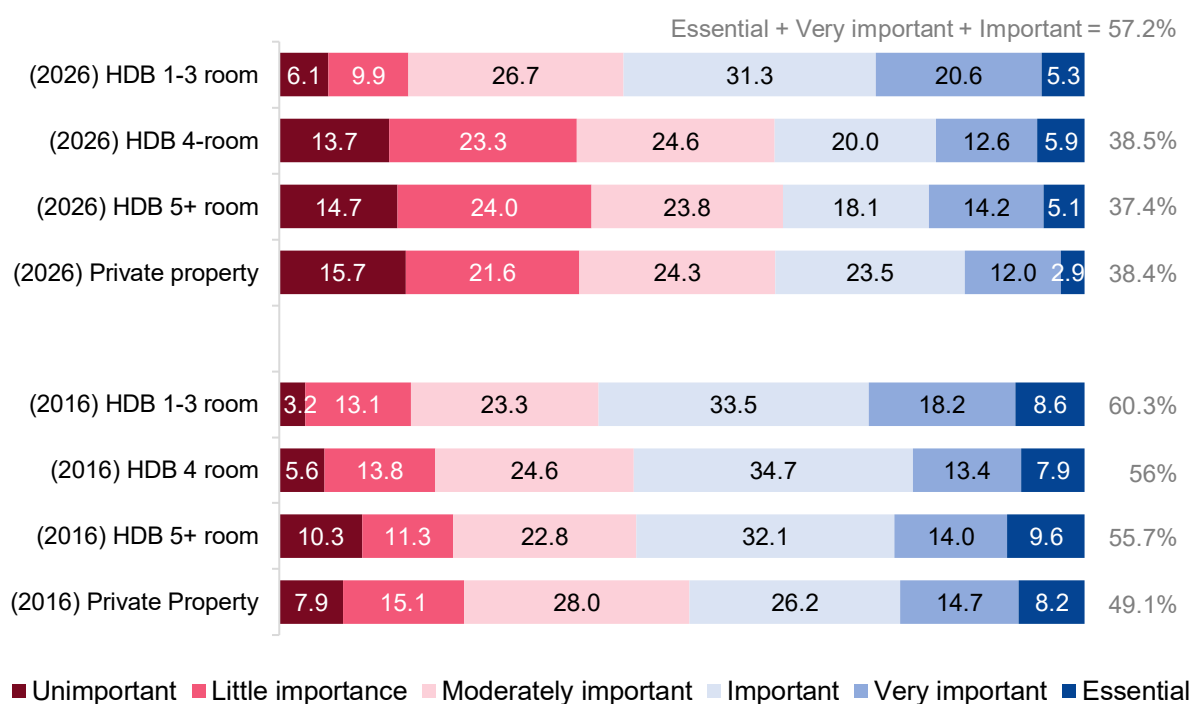
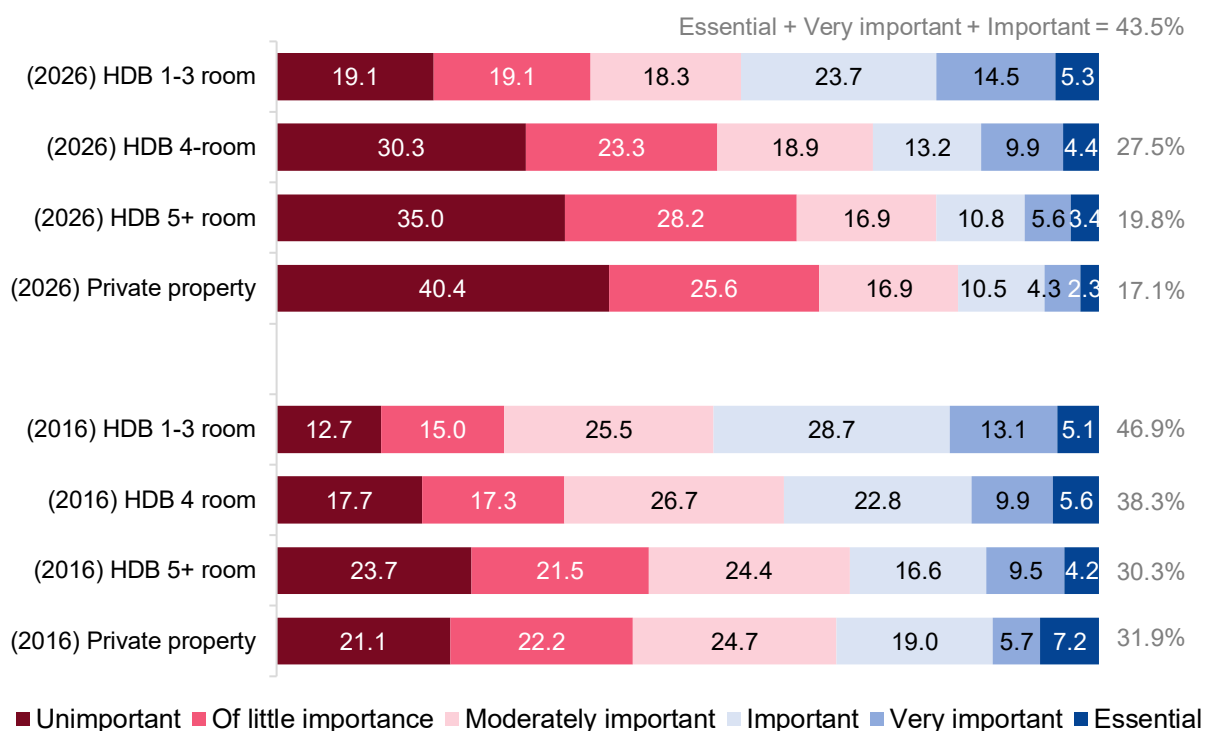


Figure 3.1.4b: In your opinion, how important are the following characteristics in determining a GOOD primary school? - "Affiliation with a religious organisation or clan which I support or respect", responses by wave and housing type



3.2 Parental views on goals of education system

3.2.1 Parents continued to emphasise the importance of character building, discipline and passion in learning as well as good social skills

Overall, the emphasis on learning continues to be more salient for parents when they evaluate the outcomes of their children's primary school education. Across both waves, parents continued to emphasise a variety of academic and holistic factors for primary school education, though there was a slight increase in overall mean scores in 2026 compared to 2016. Comparing across individual items, good character and

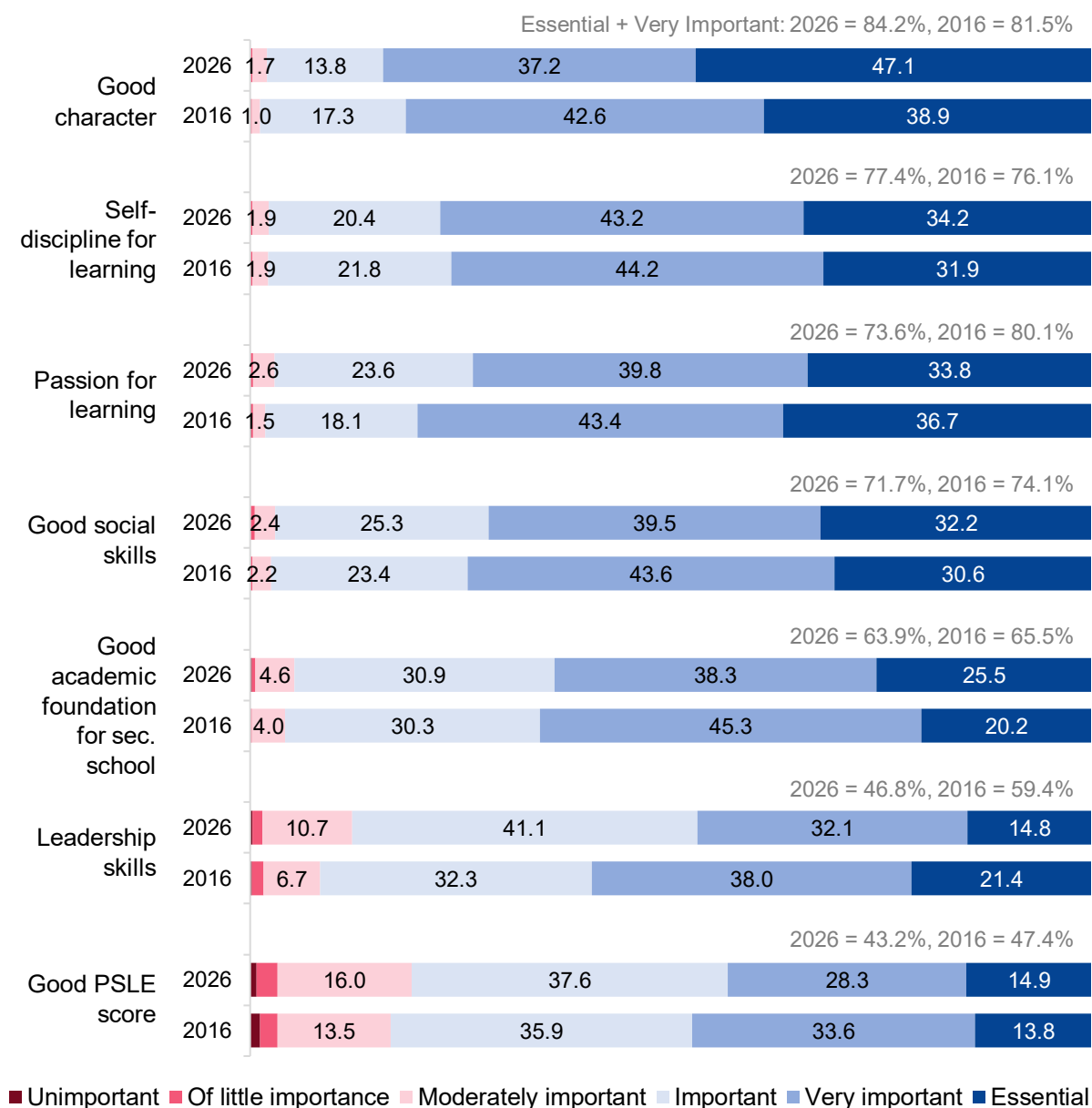
self-discipline for learning were the top two important outcomes in 2026, and the proportions seeing them as essential or very important remained broadly stable at a high level.

In comparison, declines were observed for other attributes. Even though it remained high on the list, the total proportion of parents who rated “Passion for learning” as Essential and Very Important dropped by 6.5 percentage points between 2016 and 2026. Meanwhile, the proportion rating leadership skills as essential or very important fell from 59.4 per cent in 2016 to 46.8 per cent in 2026.

Table 3.2.1: Overall importance of characteristics, mean scores by wave

Survey wave	Mean score	Standard deviation
2026	4.87	0.58
2016	4.76	0.57

Figure 3.2.1: You will know that your child has received a good primary school education if s/he comes out of school having acquired..., responses by wave



3.2.2 Parents staying in larger HDB types or private property tended to emphasise holistic outcomes more

Emphasis on holistic outcomes in primary school education differed when compared across housing types, with these differences becoming more marked when compared

to 2016. Overall, parents are viewing these characteristics as more important compared to 2016, with the exception of those staying in 1- to 3-room flats. In addition, the difference between those staying in 4-room flats and the other two housing categories has also widened; while those belonging to these three housing categories reported very similar scores in 2016, the mean scores reported by those in HDB 5+-room flats and private properties were higher than the mean score reported by those staying in HDB 4-room flats in 2026.

Table 3.2.2: Overall importance of characteristics, mean scores by wave and housing type

Importance of holistic outcomes	Housing type			
	HDB 1-3 room	HDB 4-room	HDB 5+ room	Private property
2026	4.68 (0.59)	4.86 (0.59)	4.91 (0.58)	4.92 (0.54)
2016	4.69 (0.64)	4.78 (0.57)	4.76 (0.56)	4.75 (0.54)

3.3 What makes a “good” secondary school?

In 2026, respondents were also asked about their decision-making process when choosing a secondary school for their children. Respondents were also presented with a list of considerations that one would consider when choosing a secondary school and then asked to indicate the importance of each characteristic. Based on factor analysis, we established five distinct categories that included most of the items, presented below.

Table 3.3a: Categories of criteria for choosing secondary schools

Criteria	Description	Items
Fit	Is the developmental environment of the school appropriate for my child?	• Support for weaker students • Whether my child/ren personally wishes to attend that specific secondary school • Emphasis on character and values • Emphasis on discipline
Practicality	Does attending this school fit well into my everyday life?	• Proximity to where my child/ren lives • Convenience of transport or commuting options to school (e.g., fewer transfers, less walking)
Opportunity	What educational and developmental opportunities does the school make available?	• Talent Areas offered by the school under DSA (e.g., arts, science, sports, etc) • The secondary school's facilities/infrastructure • Availability of particular subject combinations or offerings • Availability of particular programmes (e.g., Applied Learning Programme or Learning for Life Programme) • Availability of Integrated Programme option • Availability of particular co-curricular activity (CCA) options • The school's track record in non-academic activities (e.g., good National Sports Games track record)
Standing	What does the school's "brand" signal in terms of academic performance, selectivity and reputation?	• Past years' GCE O Level or N Level results of the secondary school • Competitive environment • The brand name of the school • Secondary schools' cut-off points (COP) in previous years (i.e., PSLE score range required to be admitted into the secondary school)
Belonging	Do I have a familial, social, or institutional connection with this school?	• Whether the school is my/ spouse's /other parent's alma mater • Child/ren's sibling is already enrolled in the secondary school • Affiliation with a religious organisation or clan • Whether the secondary school is a single-sex or co-education (co-ed) school
Unclassified	N/A	• Affiliation with a good JC • Strong alumni/ strength of alumni networks • The type of school (e.g., Government, Government-Aided, Autonomous, Independent, etc.)

We find that parents' primary consideration for secondary schools is fit, followed by practicality, standing, opportunity, and belonging coming in last.

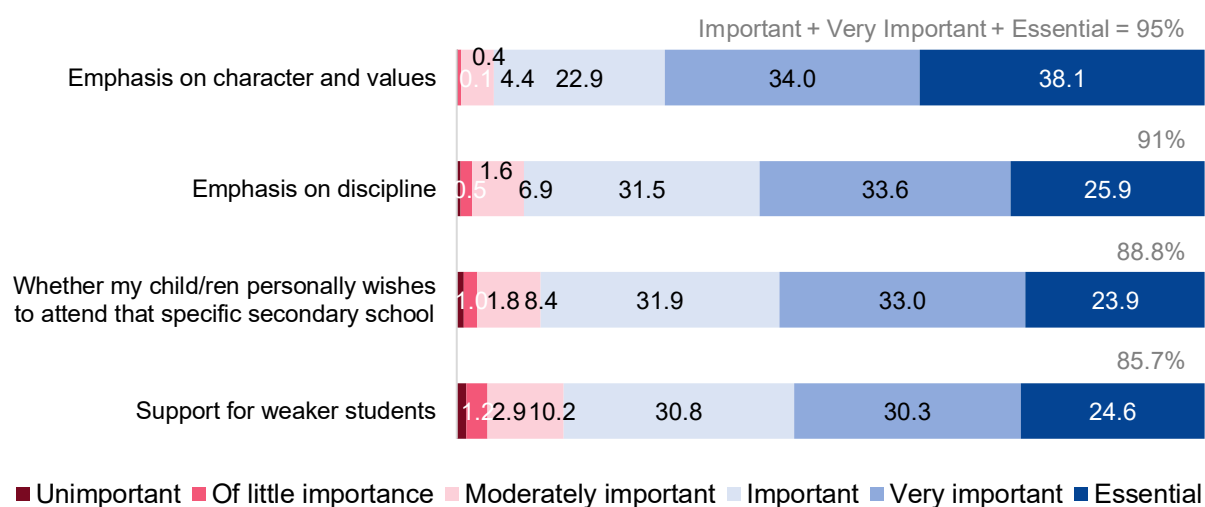
Table 3.3b: Overall sentiments about criteria for secondary schools

Criteria	Mean Score (Standard Deviation)
Fit	4.76 (0.74)
Practicality	4.42 (1.02)
Standing	3.75 (0.94)
Opportunity	3.72 (0.86)
Belonging	2.51 (0.98)

3.3.1 Parents most prioritised the holistic fit of a secondary school

Parents were primarily interested in secondary schools which emphasised holistic elements such as character and values (95 per cent), as well as discipline (91 per cent). Parents also seemed to give their children some agency in secondary school selection, as 88.8 per cent rated their child's own preference as important, very important or essential.

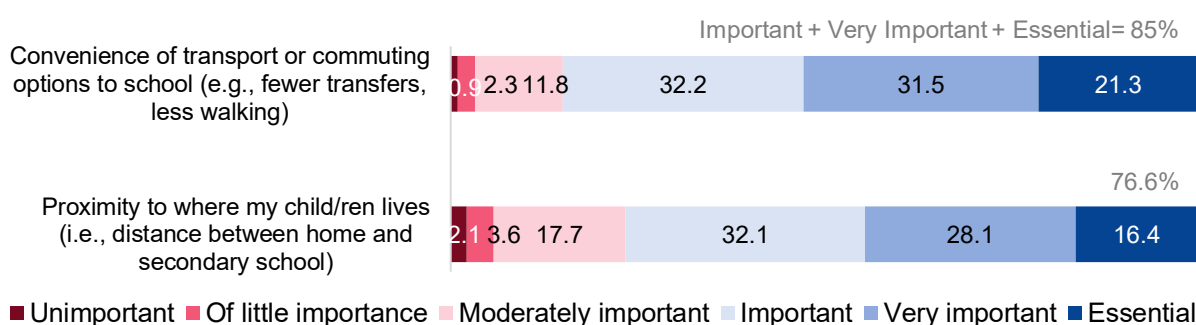
Figure 3.3.1: To what extent are these considerations important to you when thinking about the ideal secondary school for your child/ren? [Fit Items]



3.3.2 *Practicality was the second most cited logic, with ease of transport beating proximity*

More parents prioritised the convenience of transport (85 per cent) to the secondary school over the proximity of said school (76.6 per cent) to their residence. As respondents were not made to rank the considerations, this does not mean that public transport trumps proximity, merely that more were concerned about transport. This difference in preference suggests that parents may be willing to trade distance for convenience, highlighting the importance of public transport links to all educational institutions.

Figure 3.3.2: To what extent are these considerations important to you when thinking about the ideal secondary school for your child/ren? [Practicality Items]

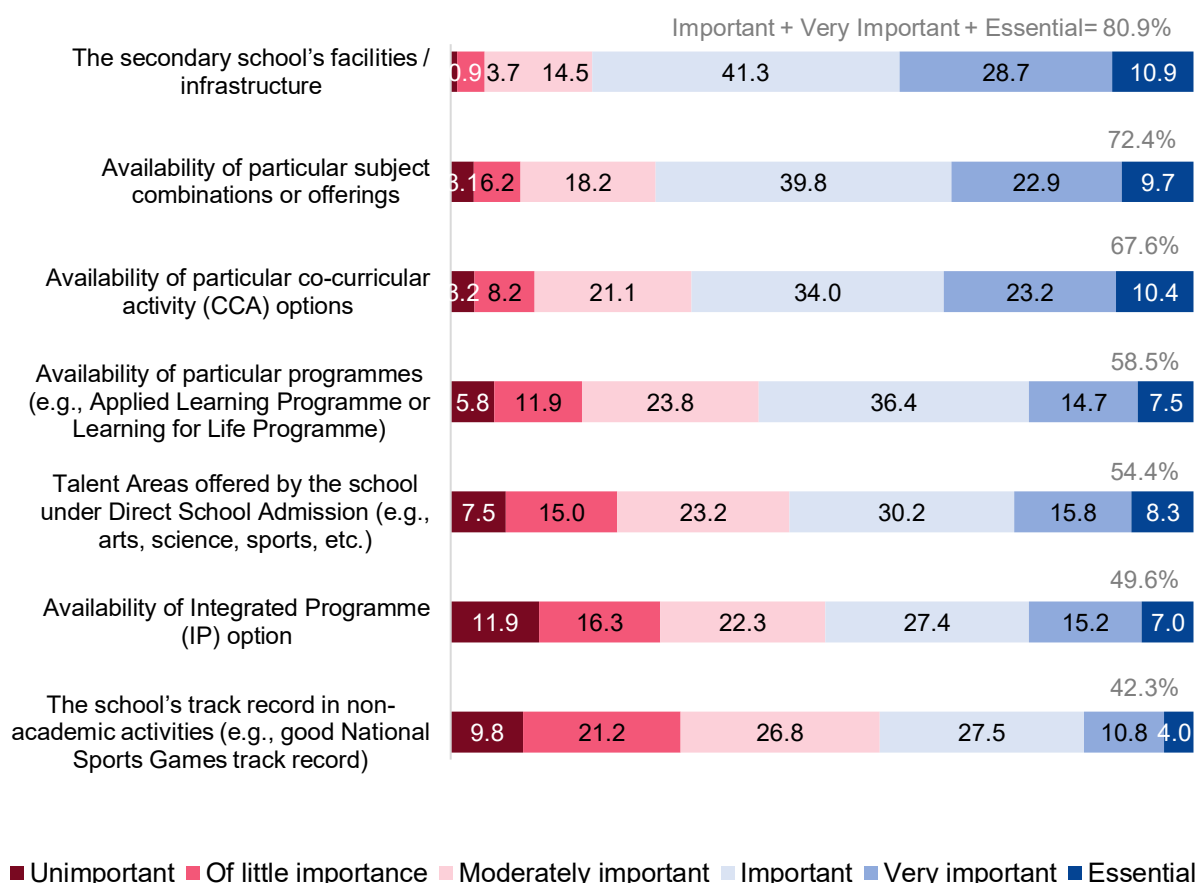


3.3.3 *Facilities and academic offerings were valued more highly than specialised programmes and options*

When considering the types of opportunities a school may potentially provide students, parents were more concerned with both the “hard” infrastructure (80.9 per cent) provided by a school, as well as the variety of subject combinations available (72.4

per cent). Other features such as CCAs and special programmes (such as the Integrated Programme) were favoured by a smaller proportion of parents.

Figure 3.3.3: To what extent are these considerations important to you when thinking about the ideal secondary school for your child/ren? [Opportunity Items]

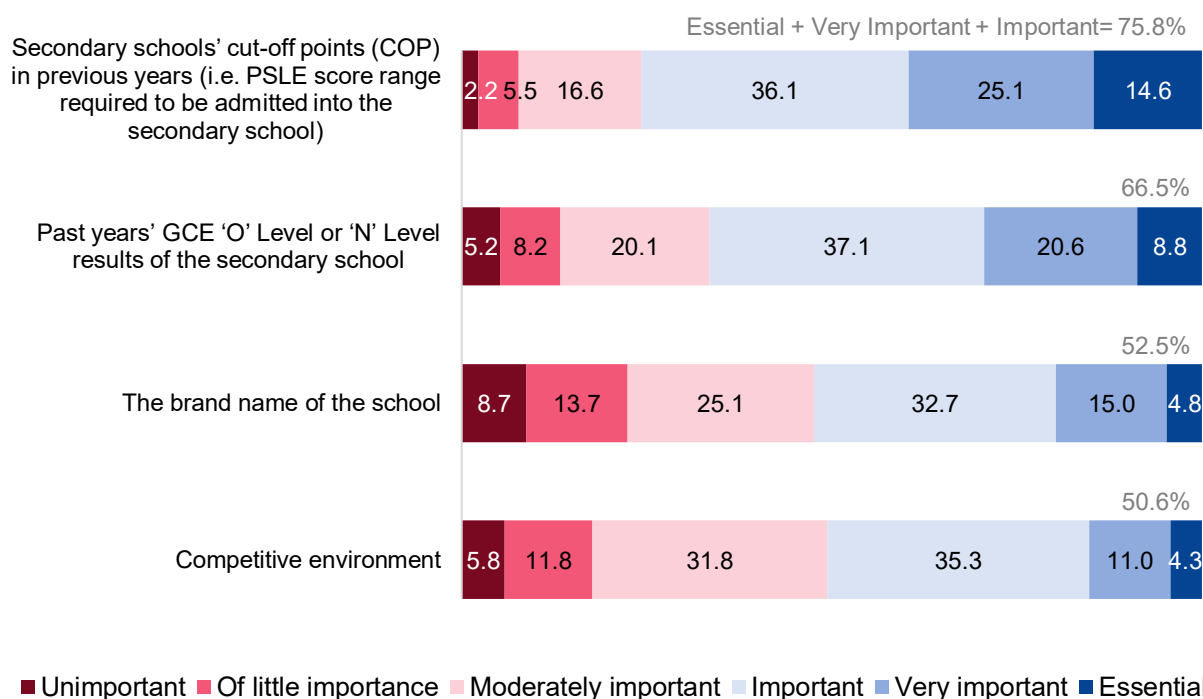


3.3.4 Cut-off points of secondary schools were the most prioritised consideration when it comes to school standing

In terms of standing, parents were primarily concerned with the cut-off points of the secondary school (75.8 per cent). GCE 'O' or 'N' level scores of secondary school graduates (66.5 per cent), school branding (52.5 per cent) and competitive

environment (50.6 per cent) were of lesser concern, though at least half indicated that each of these three aspects were important, very important, or essential.

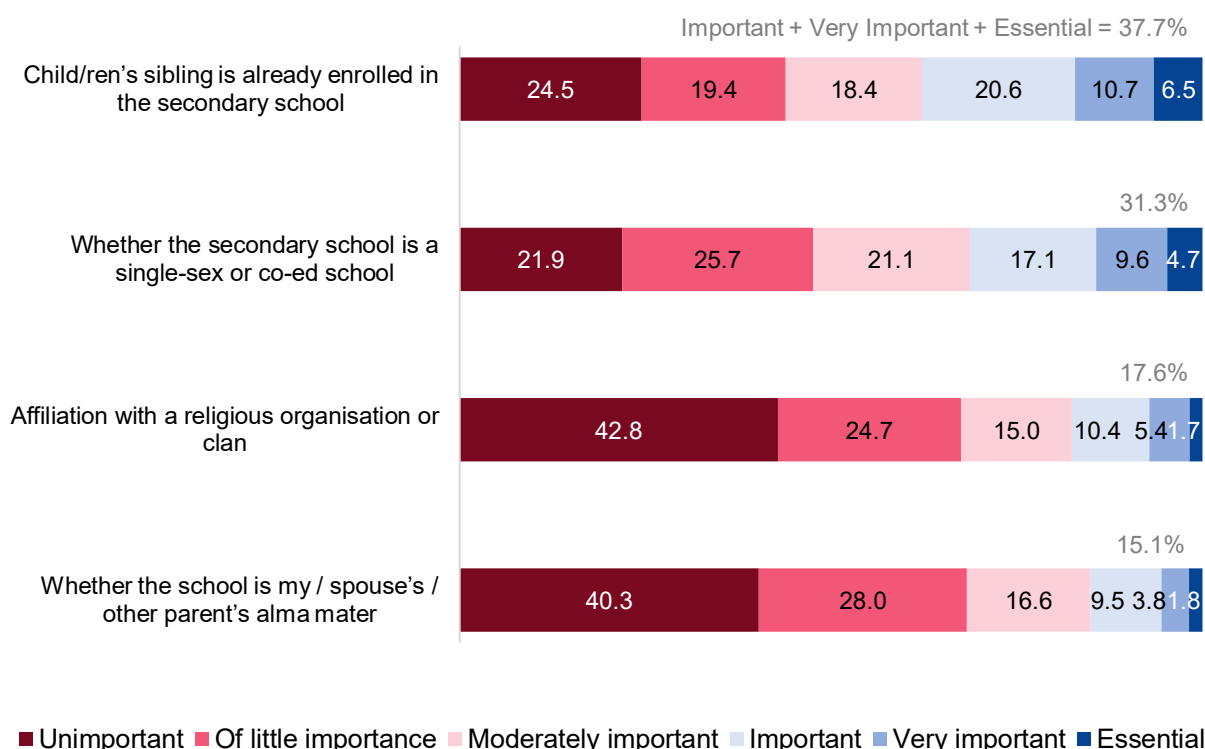
Figure 3.3.4: To what extent are these considerations important to you when thinking about the ideal secondary school for your child/ren? [Standing Items]



3.3.5 Sibling affiliation was seen by just over one-third as important and was the most prioritised belonging aspect

Most parents viewed aspects pertaining to belonging as less important when choosing a secondary school. Previous affiliations with religious or clan organisations (17.6 per cent) or having previously attended said school (15.1 per cent) were only selected by a minority of parents. A child's sibling being already enrolled in the same school (37.7 per cent) was the most highly rated belonging consideration.

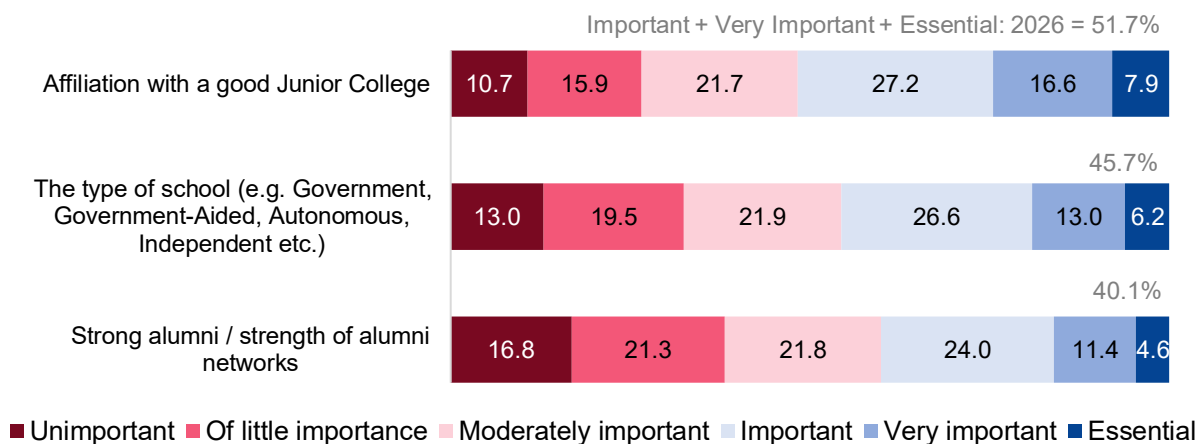
Figure 3.3.5: To what extent are these considerations important to you when thinking about the ideal secondary school for your child/ren? [Belonging Items]



3.3.6 Around half saw affiliation with a good JC as important, while just over four in 10 said that type of school and strength of alumni were important

Among the other items that did not fit into these categories, affiliation with a good JC was seen as the most important. Even then, it was only considered important by half of the parents surveyed, while the type of school (Autonomous, Independent, etc.) and strength of alumni were viewed as important by just over four in 10 parents.

Figure 3.3.6: To what extent are these considerations important to you when thinking about the ideal secondary school for your child/ren? [Other Items]



3.3.7 Parents across housing types prioritised fit and practicality, but HDB 1–3-room parents placed relatively greater emphasis on opportunity and belonging, while standing was more important among private-property parents

Housing type did not substantially alter the broad ordering of parents' secondary-school considerations. Fit and practicality remained among the most highly rated criteria across all housing groups, while belonging was consistently the least important.

Nevertheless, some differences emerged in the relative emphasis placed on particular criteria. Parents living in HDB 1–3-room flats placed the greatest emphasis on opportunity (mean = 3.86) and belonging (2.88) compared with the other housing groups. Fit was rated most highly by parents living in HDB 5-room-and-larger flats (4.83) and HDB 4-room flats (4.80), while practicality was highest among HDB 4-room parents (4.56). In contrast, standing became relatively more important across larger

housing types, reaching its highest mean among private-property parents (3.85), compared with 3.60 among parents living in HDB 1–3-room flats.

Table 3.3.7: Overall sentiments about criteria for secondary schools, by housing type

Mean Score (Standard Deviation)	Housing type*			
	HDB 1-3 room	HDB 4-room	HDB 5+ room	Private property
Fit	4.60 (0.70)	4.80 (0.71)	4.83 (0.79)	4.72 (0.73)
Practicality	4.43 (0.89)	4.56 (1.00)	4.47 (1.00)	4.23 (1.08)
Standing	3.60 (0.88)	3.69 (0.97)	3.78 (0.95)	3.85 (0.90)
Opportunity	3.86 (0.84)	3.75 (0.88)	3.73 (0.89)	3.63 (0.82)
Belonging	2.88 (1.04)	2.55 (1.04)	2.42 (0.95)	2.40 (0.86)

**ANOVA results indicated that differences across housing groups were statistically significant, particularly for Opportunity, Belonging and Standing.*

4 EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES, STRESSORS, AND TUITION AND ENRICHMENT

The frequency of reported stress-related behaviours has increased compared to 2016. In 2026, parents living in smaller HDB flats generally reported higher levels of parental stress than those living in larger HDB flats or private housing. The factors contributing to this stress have also shifted over time. While concerns relating directly to examinations and schoolwork have become less prominent, parents are now more likely to worry that their children are not obtaining the grades they are capable of, may lose out in the education system in the longer run, or are not keeping up with what is taught in school.

A related tension appears in parents' attitudes towards tuition and enrichment. Nearly nine in 10 felt that children in Singapore spend too much time on these activities, yet seven in 10 said they would spend more on them if they had the resources, and around half reported pressure arising from what other parents do. Reported expenditure on both tuition and enrichment has also risen since 2016. Tuition was viewed largely in academic and strategic terms, including as a way of gaining an advantage in the PSLE and supporting children's academic progress; while enrichment was more commonly associated with developing skills beyond those taught in school.

These behaviours and attitudes also differed by housing type. Parents in HDB flats were generally more likely than those in private housing to say they would spend more if they had the resources, while private-housing households generally reported greater

use of paid tuition and enrichment. Overall, the findings point both to continuing investment in supplementary education and to differences in the resources and strategies available to families.

4.1 Parental stress in education

Respondents were asked about the variety of factors which resulted in stress, or feelings of anxiety.

4.1.1 The incidence of behaviours related to educational stress has increased compared to 2016

The overall proportion of parents demonstrating behaviours associated with stress increased between 2016 and 2026. When comparing overall mean scores of similar questions across the two waves, the score increased from 2.31 in 2016 to 2.91 in 2026. When examining individual items, there was a notable increase in the proportion of parents who argued over (16.9 percentage points) and expressed stress (14.8 percentage points) over their child's education. The measures, however, point in different directions.

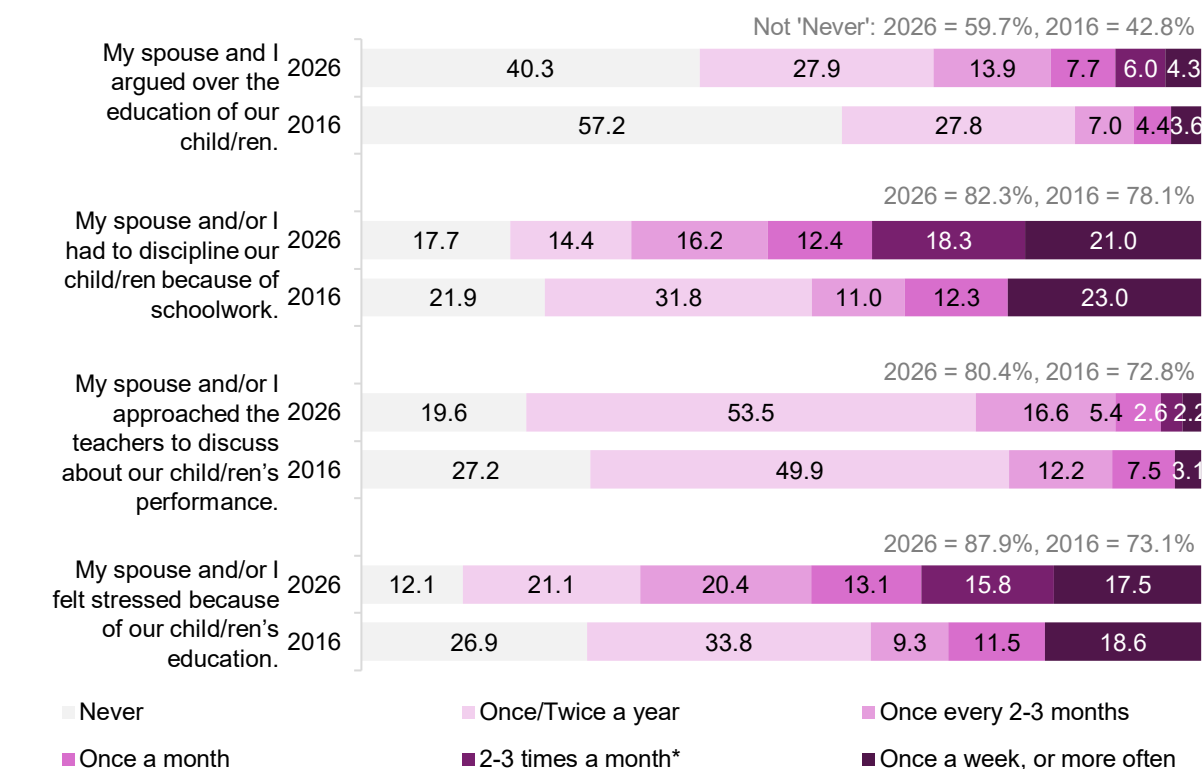
Parents were less likely to agree that the system causes children undue stress, but reported more frequent stress-related behaviours themselves. Possible explanations for this require further research. One possible explanation is that parental stress has shifted from immediate examination pressure to broader uncertainty about children's longer-term educational prospects, especially in the ever-increasing global competition for jobs. Assessment reforms may have reduced the salience of specific

tests, but they may also have left parents managing a wider set of concerns, including whether their children are keeping up, developing holistically, building relevant skills and remaining competitive for future pathways. In this sense, educational competition may have diversified rather than disappeared, moving into tuition, enrichment, school choice and alternative admissions routes.

Table 4.1.1: Parental stress, mean scores by wave

Survey wave	Mean score	Standard deviation
2016	2.31	0.90
2026	2.91	1.10

Figure 4.1.1: Please indicate how often the following has happened to you over the last one year, responses by wave



* The option "2-3 times a month" was introduced in the 2026 survey

4.1.2 Parental stress levels have increased compared to 2016; those residing in smaller flat types indicate higher levels of stress

As the trends found when comparing housing types were similar for individual items, we present the overall parental stress scores. Across the board, stress levels have increased over the years when we compare 2016 to 2026. For 2026, overall parental stress was highest in households living in smaller HDB flats (1-4 rooms), compared to those living in 5-room HDB flats and private property, who had a lower mean stress score.

Table 4.1.2: Parental stress, mean scores by wave and housing type

Mean Score for Parental Stress (Standard Deviation)	Housing type			
	HDB 1-3 room	HDB 4-room	HDB 5+ room	Private property
2016	2.50 (0.99)	2.28 (0.88)	2.29 (0.88)	2.27 (0.88)
2026	3.09 (1.02)	3.01 (1.17)	2.76 (1.05)	2.86 (1.06)

4.1.3 Sources of parental stress shifted away from tests and schoolwork towards concerns about children falling behind or not reaching their potential

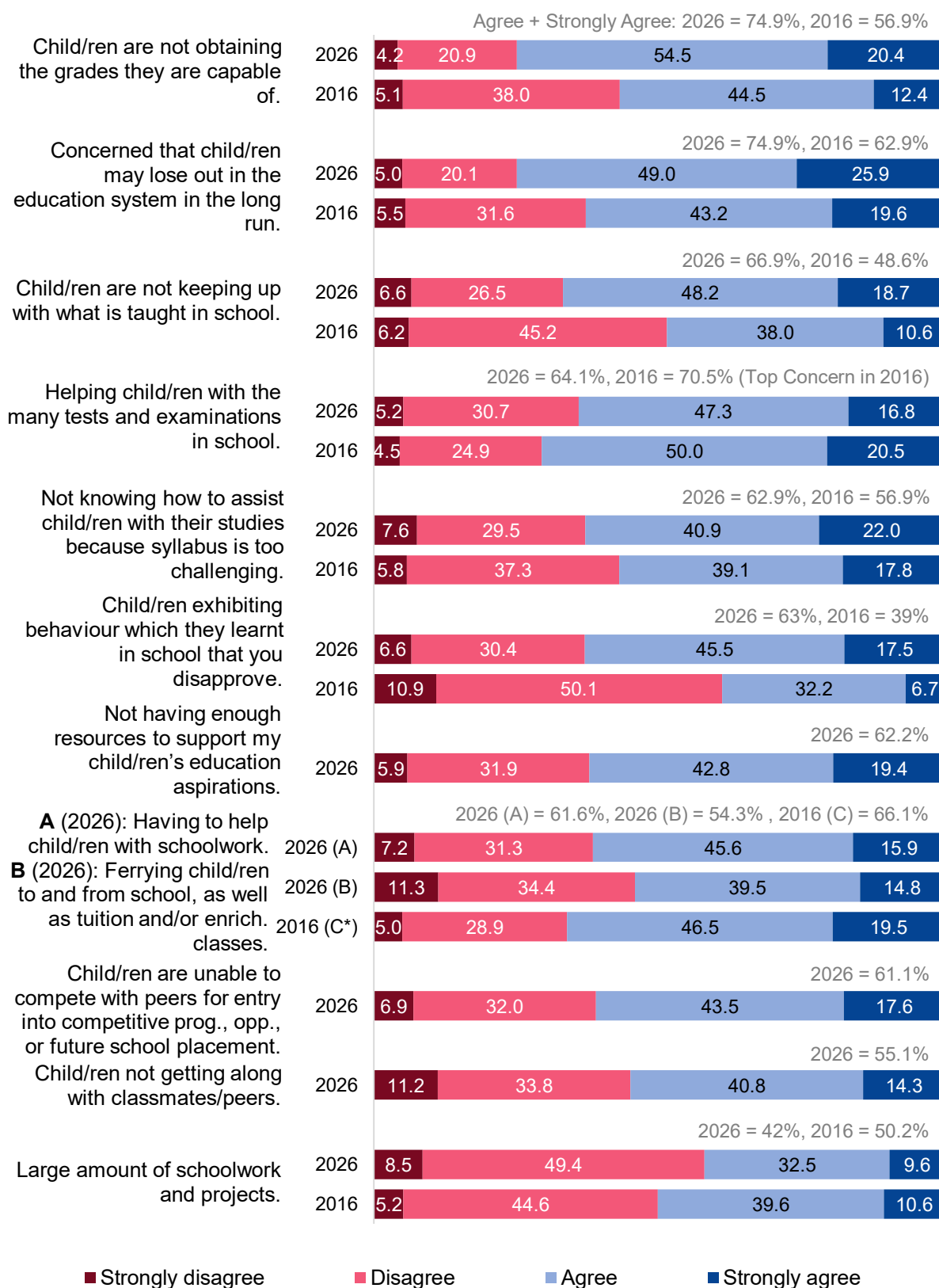
A larger proportion of parents expressed anxiety over keeping up with their child's education in 2026 than in 2016. The source of this anxiety seems to stem from fear of their children not living up to their full potential. Approximately three-quarters were afraid their children were not obtaining the grades they are capable of (increase from 56.9 per cent in 2016 to 74.9 per cent in 2026) or that they may lose out in the education system in the long run (increase from 62.9 per cent in 2016 to 74.9 per cent

in 2026); while two-thirds (66.9 per cent) were worried that their children are not keeping up with what is taught in school (increase from 48.6 per cent in 2016).

Conversely, stress caused by examinations and schoolwork has dropped when compared to 2016; the top concern in 2016 was stress over helping children with the many tests and examinations in school, but this dropped to fourth place in 2026. These changes are consistent with a shift from immediate assessment-related concerns towards broader anxiety about children's longer-term prospects and keeping pace.

Among the items that were directly comparable across the two waves, the largest increase was in concern about children exhibiting behaviour learnt in school that parents disapproved of, which rose by 24 percentage points, from 39 per cent in 2016 to 63 per cent in 2026. While this concern is distinct from the academic and progression-related anxieties highlighted above, it suggests that parental concerns have also broadened to encompass aspects of children's behaviour associated with their school experience. Other sizeable increases were seen in concerns about children not keeping up with what is taught in school (up 18.3 percentage points) and not obtaining the grades they are capable of (up 18 percentage points), reinforcing the broader shift towards anxieties about children keeping pace and realising their potential.

Figure 4.1.3: Do you feel stressed or anxious over your child/ren's education due to the following factors?, responses by wave

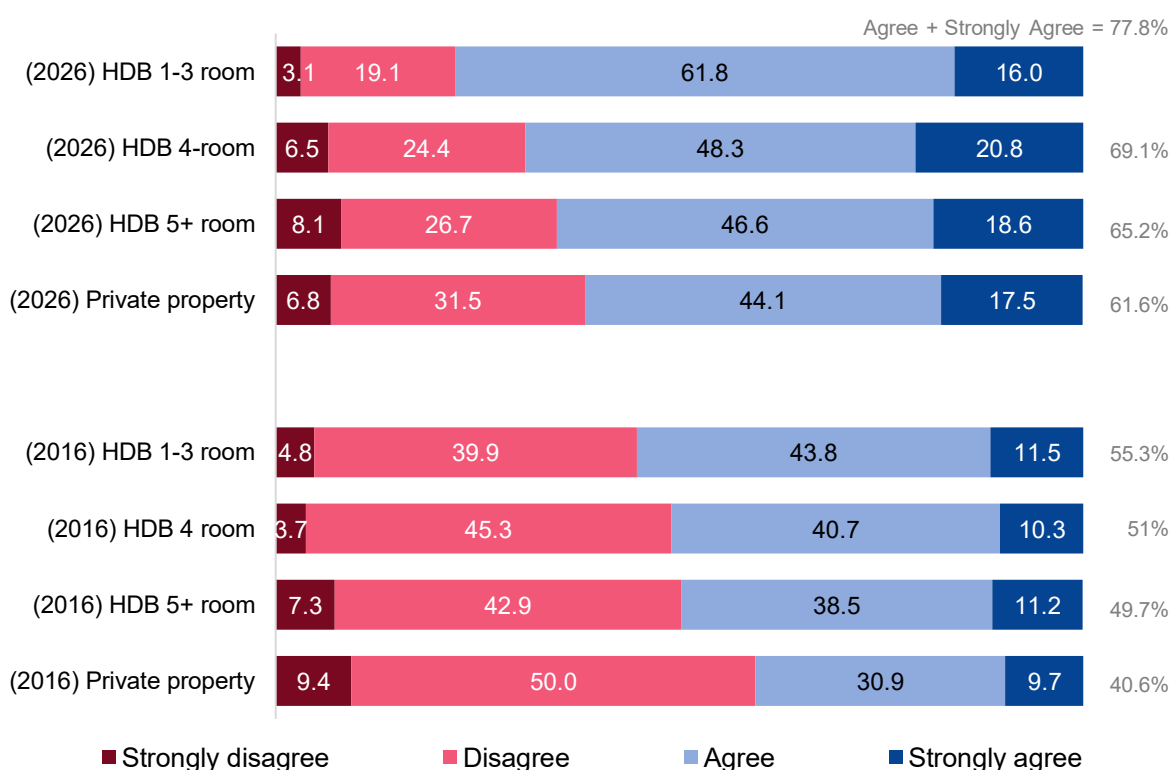


*In 2016, options A and B were asked in one question: "Having to help child with schoolwork and ferrying him/her to and from school as well as tuition and/or enrichment classes."

4.1.4 Those staying in smaller flat types report higher anxiety about their children keeping up in school; a similar pattern was found in 2016

Households living in smaller HDB flats were more likely to agree that their children were not keeping up with what was being taught in school. While a similar trend was found in 2016, the differences across housing types have become more pronounced in 2026. This suggests differences in available resources or support; for instance, less-resourced households may struggle to support their children appropriately due to the lack of time, capital or knowledge resources.

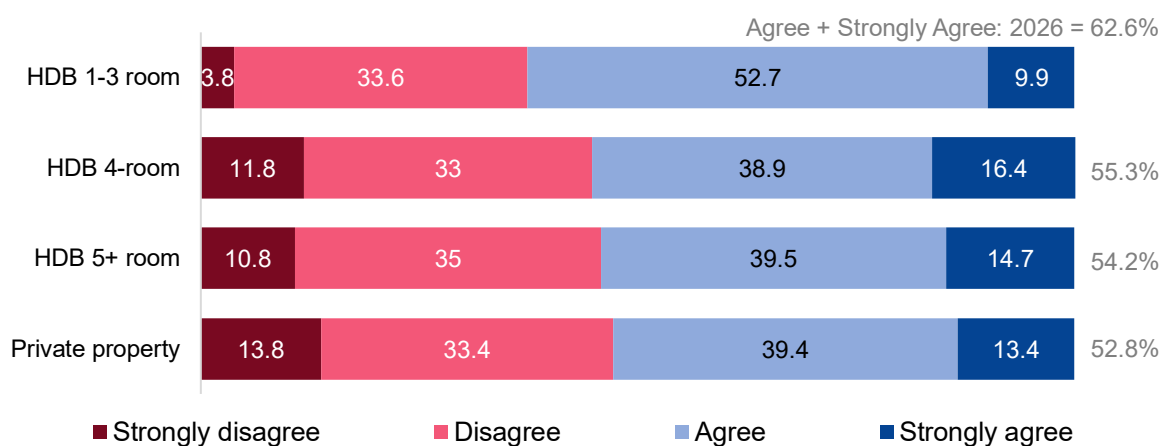
Figure 4.1.4: Do you feel stressed or anxious over your child/ren's education due to the following factors? - "Child/ren are not keeping up with what is taught in school", by wave and housing type



4.1.5 Those staying in smaller flat types were also more likely to be worried about whether their children were getting along with their peers

Similarly, households living in 1-3 room HDB flats were more likely to indicate that their children were not getting along with their peers when compared to those living in larger HDB flats and private property.

Figure 4.1.5: Do you feel stressed or anxious over your child/ren's education due to the following factors? - "Child/ren not getting along with classmates/peers", by housing type



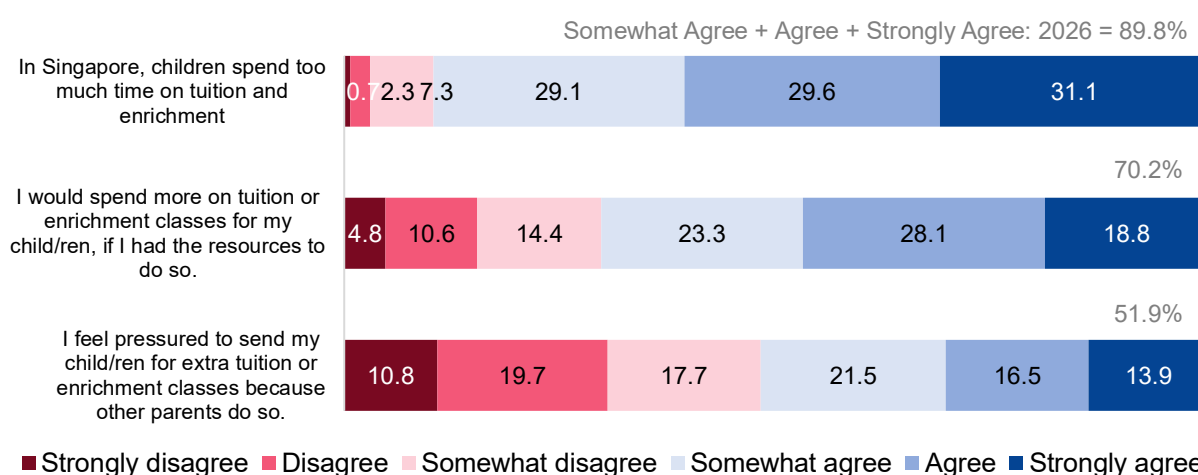
4.2 Attitudes on tuition, enrichment and spending

Besides reported behaviours, parents were also asked to provide their thoughts on tuition and enrichment, including whether they think children spend too much time on these activities, whether they are spending as much as they want on them, as well as what they believed was the purpose of these activities. They were also asked to indicate the number of hours and money spent on enrichment and tuition.

4.2.1 While nearly nine in 10 say children spend too much time on tuition and enrichment, seven in 10 also say they would spend more on these aspects if they had the resources

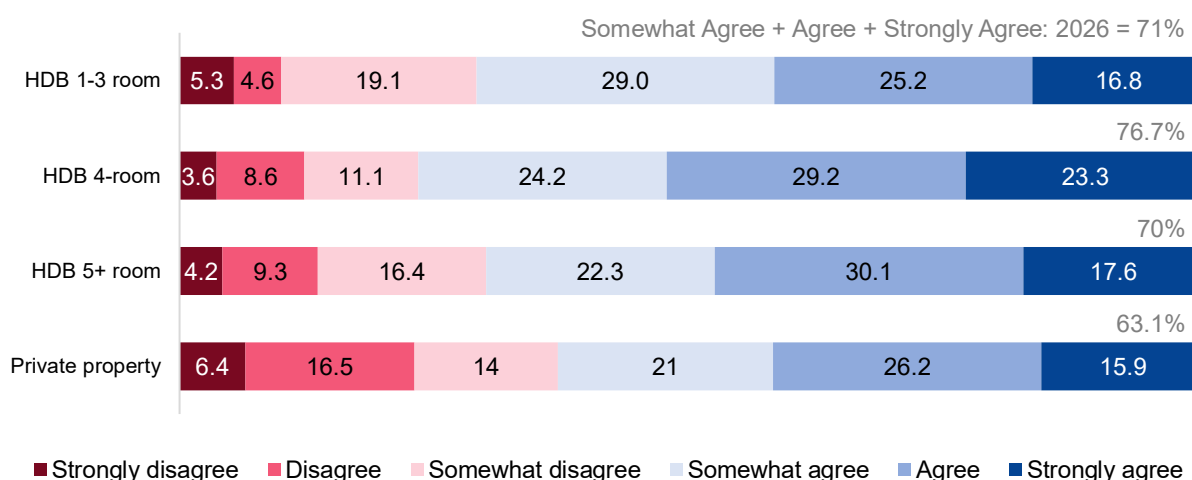
A large majority (89.8 per cent) of parents agreed that children spent too much time on tuition and enrichment. Despite this, 70.2 per cent opined that they would spend more on their child's tuition and enrichment. Roughly half of respondents expressed that peer pressure was the reason for sending their children for these extra classes.

Figure 4.2.1a: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about tuition and enrichment? [Tuition & Enrichment items]



In particular, households living in 4-room HDB flats were most likely to agree that they would spend more money on tuition or enrichment, followed by those staying in other flat types. In general, over seven in 10 respondents staying in public housing indicate that they would spend more on tuition or enrichment if they could afford to do so, while just 63.1 per cent of private property dwellers said the same.

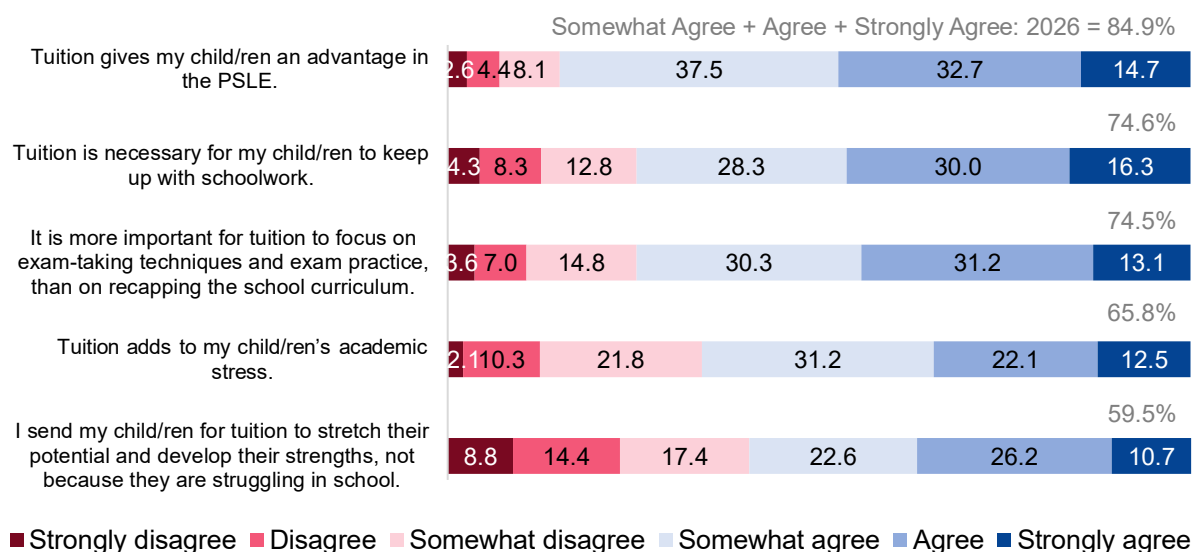
Figure 4.2.1b: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about tuition and enrichment? - "I would spend more on tuition or enrichment classes for my child/ren, if I had the resources to do so", by housing type



4.2.2 Parents mainly view tuition as a means to give their children a further leg up in their academic results

Improving their child's academic results seemed to be the main motivator for tuition, with a large majority of parents, or 84.9 per cent agreeing that it gave their children an advantage in the PSLE. Three-quarters also indicated that their children need tuition to keep up with schoolwork, and that the more important purpose of tuition would be to focus on exam preparation. At the same time, however, around two-thirds say that tuition adds to their children's academic stress, while 59.5 per cent say that their children are going for tuition to meet their full potential and not to plug weaknesses.

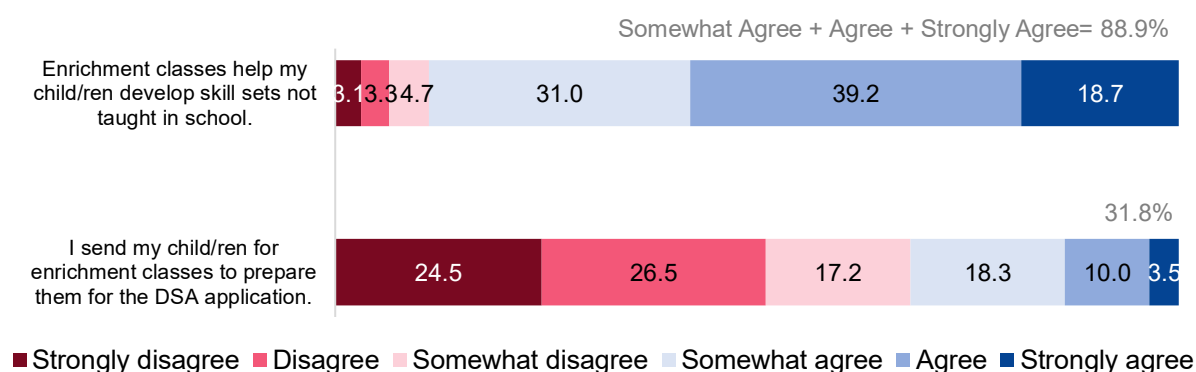
Figure 4.2.2: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about tuition and enrichment? [Tuition Items]



4.2.3 Parents primarily view enrichment as developmental, though its use for DSA preparation varies substantially by housing type

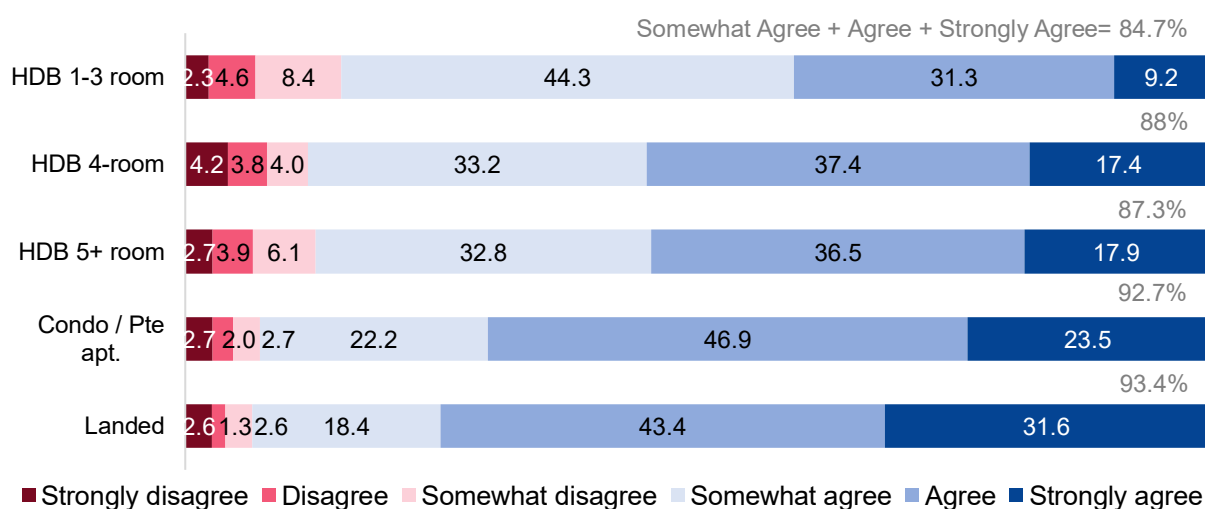
Meanwhile, enrichment was viewed primarily as a means of developing children's skills beyond those taught in school. A large majority of parents (88.9 per cent) agreed that enrichment classes helped their children develop skill sets not taught in school. By comparison, fewer than one-third (31.8 per cent) said that they sent their children for enrichment classes to prepare for a DSA application.

Figure 4.2.3: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about tuition and enrichment? [Enrichment items]



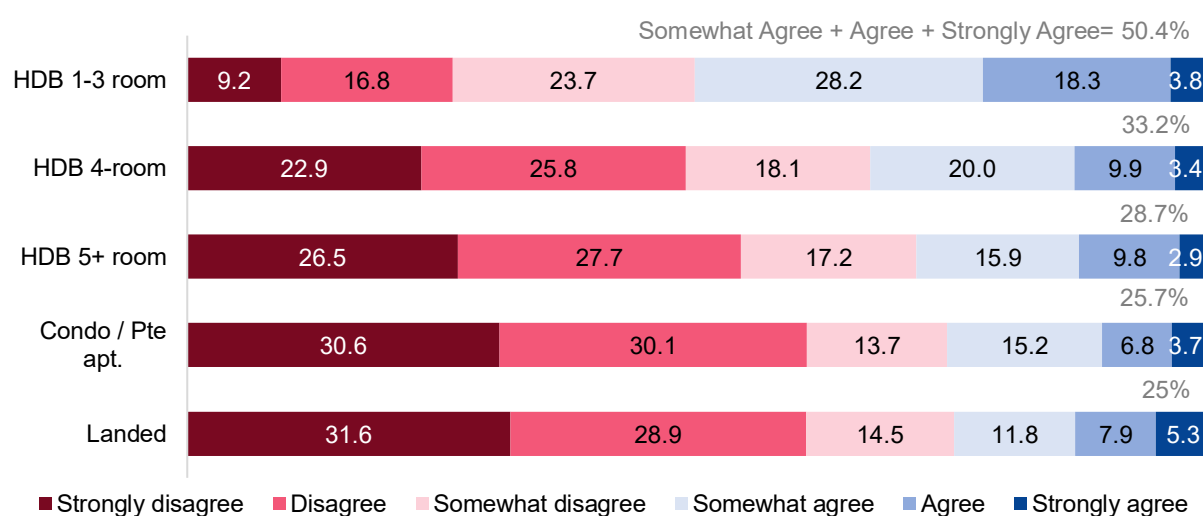
Interestingly, belief in the developmental value of enrichment was strong across all housing types. The proportion agreeing that enrichment helped children develop skills not taught in school ranged from 84.7 per cent among parents living in HDB 1–3-room flats to 92.7 per cent among those living in condominiums or private apartments and 93.4 per cent among those in landed housing.

Figure 4.2.3a: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about tuition and enrichment? - Enrichment classes help my child/ren develop skill sets not taught in school, by housing type



A different pattern emerged for the use of enrichment as preparation for DSA. Around half (50.4 per cent) of parents living in HDB 1–3-room flats said that they used enrichment for this purpose, compared with 33.2 per cent of HDB 4-room households, 28.7 per cent of HDB 5-room-and-larger households, 25.7 per cent of condominium or private-apartment households, and 25 per cent of landed households. This suggests that while enrichment is broadly seen as developmental across housing groups, its use as a strategy for DSA preparation is more concentrated among parents living in smaller HDB flats.

Figure 4.2.3b: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about tuition and enrichment? - I send my child/ren for enrichment classes to prepare them for the DSA application, by housing type



4.2.4 Parents spent more time and money on tuition and enrichment in 2026

While the mean reported hours spent on tuition and enrichment as well as the median reported hours for enrichment increased between 2016 and 2026, the mean time spent on homework and academic coaching as well as the median time for homework decreased.

Table 4.2.4a: Mean and median hours per week spent on preparation outside school, by wave

Mean / Median	Year	Homework	Tuition	Enrichment	Academic coaching by family member
Mean	2016	6.46	3.26	1.49	4.47
	2026	4.30	3.49	2.32	4.17
Median	2016	5.00	3.00	1.00	3.00
	2026	3.00	3.00	2.00	3.00

Beyond time spent, parents continued to spend increasing amounts of money on tuition and enrichment. The amount spent on tuition increased from \$318 in 2016 (or \$386 adjusting for inflation) to \$677 in 2026, and enrichment spending increased from \$125 (or \$152 adjusting for inflation) to \$355. These increases were also clear when comparing the median amounts, increasing from \$200 (or \$242 adjusting for inflation) to \$500 for tuition and \$40 (or \$48 adjusting for inflation) to \$260 for enrichment.

Table 4.2.4b: Mean and median expenditure on tuition and enrichment, by wave

Mean / median	Year	Tuition	Enrichment
Mean	2016	\$318 (\$386 adjusting for inflation)	\$125 (\$152 adjusting for inflation)
	2026	\$677	\$355
Median	2016	\$200 (\$242 adjusting for inflation)	\$40 (\$48 adjusting for inflation)
	2026	\$500	\$260

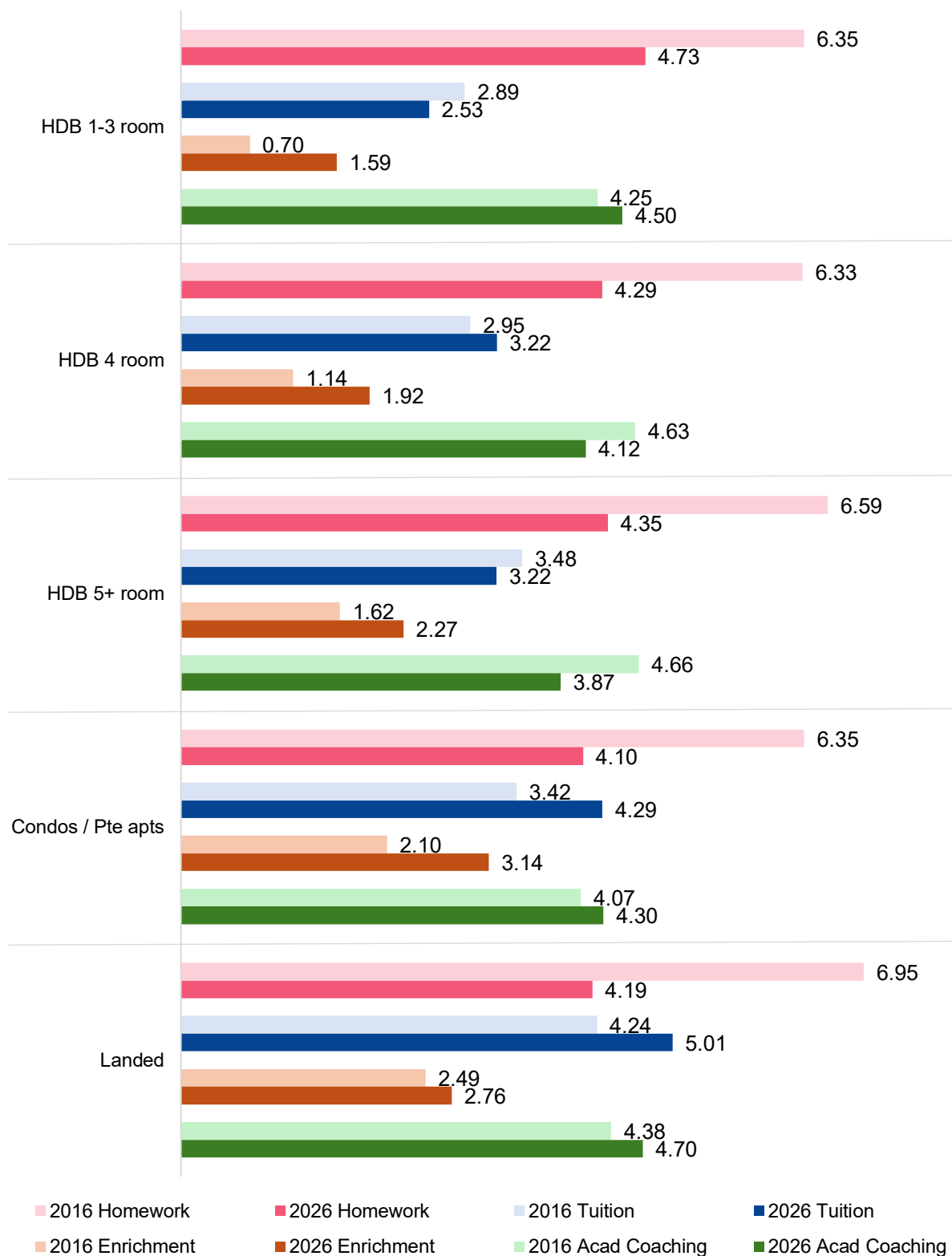
4.2.5 Parents in private housing spend more time on tuition and enrichment, while patterns of academic coaching at home are more mixed

Patterns in time spent on supplementary education also varied by housing type. In 2026, parents living in private housing generally reported more time spent on tuition and enrichment than those living in HDB flats. Weekly tuition time ranged from 2.53 hours among households living in HDB 1–3-room flats to 4.29 hours among those in condominiums or private apartments and 5.01 hours among those in landed housing. A similar pattern was observed for enrichment, with households in HDB 1–3-room flats reporting 1.59 hours per week, compared with 3.14 hours among condominium or private-apartment households and 2.76 hours among landed households.

The pattern for academic coaching by family members was less straightforward. Parents living in HDB 1–3-room flats reported 4.50 hours per week, compared with 4.12 hours among HDB 4-room households and 3.87 hours among HDB 5-room and larger households. However, academic coaching was also relatively high among condominium or private-apartment households (4.30 hours) and landed households (4.70 hours). This suggests that greater use of paid tuition and enrichment among private-housing households does not necessarily substitute for academic support provided within the family.

Across the two survey waves, time spent on homework declined across all housing types, while time spent on enrichment increased across all housing types. Changes in tuition were more varied, although by 2026 the highest levels of tuition were reported among households living in private housing. Taken together, the findings point to differences in how families allocate time across schoolwork, paid supplementary education and family support, rather than a simple substitution between these activities.

Figure 4.2.5: Mean weekly hours spent on homework, tuition, enrichment, and academic coaching by family members, by housing type and survey wave



5 PARENTS' VIEWS ON EDUCATIONAL POLICY

Parents were asked for their perspectives on current education policies, including the change from the PSLE T-score system to the current AL system, the impact and implications of the DSA scheme, and comparisons between PSLE- and DSA-based routes into secondary school. Parents generally reported understanding how the AL system works, but views of the change from T-scores remained lukewarm, with four in 10 neither positive nor negative. Concerns about stress, school choice and reduced differentiation also persisted. At the same time, most parents continued to see the PSLE as a useful educational checkpoint and preferred to retain it in some form, with the largest group favouring a less high-stakes version.

The DSA scheme was viewed positively by over four in 10 parents. While general understanding of the scheme was relatively high, parents were less familiar with the specific schools and programmes available through DSA. Many saw it as a useful alternative pathway into secondary school, although over half were also concerned that DSA preparation could distract children from PSLE preparation. Overall, PSLE-based posting remained the preferred route into secondary school.

Beyond these policy-specific views, the chapter also considers how parents see their own role in supporting their children through PSLE preparation, secondary-school selection and primary-school education more generally. Just over half reported being at least moderately confident in supporting their children through PSLE preparation and secondary-school choice. Parents continued to place considerable trust in schools

and teachers and to value a happy learning environment over good grades. Compared with 2016, more parents supported allowing children to fail and learn from their mistakes, while fewer supported disciplining children for poor examination performance.

5.1 Views on PSLE

5.1.1 Most parents say they understand the AL system, but views of the change from T-scores remain lukewarm

A sizeable proportion of parents (40 per cent) were neither positive nor negative about the change from the T-score to the AL system. A further 33.1 per cent expressed positive views, compared with 26.9 per cent who expressed negative views. At the same time, 85.9 per cent at least somewhat agreed that they understood how the current PSLE scoring system works. The lukewarm response therefore does not appear to stem primarily from a lack of understanding of the system. Rather, parents may understand how the system works while remaining ambivalent about its effects. As the following sections show, support for reducing fine differentiation coexists with continuing concerns about stress, school choice and the ability to gauge children's relative position.

Figure 5.1.1a: Overall, how do you feel about the change from the previous PSLE T-score system to the current Achievement Level (AL) system?

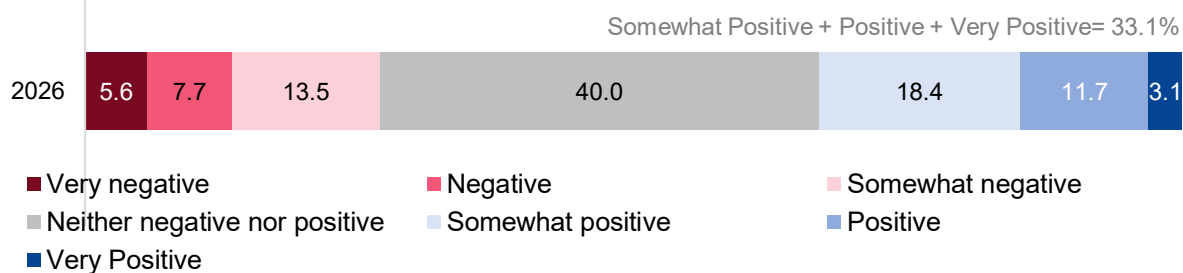
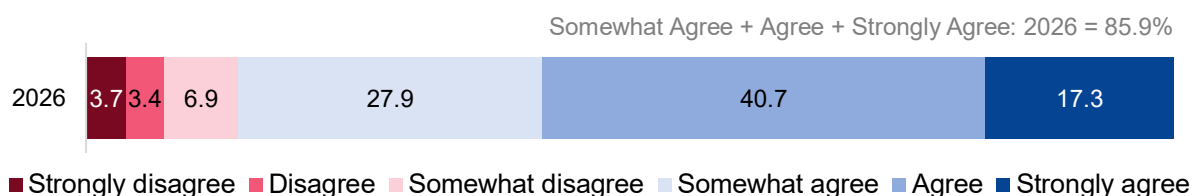
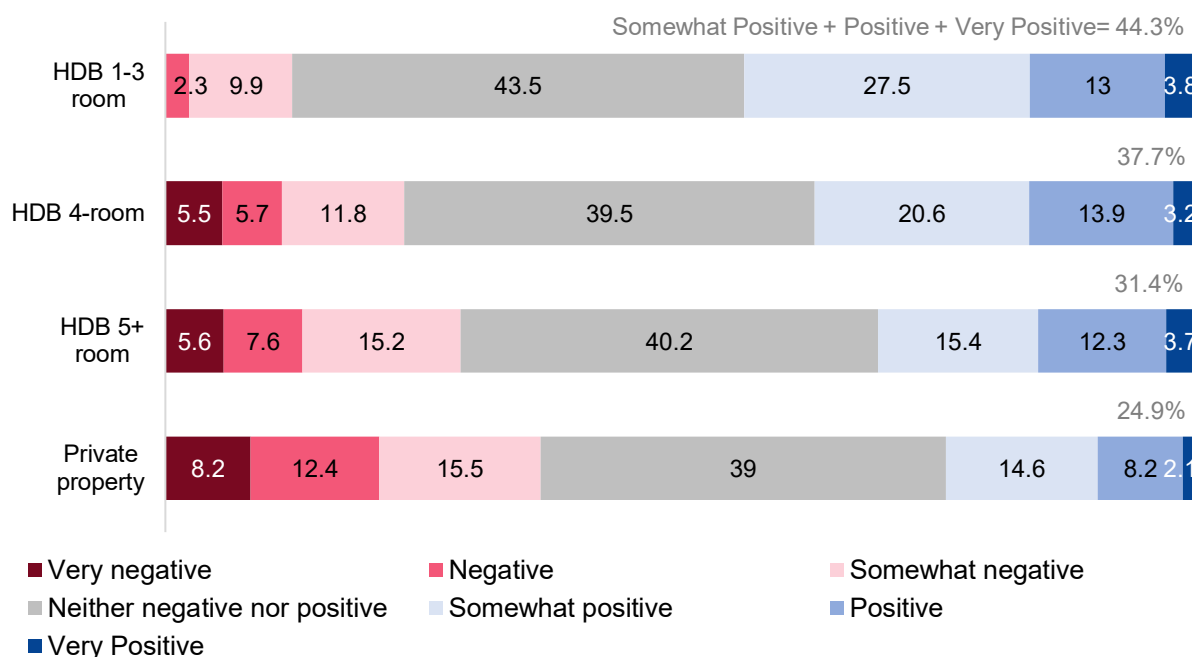


Figure 5.1.1b: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about PSLE and the secondary school posting exercise? I understand how the current PSLE scoring system works



Opinions on the change from T-score to AL varied across housing types. Parents living in smaller HDB flats were more likely to approve of the change of the PSLE T-score system to ALs, while private property owners were the most negative.

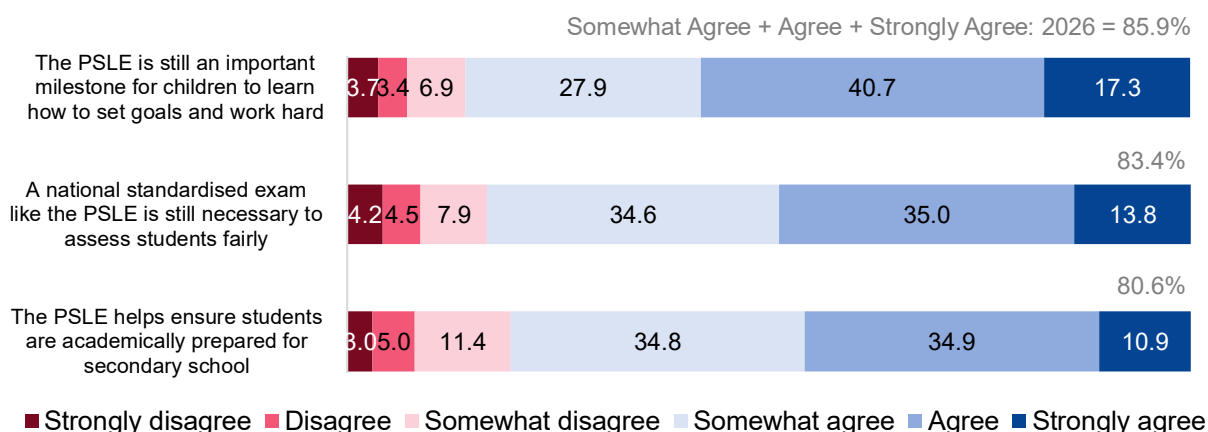
Figure 5.1.1c: Overall, how do you feel about the change from the previous PSLE T-score system to the current Achievement Level (AL) system?



5.1.2 Over eight in 10 see the PSLE as an important checkpoint that is helpful for students' academic journey

Parents perceive the PSLE as a useful checkpoint. Over eight in 10 (85.9 per cent) indicate that it is still an important checkpoint for children to learn how to set goals and work hard, that a national standardised exam like the PSLE is still necessary to assess students fairly, and that it helps to ensure students are academically prepared for secondary school.

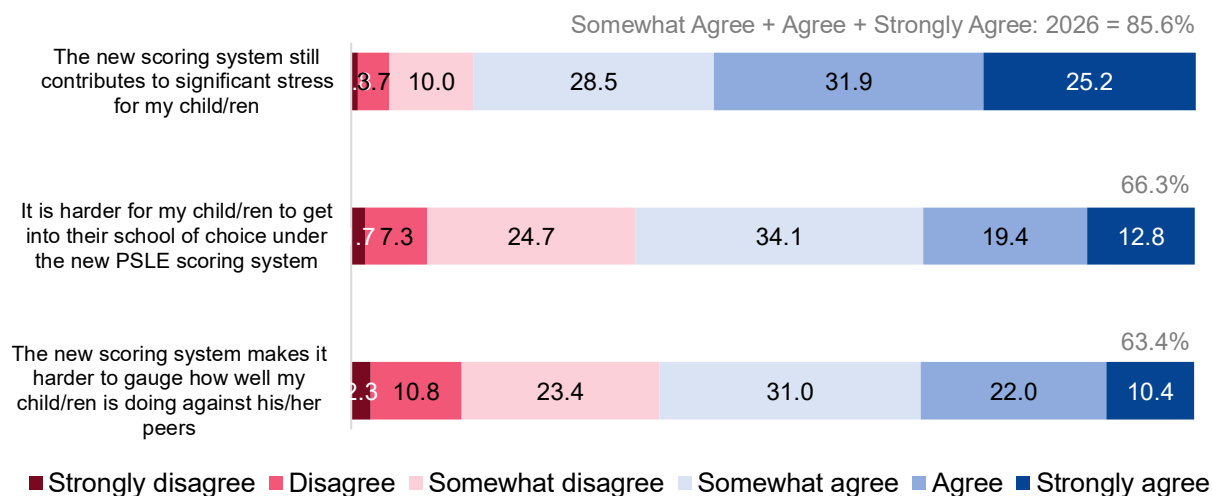
Figure 5.1.2: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about PSLE and the secondary school posting exercise?



5.1.3 Under nine in 10 believe the new system is still stressful for their children, while around two-thirds feel that it is harder for their children to get into their school of choice and that it is harder to gauge their children's performance against their peers

Most (85.6 per cent) parents indicated that the new AL-based PSLE scoring system still contributes to significant stress for their children. In terms of specific impact, 66.3 per cent say that it is harder for their children to get into their school of choice under this new system, and 63.4 per cent say that it is harder to gauge how children are doing against their peers under this new system. Taken together, these findings point to a more complex set of preferences rather than simple misunderstanding of the AL system. Parents broadly report understanding how the system works and many favour a less high-stakes PSLE, but concerns remain about stress, school choice and the reduced precision with which they can gauge their child's relative position. The findings therefore suggest a tension between support for reducing fine differentiation and parents' continuing desire for predictability around school placement and access.

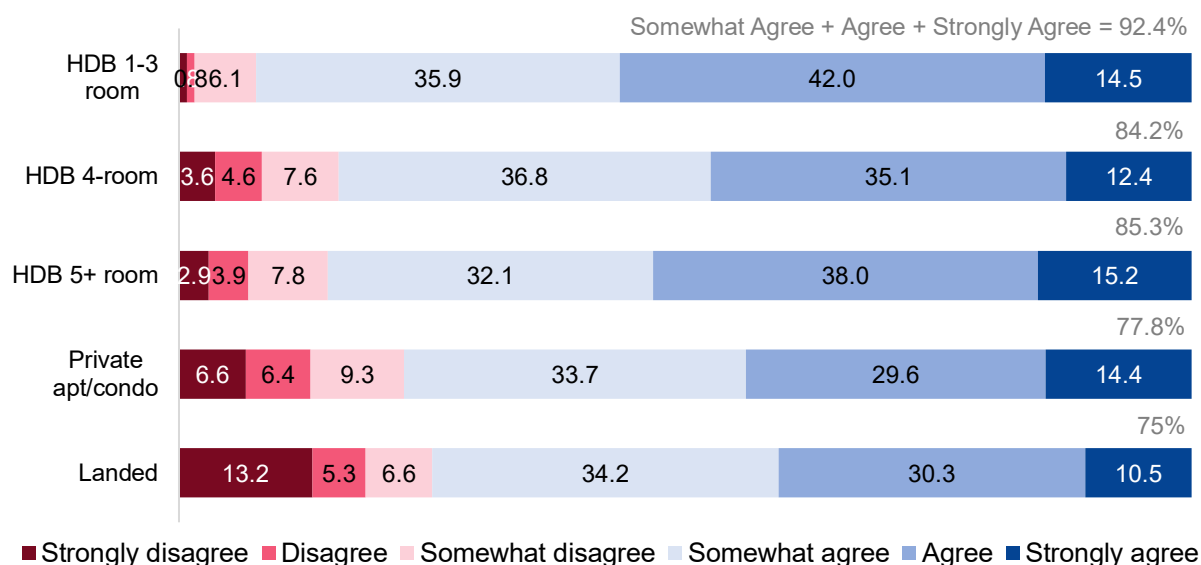
Figure 5.1.3: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about PSLE and the secondary school posting exercise?



5.1.4 Parents residing in smaller housing types are more likely to agree that a national standardised exam like the PSLE is still necessary to assess students fairly, and that the AL scoring system makes it harder to evaluate their child's performance against their peers

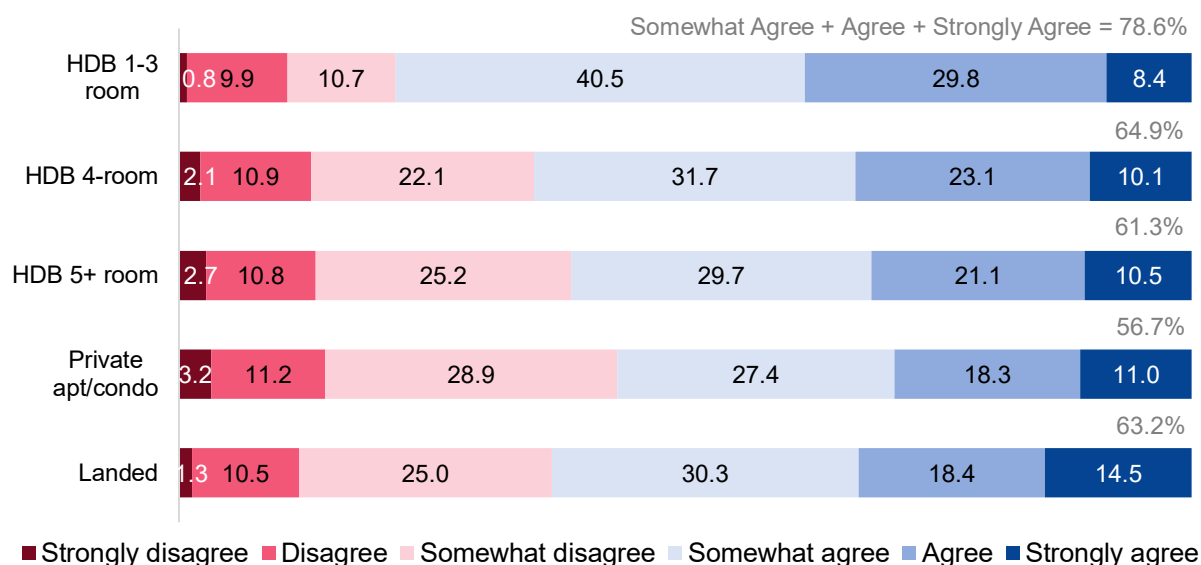
Parents living in HDB 1–3-room flats were the most likely to agree that a national standardised examination such as the PSLE remains necessary to assess students fairly. More than nine in 10 (92.4 per cent) agreed to some extent, compared with around three-quarters of those living in condominiums or private apartments (77.8 per cent) and landed properties (75 per cent). Support remained high across all housing groups, but was strongest among parents living in smaller HDB flats.

Figure 5.1.4a: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about PSLE and the secondary school posting exercise? - "A national standardised exam like the PSLE is still necessary to assess students fairly.", by housing type



At the same time, parents living in HDB 1–3-room flats were also the most likely to say that the new scoring system makes it harder to gauge how well their child is doing relative to peers. Nearly eight in 10 (78.6 per cent) agreed to some extent, compared with 64.9 per cent of HDB 4-room residents, 61.3 per cent of HDB 5-room and larger residents, 56.7 per cent of condominium or private apartment residents, and 63.2 per cent of landed-property residents.

Figure 5.1.4b: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about PSLE and the sec. sch. posting exercise? - "The new scoring system makes it harder to gauge how well my child/ren is doing against his/her peers.", by housing type



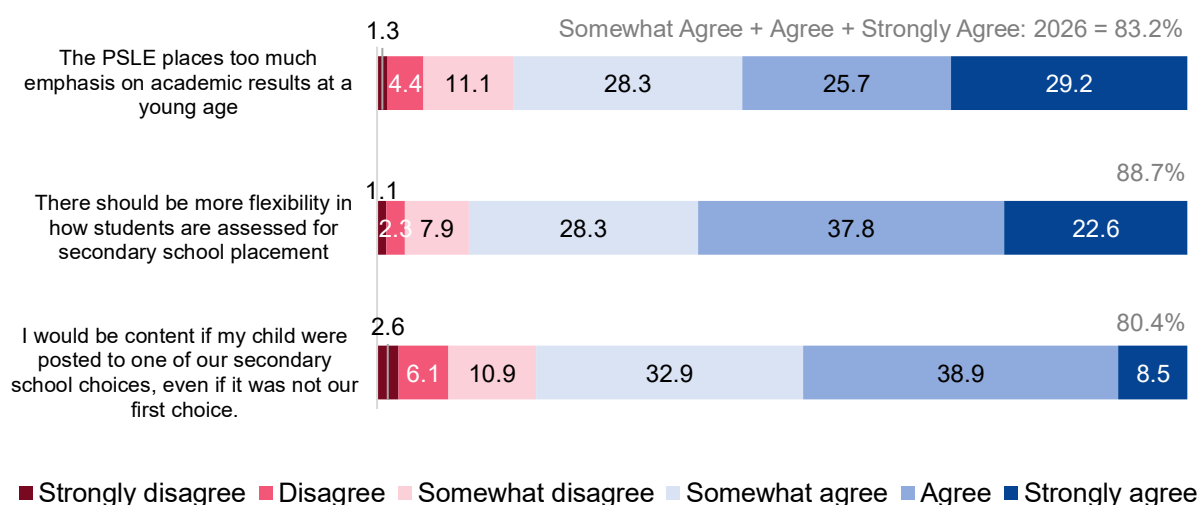
Taken together, these findings suggest that stronger support for standardised assessment can coexist with concern about the reduced precision of the AL system. Among parents living in smaller HDB flats in particular, the PSLE may continue to be valued as a clear and standardised basis for assessment, even while the broader scoring bands are seen as making relative performance less transparent.

5.1.5 Over eight in 10 feel that the PSLE places too much emphasis on academics at a young age, that there should be more flexibility in assessment, and that they would want their child to be posted to a secondary school of their choice

When asked about the impact of the PSLE system, parents expressed some concerns. Over eight in 10 agreed that it places too much emphasis on academic results at a young age, while 88.7 per cent expressed the desire for more flexible forms of

assessment or entry for secondary-school placement. Further, most parents (80.4 per cent) opined that they would be satisfied even if their child was posted to a secondary school that was not their first choice.

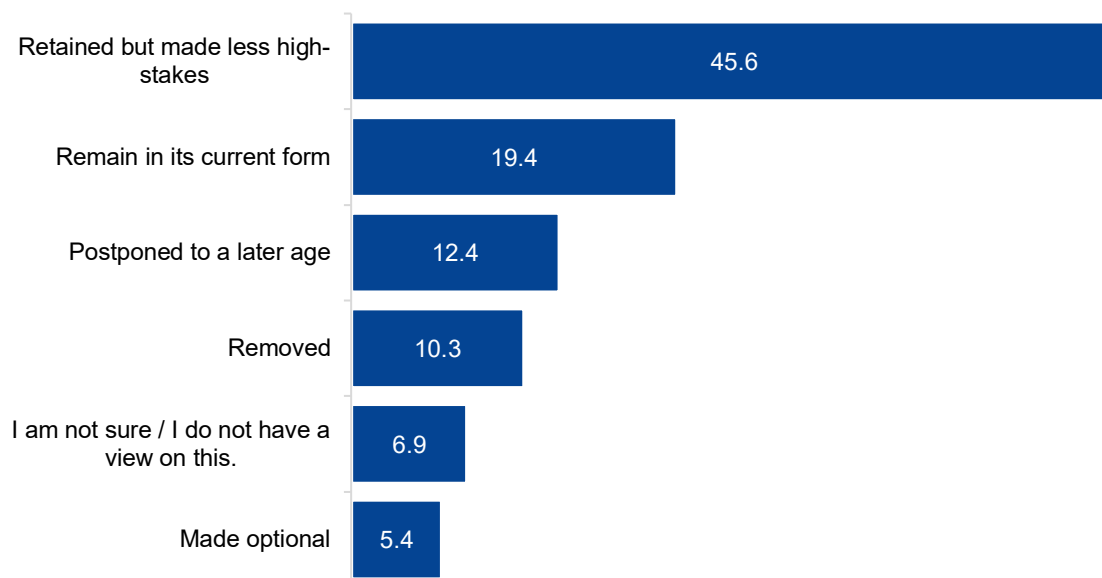
Figure 5.1.5: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about PSLE and the secondary school posting exercise?



5.1.6 Parents still prefer to retain the PSLE in some form; private property dwellers were more likely to suggest postponement

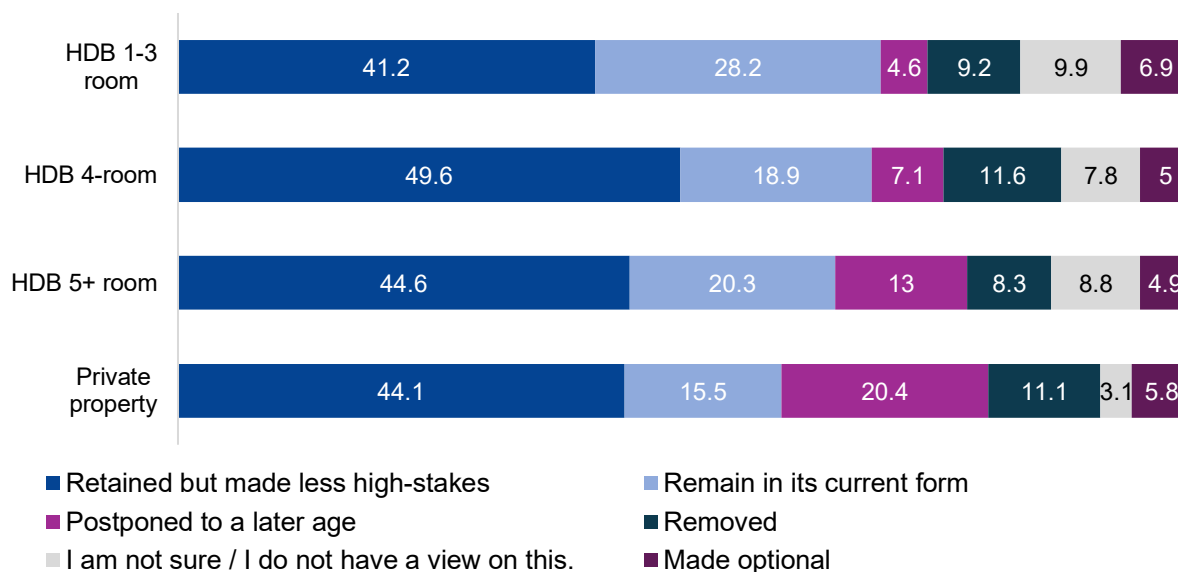
However, when asked directly about their feelings towards the PSLE, nearly half indicated their preference that the PSLE should be retained but made less high-stakes. This was the most popular option compared to the rest. Overall, there seems to be a preference to retain the PSLE in some form, whether it is to be made less high-stakes (45.6 per cent), to continue with the status quo (19.4 per cent), to be postponed (12.4 per cent), or to be made optional (5.4 per cent). Meanwhile, only 10.3 per cent clearly expressed the sentiment of wanting to remove the PSLE.

Figure 5.1.6a: Please select the statement that best describes your view on the PSLE:



Households living in 1-3 room HDB flats were the most positive about the PSLE system, with private property owners being the least supportive. Support for postponement also followed a clear gradient by dwelling type: private property dwellers were the most in favour of postponing the PSLE, while those staying in 1- to 3-room flats were the least in favour.

Figure 5.1.6b: Please select the statement that best describes your view on the PSLE, by housing type

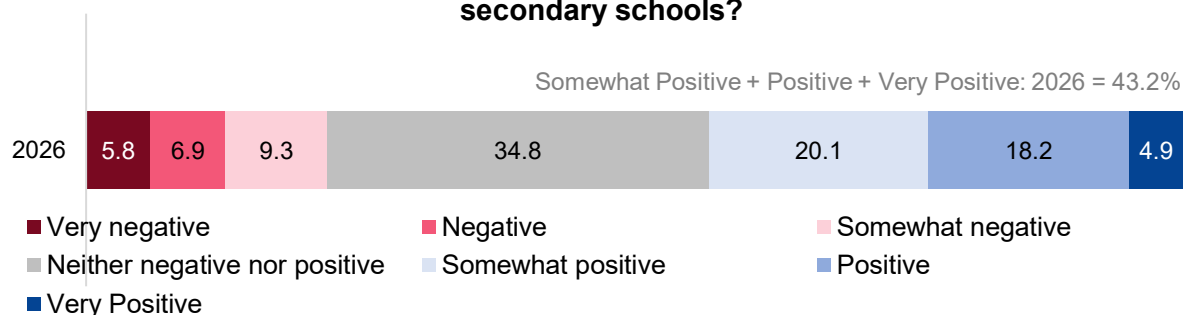


5.2 Views on the DSA scheme

5.2.1 *Over four in 10 were positive about the impact of the DSA scheme; those in smaller flat types were more positive*

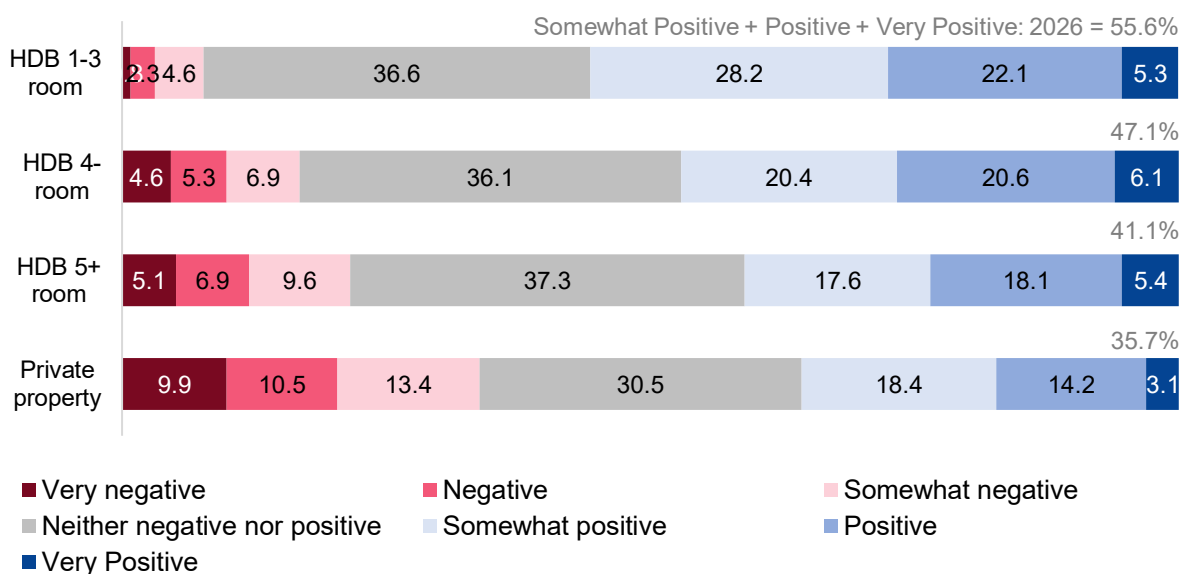
When asked about the overall impact of the DSA scheme on students gaining admission to certain secondary schools, 43.2 per cent indicated to various extents that it is positive, though those who said it was somewhat positive took up nearly half of the group. In addition, another 34.8 per cent felt that it was neither negative nor positive, suggesting that overall opinions of the scheme are neutral but tending towards positive.

Figure 5.2.1a: How do you feel about the overall impact of the DSA scheme for Primary 6 students to gain admission to certain secondary schools?



The DSA scheme was viewed most positively by households living in 1- to 3-room HDB flats, compared with the other housing types. It is possible that parents from this group view DSA as a potential path for social mobility, as it can be a way for children from different socio-economic backgrounds to enter secondary schools with certain desirable characteristics beyond academic achievements.

Figure 5.2.1b: How do you feel about the overall impact of the DSA scheme for Primary 6 students to gain admission to certain secondary schools?, by housing type



5.2.2 While parents knew what the DSA scheme was about, they were less knowledgeable about the details; over three-quarters see it as an alternative pathway if their children do not do well in the PSLE

Parents were asked a series of questions about the DSA to check their perceptions and attitudes towards this policy. Perceptions of DSA were neutral but tended towards positive, given that the overall mean score for all the items combined was 3.76 out of a maximum of 6.

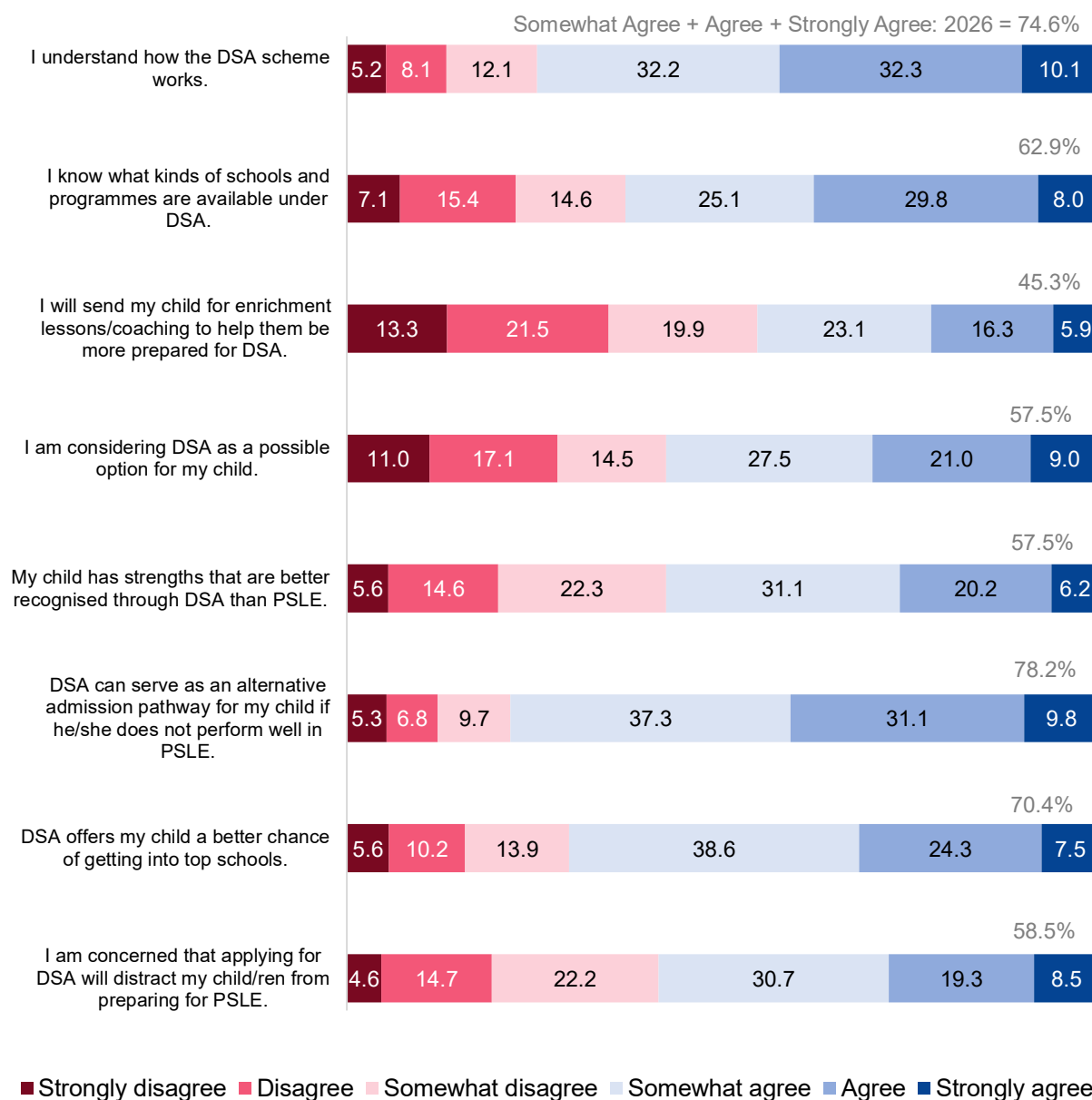
Table 5.2.2a: Overall opinions about DSA, mean scores

Survey wave	Mean score	Standard deviation
2026	3.76	0.83

Looking at the individual items, understanding of the scheme was high, with three out of four parents expressing some degree of understanding. Despite this, a lower proportion, or 62.9 per cent, said that they knew about the schools involved and programmes offered by the DSA.

Slightly over half of parents surveyed were considering the DSA as a possible option for their children, with a similar proportion noting that the DSA better recognised their child's strengths when compared to the PSLE. A similar proportion (58.5 per cent) also expressed concerns that applying for the DSA might distract their children from PSLE preparations. Despite this, 78.2 per cent of parents viewed DSA as a potential hedge against their child performing poorly in PSLE, stating that it provided an alternative admission pathway, while 70.4 per cent agreed that the scheme offers their children a better chance at getting into the top schools.

Figure 5.2.2: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about DSA? (2026)



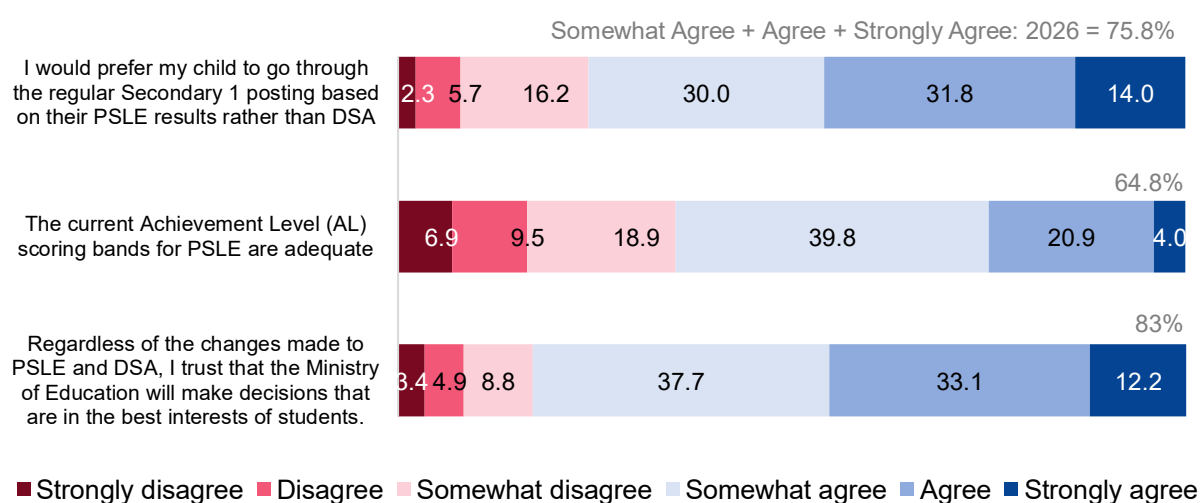
When compared across housing types, those staying in 1- to 3-room flats expressed the most positive views of the DSA scheme in general, with a mean score of 3.97. In comparison, private property dwellers reported the lowest mean score of 3.69.

Table 5.2.2b: Overall opinions about DSA, mean scores by housing type

	Housing type			
	HDB 1-3 room	HDB 4-room	HDB 5+ room	Private property
Mean Score (Standard Deviation)	3.97 (0.74)	3.75 (0.84)	3.74 (0.79)	3.69 (0.86)

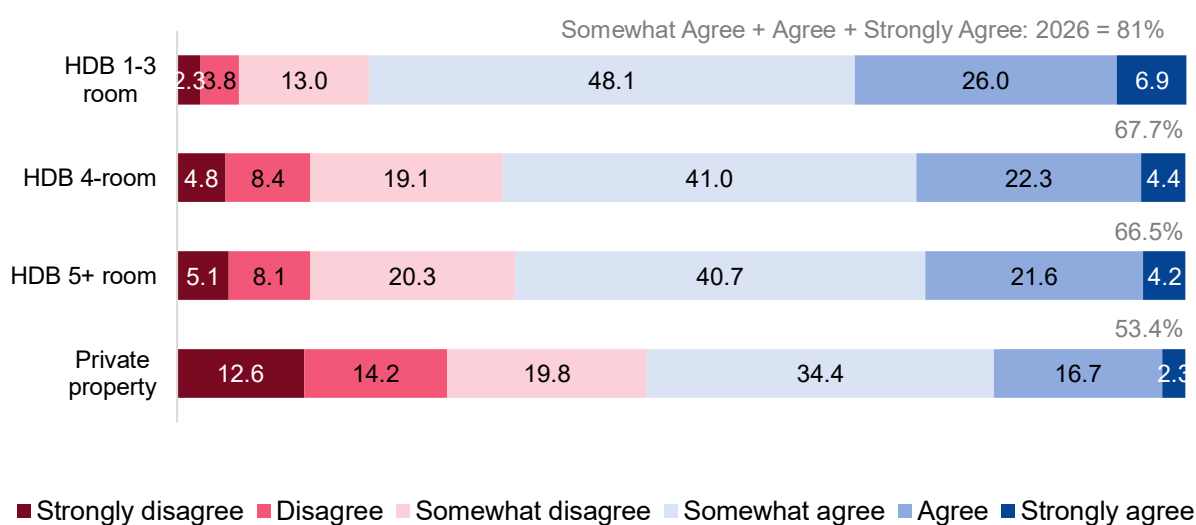
5.2.3 PSLE still preferred over DSA

Overall, parents still preferred PSLE over a direct secondary school admission system. Around three-quarters would prefer that their child enter secondary school based on their PSLE results rather than the DSA, with around two-thirds saying that the existing AL scoring bands were adequate. Trust in MOE's decisions was rather high, with 83 per cent indicating that they believe MOE will make decisions in the best interests of students.

Figure 5.2.3a: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about PSLE and DSA?

Households living in 1-3 room HDB flats were the most satisfied with the current AL scoring bands, with a steady drop in support across the rest of the housing categories. Compared to 81 per cent of this group, just over half, or 53.4 per cent of private property dwellers felt that the current AL bands are adequate.

Figure 5.2.3b: The current Achievement Level (AL) scoring bands for PSLE are adequate, by housing type



5.3 Parental attitudes towards supporting children

5.3.1 Just over half said they are at least moderately confident in supporting their children through PSLE

When asked about their confidence in supporting their children through PSLE and secondary school selection, parents were divided, with slightly more than half expressing confidence. In particular, nearly four in 10 said that they were just moderately confident.

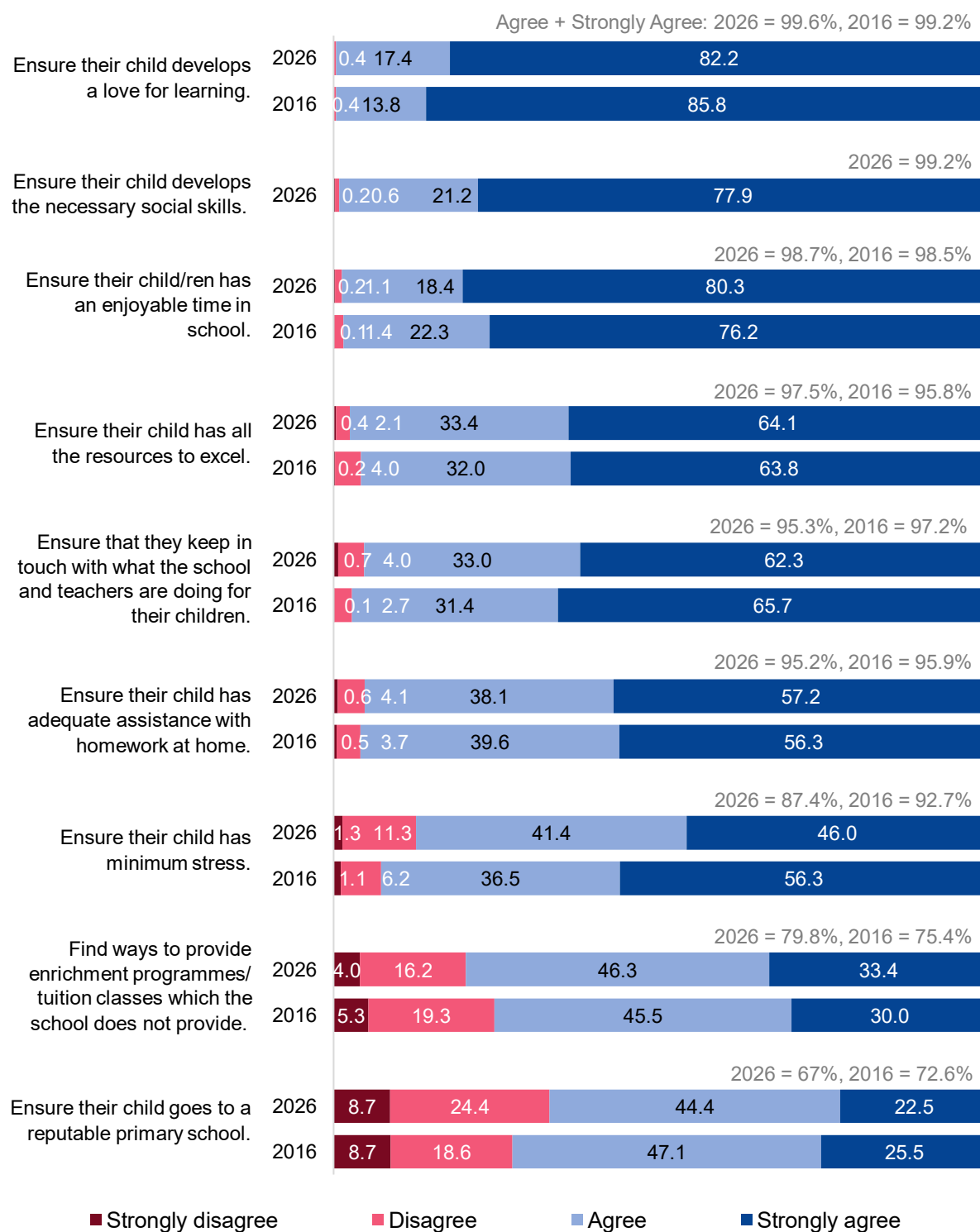
Figure 5.3.1: In general, how confident are you in supporting your child through PSLE preparation and secondary school selection?



5.3.2 Idealised parental roles in child support in primary education remain mostly unchanged

Overall, parents' views on their role in supporting their children through primary school remained broadly consistent between 2016 and 2026. Ensuring that children develop a love for learning continued to receive near-unanimous support, with 99.6 per cent of parents agreeing or strongly agreeing in 2026. Similarly, 99.2 per cent agreed that parents should support the development of their children's social skills. Compared with 2016, however, slightly smaller proportions of parents in 2026 agreed that they should ensure their children experience minimal stress, declining from 92.7 per cent to 87.4 per cent, and that their children attend a reputable primary school, declining from 72.6 per cent to 67 per cent. These represented decreases of 5.3 and 5.6 percentage points respectively.

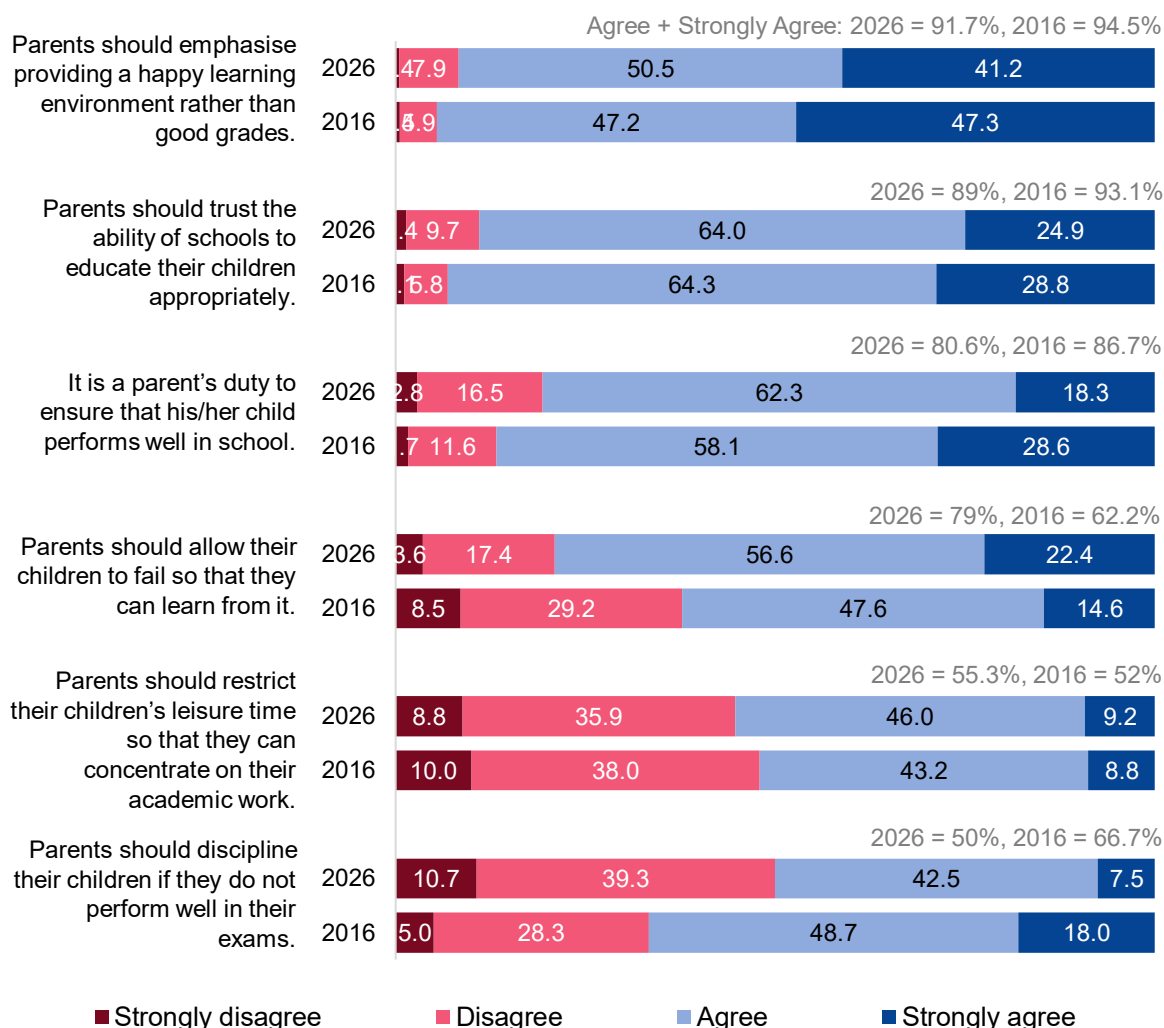
Figure 5.3.2: If parents are to adequately support their children through their primary school education they should..., responses by wave



5.3.3 While parents continue to say a happy learning environment is more important than good grades and that they should trust schools to provide appropriate education; attitudes towards failure and discipline have changed significantly

While parents continue to emphasise a happy learning environment over good grades, and generally trust schools to educate their children, attitudes towards failure and discipline have changed substantially. Compared to 2016, there was a 16.8 percentage point increase in parents agreeing that they should allow their children to fail so that they can learn from it, and a 16.6-percentage-point decline in the proportion of parents agreeing that children should be disciplined for performing poorly in exams in 2026.

Figure 5.3.3: How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the role of parents in their children's primary school education?, responses by wave

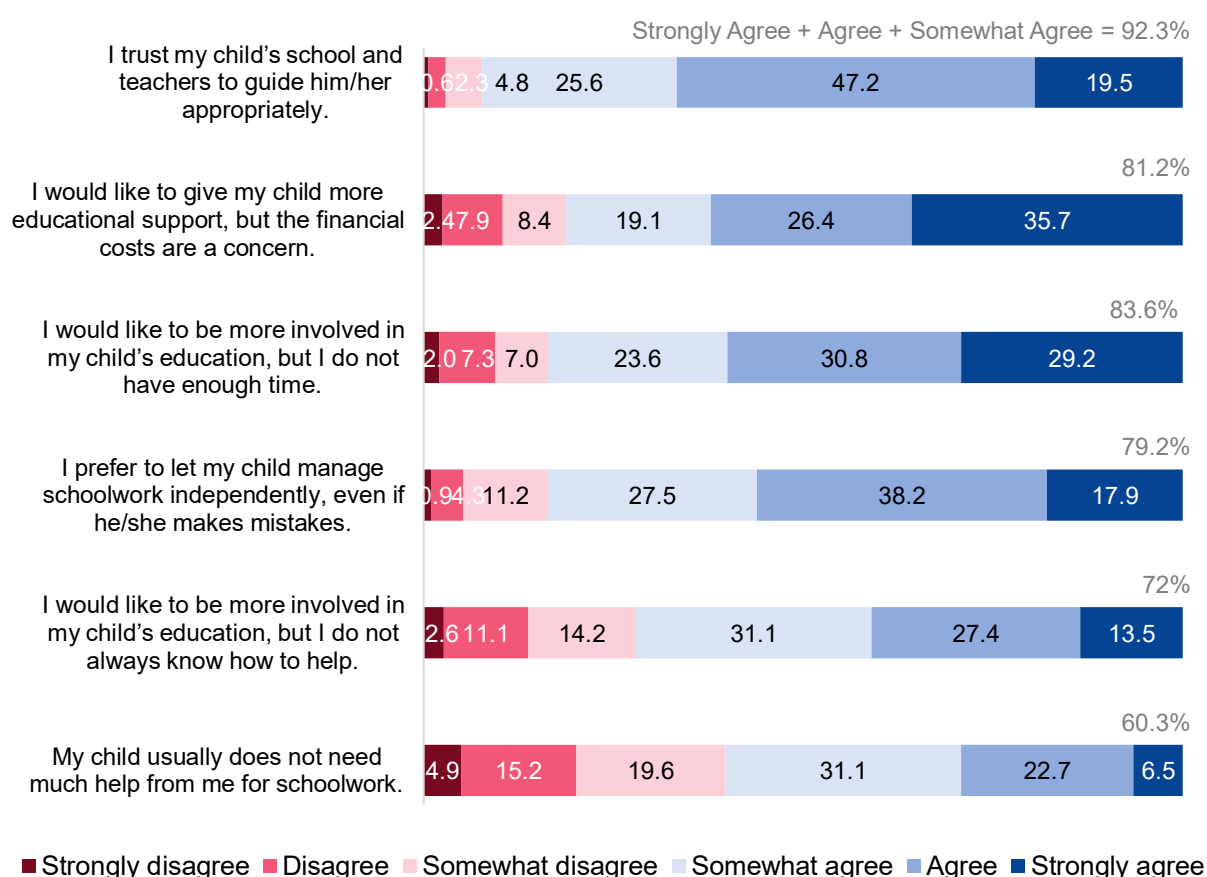


5.3.4 Over nine in 10 say they trust school and teachers to guide their children appropriately, though at least seven in 10 cite constraints despite wanting to be more involved

When asked about parental involvement in children's primary school education, parents expressed a desire to be more involved amid high levels of trust in the school, teachers, and their children's independence. Over nine in 10 said they trust their child's school and teachers to guide them appropriately, with 66.7 per cent indicating

agreement or strong agreement. Nearly eight in 10 say that they prefer to let their child manage schoolwork independently, even if they make mistakes, while a smaller proportion (60.3 per cent) felt that their child usually does not need much help for schoolwork. However, over eight in 10 also express a desire to be more involved if not for financial and time constraints, while 72 per cent also say they do not always know how to help.

Figure 5.3.4: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about your involvement in your child's primary school education? (2026)



6 PARENTAL ARCHETYPES AND PROFILES

This chapter uses cluster analysis to identify broad parental archetypes based on achievement orientation, process-development orientation, parental stress and ideals of parental involvement. Building on the three archetypes identified in the 2016 study (Mathew et al., 2017), the 2026 analysis again identifies three broad groups: Loving Lions, New-School Parents and Detached Realists, the latter evolving from the Old-School Parent profile identified in 2016.

The archetypes illustrate that achievement and holistic orientations need not be opposites. Loving Lions, the largest group in 2026, score highly on both orientations and are also the most intensely involved and stressed. New-School Parents are more strongly oriented towards holistic development and report lower stress and involvement, while Detached Realists score lower across the four clustering dimensions and adopt a less directive orientation towards their children's education.

The remainder of the chapter examines how these archetypes differ beyond the dimensions used to construct them: in their views on tuition and educational stress, secondary-school choice, tuition and enrichment practices, and attitudes towards PSLE, the AL system and DSA. These comparisons show how similar broad priorities can translate into different parental strategies, levels of investment and responses to education policy.

6.1 Archetypes of parental attitudes

We made use of K-means cluster analysis, a data-reduction technique that groups observations according to their similarity (Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health, n.d.). This technique allowed us to separate respondents into different groups with similar perspectives along four dimensions to identify the main parental archetypes in Singapore.

We grouped parents by their mindsets and stressors towards education along four dimensions, namely achievement orientation (AO), process development orientation (PO), parental stress (PS), and ideals of parental involvement (PII), for both the 2016 and 2026 samples. This allowed us to compare the derived archetypes more directly and to track the changes in profiles over these two waves. The AO measures the degree to which parents prioritise competition and homework as a way to evaluate their children's primary school. Meanwhile, the PO takes a more holistic approach to students' development, including social-emotional development, individual interests, and developing character and values. PS examines the degree to which parents feel anxiety over their children's education preparations and future, while PII examines the manner in which parents believe they should support their children's education.

Table 6.1: Cluster dimensions

Dimension	Included components
Achievement orientation (AO)	In your opinion, how important are the following characteristics in determining a good primary school? <i>Competitive environment</i>
	In your opinion, how important are the following characteristics in determining a good primary school? <i>Lots of homework</i>
Process development orientation (PO)	In your opinion, how important are the following characteristics in determining a good primary school? <i>Teachers who care for the students' social-emotional development</i>
	In your opinion, how important are the following characteristics in determining a good primary school? <i>Caters to individual students' needs, interests and strengths</i>
	In your opinion, how important are the following characteristics in determining a good primary school? <i>Emphasis on character and values</i>
Parental stress (PS)	Do you feel stressed or anxious over your child/ren's education due to the following factors? <i>Helping child/ren with the many tests and examinations in school</i>
	Do you feel stressed or anxious over your child/ren's education due to the following factors? <i>Not knowing how to assist child/ren with their studies because syllabus is too challenging</i>
	Do you feel stressed or anxious over your child/ren's education due to the following factors? <i>Concerned that child/ren may lose out in the education system in the long run</i>
	Do you feel stressed or anxious over your child/ren's education due to the following factors? <i>Having to help child/ren with schoolwork</i>
Ideals of parental involvement (PII)	If parents are to adequately support their children through their primary school education they should: <i>Ensure their child has minimum stress</i>
	If parents are to adequately support their children through their primary school education they should: <i>Ensure their child has all the resources to excel</i>
	If parents are to adequately support their children through their primary school education they should: <i>Ensure their child has adequate assistance with homework at home</i>
	If parents are to adequately support their children through their primary school education they should: <i>Ensure that they keep in touch with what the school and teachers are doing for their children</i>
	If parents are to adequately support their children through their primary school education they should: <i>Find ways to provide enrichment programmes/tuition classes which the school does not provide</i>

6.1.1 Three distinct parental archetypes in both waves reflect shifting parent attitudes towards their children's education

Based on the four dimensions listed above, we derived three parental archetypes in both waves, with the changes reflecting the shifts in perspectives and priorities over the years. The archetypes identified in 2026 were **Loving Lions**, **New-School Parents**, and **Detached Realists**.

Loving Lions comprised 40.8 per cent of the total 2026 sample, a slight increase from 37.5 per cent in 2016. These Lions are characterised by high scores in all the cluster dimensions, and aspire to attain success in all aspects for their children while feeling the most pressure. New-School Parents make up 34.3 per cent of the 2026 sample; broadly stable from 33.9 per cent in 2016. They are more likely to prioritise the holistic aspects of their children's development and place less emphasis on academic achievement, while feeling lower levels of parenting stress and reporting lower levels of parental involvement. The remaining 24.9 per cent of parents in 2026 are Detached Realists, a slight decrease from the 28.6 per cent represented by Old-School Parents in 2016. Detached Realists score low or below average in all dimensions, and represent a less involved parenting style in which they provide resources or support without a strong value stance.

Table 6.1.1a: Archetype characteristics, by dimension

Dimension	Archetypes*		
	Loving Lions (Loving Lions)	New-School Parents (New-School Parents)	Detached Realists (Old-School Parents)
	40.8% (37.5%)	34.3% (33.9%)	24.9% (28.6%)
Achievement orientation (AO)	High (High)	Below average (Low)	Low (Medium)
Process development orientation (PO)	High (High)	Medium (High)	Low (Low)
Parental stress (PS)	High (High)	Low (Medium)	Below average (Medium)
Ideals of parental involvement (PII)	High (High)	Low (Low)	Below average (High)

*2016 parental archetypes and how they score on the various dimensions are presented in parentheses

The demographic profiles of the three archetypes also differed in terms of educational attainment and housing type. New-School Parents were the most educationally advantaged of the three groups: 76.7 per cent held a university degree or higher, compared with 62.7 per cent of Loving Lions and 54.8 per cent of Detached Realists. Correspondingly, a smaller proportion of New-School Parents had ITE, Higher Nitec or polytechnic qualifications (17.2 per cent), compared with 27.9 per cent of Loving Lions and 33.2 per cent of Detached Realists.

Housing patterns broadly reflected these differences. New-School Parents were the most likely to live in private housing, with 30.8 per cent residing in condominiums or private apartments and 5.5 per cent in landed properties. By comparison, 32.5 per cent of Loving Lions and 26.3 per cent of Detached Realists lived in private housing overall. Detached Realists were also more likely to live in HDB 1–3-room flats (14.2 per cent), compared with 8.3 per cent of Loving Lions and 5.4 per cent of New-School Parents. Taken together, the education and housing profiles suggest that New-School

Parents tend to be more socio-economically advantaged, Detached Realists less so, while Loving Lions generally occupy an intermediate position.

Table 6.1.1b: Detailed demographic characteristics of archetypes

Demographic variable		Archetypes		
		Loving Lions	New-School Parents	Detached Realists
Education	PSLE and below	2.3%	0.4%	3%
	GCE O/N Level	6.4%	5.4%	7.1%
	GCE A Level	0.7%	0.4%	1.9%
	ITE/ H Nitec/ Poly	27.9%	17.2%	33.2%
	Degree and above	62.7%	76.7%	54.8%
Housing type	HDB 1- 3 room	8.3%	5.4%	14.2%
	HDB 4-room	34.2%	30.2%	29.9%
	HDB 5+-room	25%	28.1%	29.6%
	Private apartment/ condo	27.5%	30.8%	21.9%
	Landed	5.1%	5.5%	4.4%

6.2 Loving Lions in 2026 are most likely to think tuition is necessary for academic success, that Singapore's education system causes unnecessary stress, and report higher stress

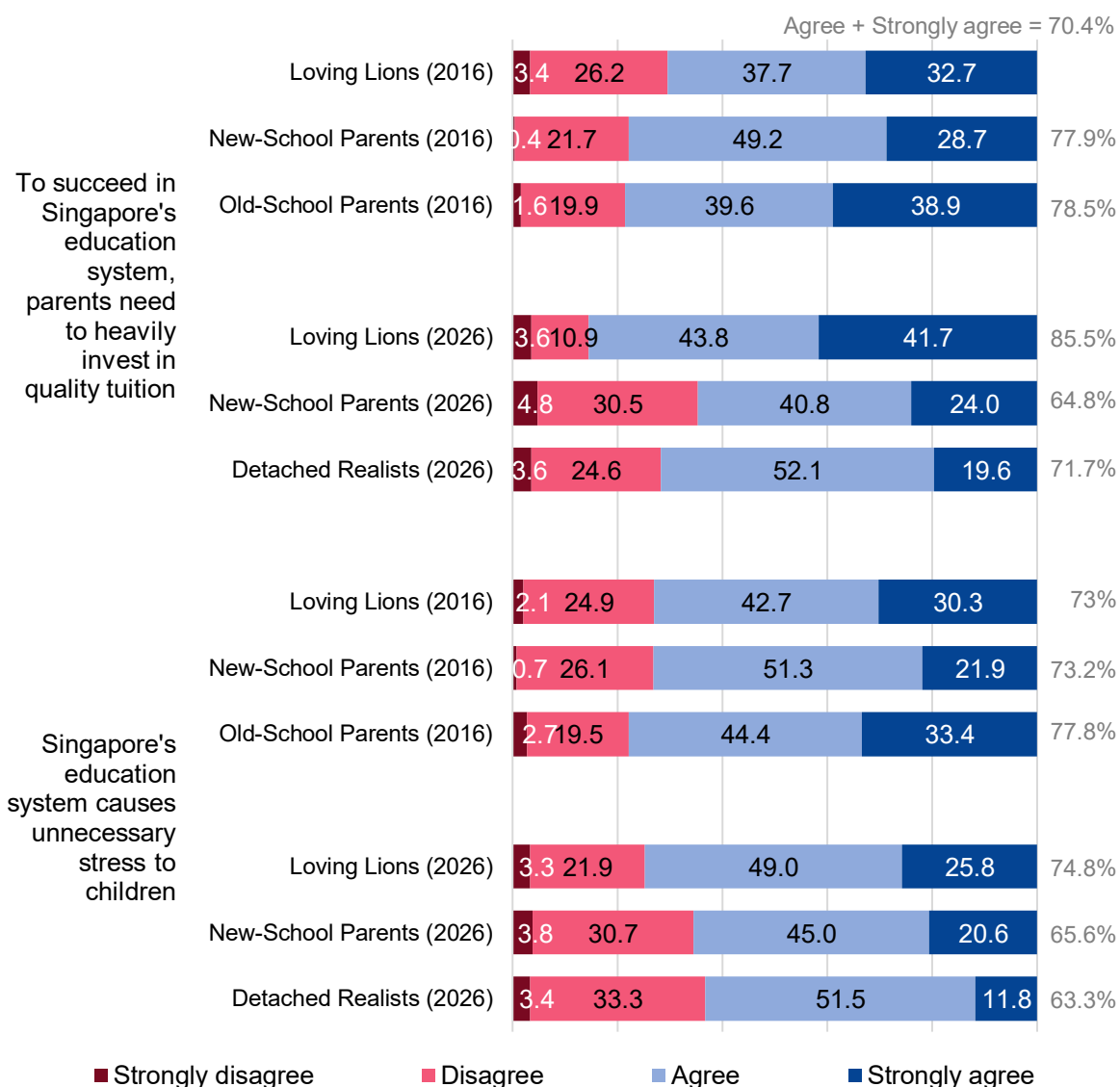
These three parental archetypes differ in many ways when it comes to their perspectives towards various areas of parenting and the education system. As we collected data for these items in both waves, we have also presented the cross-wave comparisons.

Loving Lions in 2026 were much more likely than the other two archetypes to say that parents need to invest heavily in quality tuition. Over four in 10 strongly agreed with this statement, compared to 24 per cent of New-School Parents and 19.6 per cent of

Detached Realists, with the total proportion of those indicating some level of agreement going up to 85.5 per cent (compared to 64.8 per cent of New-School Parents and 71.7 per cent of Detached Realists). This preference is a marked increase compared to the Loving Lions in 2016, where the group was actually least likely to say that parents need to invest heavily in quality tuition to succeed in Singapore's education system. In contrast, New-School Parents and Detached Realists (formerly Old-School Parents) actually were less likely to agree with this statement in 2026.

Loving Lions in 2026 are also the most likely to say that the Singapore education system causes unnecessary stress to children, with 74.8 per cent indicating this compared to 65.5 per cent of New-School Parents and 63.3 per cent of Detached Realists. While the proportion of Loving Lions agreeing to this statement did not shift very much compared to 2016, there was a decrease in the agreement rate for the other two archetypes.

Figure 6.2: Opinions on Singapore's education system, by wave and archetype



It is thus not surprising to note that Loving Lions also reported the highest parental stress scores compared to the other two archetypes. It was also the only group that reported a score above 3, indicating that they experienced stressful events about their children's education at least once every two to three months, while the other two archetypes experienced these events less frequently.

Table 6.2: Mean scores of parental stress, by archetypes

Loving Lions	New-School Parents	Detached Realists
3.25	2.55	2.82

6.3 Loving Lions assigned heavier degrees of importance to all the criteria groups in assessing secondary school choices

When it comes to choosing secondary schools, the three archetypes were similar in how they prioritised the different types of criteria, with the top two being fit and practicality. However, the degree of importance assigned to these criteria differed. Loving Lions reported the highest mean scores across all five criteria groups, while the relative ordering of New-School Parents and Detached Realists varied by criterion. New-School Parents placed Opportunity above Standing, whereas the reverse was true for Loving Lions and Detached Realists.

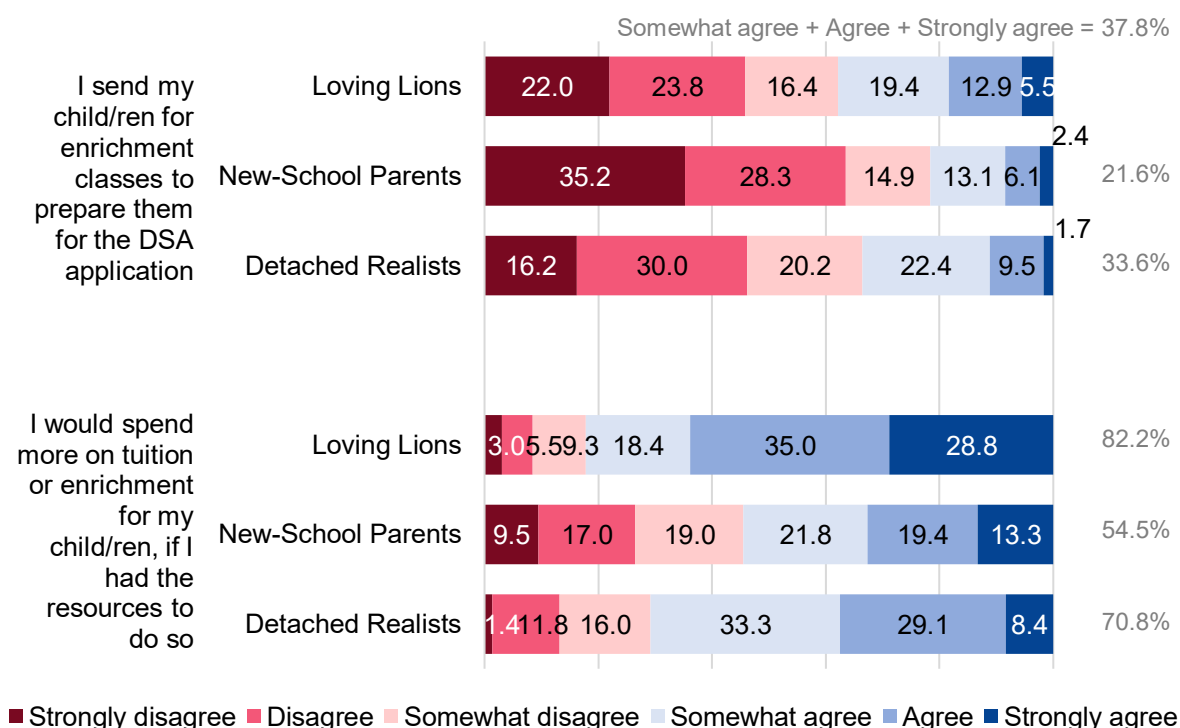
Table 6.3: Mean scores of secondary school criteria, by archetypes

Rank	Archetypes		
	Loving Lions	New-School Parents	Detached Realists
1	Fit (5.00)	Fit (4.92)	Fit (4.16)
2	Practicality (4.62)	Practicality (4.44)	Practicality (4.05)
3	Standing (4.13)	Opportunity (3.58)	Standing (3.53)
4	Opportunity (4.04)	Standing (3.48)	Opportunity (3.35)
5	Belonging (2.74)	Belonging (2.23)	Belonging (2.47)

6.4 Loving Lions were the most enthusiastic about tuition and enrichment, though New-School Parents spent more on enrichment on average

Loving Lions were the most likely to want to use tuition or enrichment to help their children succeed in their academic journey, followed by Detached Realists. While over one-third of Loving Lions and Detached Realists indicated to varying degrees that they send their children to enrichment classes to prepare them for the DSA application, just 21.6 per cent of New-School Parents said the same. In fact, 35.2 per cent of this group strongly disagreed with this statement. A similar trend was found when asked about whether they would spend more on tuition or enrichment if they had the resources to do so. Loving Lions were the most likely to agree with the statement, followed by Detached Realists, and then New-School Parents.

Figure 6.4: Opinions on enrichment and tuition, by archetype



When it comes to actual practice, however, some differences were observed. Loving Lions were mostly consistent with their proactiveness and hands-on attitude in helping their children, spending the most time compared to the other two archetypes on tuition, homework, and coaching by family members in both 2016 and 2026. They also spent the most on tuition in both years. Meanwhile, Detached Realists in 2026 followed relatively closely behind Loving Lions in terms of hours spent on homework, tuition, and coaching by a family member. This was a departure from 2016, where the Old-School Parents spent the least time on average compared to the other two archetypes. However, this archetype continued to spend the least on tuition and enrichment in 2026.

Interestingly, New-School Parents were actually the ones spending the most time and money on enrichment for their children on average compared to the other two parental archetypes in both years. In 2026, while Loving Lions did not lag far behind in terms of mean number of hours, they spent nearly \$100 less on enrichment compared to New-School Parents when comparing mean expenditures. Given that they did not differ in the 2026 median expenditure for enrichment, it indicates that the New-School Parents spending above the midpoint had significantly higher spending compared to Loving Lions. Hence, it is possible that their expressed sentiments on spending more on tuition and enrichment may reflect that they are selective about external investment, rather than reject tuition and enrichment altogether. Given that these archetypes differ quite clearly by socio-economic status, these differences also suggest that parents might vary their strategies according to the amount of resources they have, to try to give their children the best help they can provide.

Table 6.4a: Mean and median hours spent per week on preparation outside school, by archetypes

Hours spent on:		Archetypes		
		Loving Lions	New-School Parents	Old-School Parents / Detached Realists
Homework	2016	Mean = 6.75 Median = 5.00	Mean = 6.47 Median = 5.00	Mean = 6.12 Median = 5.00
	2026	Mean = 4.49 Median = 4.00	Mean = 4.06 Median = 3.00	Mean = 4.27 Median = 3.00
Tuition	2016	Mean = 3.86 Median = 3.00	Mean = 2.89 Median = 2.00	Mean = 2.77 Median = 2.00
	2026	Mean = 3.99 Median = 3.00	Mean = 3.03 Median = 2.00	Mean = 3.52 Median = 3.00
Enrichment	2016	Mean = 1.54 Median = 1.00	Mean = 1.64 Median = 1.00	Mean = 0.94 Median = 0.00
	2026	Mean = 2.26 Median = 2.00	Mean = 2.65 Median = 2.00	Mean = 2.10 Median = 1.50
Academic coaching by family member	2016	Mean = 5.15 Median = 4.00	Mean = 4.08 Median = 3.00	Mean = 4.09 Median = 3.00
	2026	Mean = 4.84 Median = 4.00	Mean = 3.35 Median = 2.00	Mean = 4.20 Median = 3.00

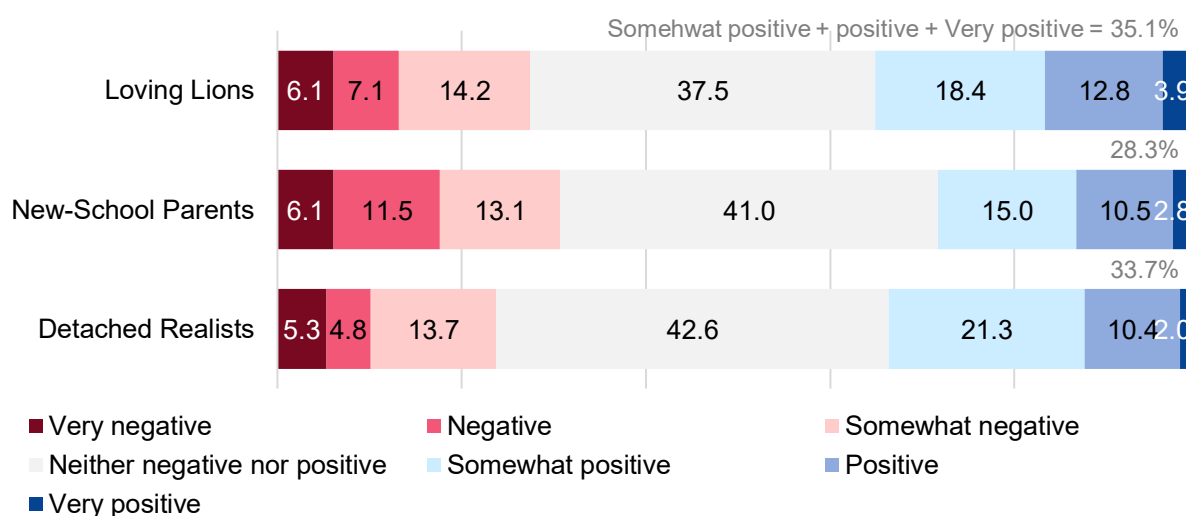
Table 6.4b: Mean and median expenditure on tuition and enrichment, by archetypes

Expenditure on:		Archetypes		
		Loving Lions	New-School Parents	Old-School Parents / Detached Realists
Tuition	2016	Mean = \$349 Median = \$266	Mean = \$311 Median = \$200	Mean = \$218 Median = \$150
	2026	Mean = \$743 Median = \$600	Mean = \$673 Median = \$500	Mean = \$632 Median = \$500
Enrichment	2016	Mean = \$116 Median = \$10	Mean = \$148 Median = \$60	Mean = \$70 Median = \$0
	2026	Mean = \$341 Median = \$300	Mean = \$433 Median = \$300	Mean = \$279 Median = \$200

6.5 All three archetypes were more positive about the DSA scheme compared to the AL system; they were also more likely to say that PSLE should be retained but made less high-stakes

When asked about how they felt about the change from the previous PSLE T-score system to the current AL system, the most popular response across all three archetypes was to indicate neutrality. However, Loving Lions and Detached Realists were slightly more likely to say that the change was positive compared to New-School Parents.

Figure 6.5a: Overall, how do you feel about the change from the previous PSLE T-score system to the current Achievement Level (AL) system?, by archetype



Asked specifically about the PSLE system, the prevailing sentiment across archetypes was also to keep it in some form, but with some changes. The most popular choice by far was to make it less high-stakes, while keeping the status quo was the second most chosen option.

Table 6.5a: Opinions about PSLE, by archetypes

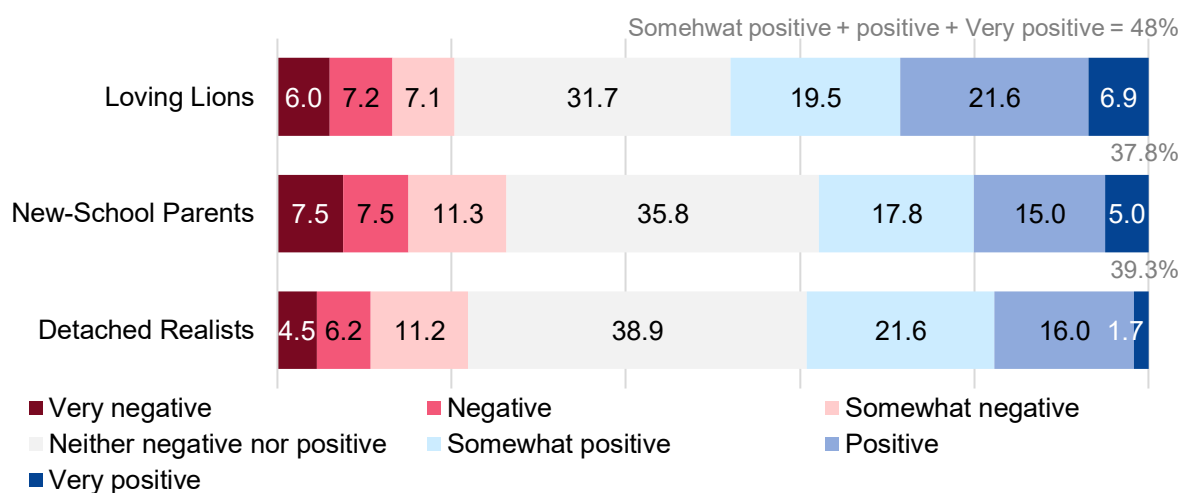
Rank	Archetypes		
	Loving Lions	New-School Parents	Detached Realists
1	Should be retained but made less high-stakes (45.8%)	Should be retained but made less high-stakes (49.3%)	Should be retained but made less high-stakes (41.2%)
2	Remain in its current form (15.9%)	Remain in its current form (17%)	Remain in its current form (27.2%)
3	Should be removed (12.3%)	Should be postponed to a later age (14.9%)	Should be postponed to a later age (11.2%)
4	Should be postponed to a later age (11.7%)	Should be removed (10.7%)	Not sure (7.8%)
5	Not sure (7.7%)	Not sure (4.8%)	Should be removed (6.4%)
6	Should be made optional (6.6%)	Should be made optional (3.4%)	Should be made optional (6.2%)

Meanwhile, sentiments towards the DSA were slightly more positive compared to the use of the AL system, with at least one-third indicating that it is positive. Loving Lions were the most positive about the scheme, with nearly half indicating that it has a positive impact. When opinions on different aspects of the DSA scheme were aggregated, Loving Lions remained the most positive about it, followed by Detached Realists and then New-School Parents.

Table 6.5b: Mean scores of opinions about DSA, by archetypes

Loving Lions	New-School Parents	Detached Realists
3.93	3.59	3.67

Figure 6.5b: How do you feel about the overall impact of the DSA scheme for Primary 6 students to gain admission to certain secondary schools?, by archetype



7 CONCLUSION

The findings show that parental attitudes towards education in Singapore have shifted in the past decade from academic competition towards holistic development. However, this shift is not necessarily linear, with a large portion of parents increasingly holding both orientations at once. Parents continue to value what a school's education can provide to their child in terms of character, self-discipline, social-emotional development, and a happy learning environment, and place less importance than parents did in 2016 on several conventional markers of a "good" primary school, including competitive environments, alumni networks and records of academic achievement. Parents are also more willing to say that children should be allowed to fail and learn, and less willing to endorse disciplining children for poor examination performance. Yet these attitudinal changes coexist with continued concern about academic positioning, greater use of tuition and enrichment, and rising expenditure on both. Educational ambition is not necessarily declining, though it is being expressed through a broader combination of academic, developmental and wellbeing goals.

The study also reveals an important apparent paradox in educational stress. The proportion agreeing that Singapore's education system causes children unnecessary stress fell from 76.3 per cent in 2016 to 68.7 per cent in 2026. At the same time, manifestations of parental stress became more common: the proportion of parents who reported arguing with their spouse over their children's education – ranging from at least once in the past year or up to once a week or more - increased from 42.8 per cent to 59.7 per cent, while the proportion who reported feeling stressed over their

children's education rose from 73.1 per cent to 87.9 per cent. The content of anxiety has also changed; concerns directly associated with tests, examinations and schoolwork became less prominent, while worries that children were not achieving the grades of which they were capable, might lose out in the longer term, or could not keep up with what was taught became more widespread. These results are consistent with a shift from immediate assessment pressures, perhaps due to the decreased prominence of frequent testing, towards wider uncertainty about children's future opportunities.

A similar tension is visible in parents' use of private supplementary education. Mean weekly homework time fell from 6.46 hours in 2016 to 4.30 hours in 2026, while mean time spent on tuition rose modestly and enrichment time increased more substantially. Reported mean and median expenditure on both tuition and enrichment also rose in nominal terms. Most strikingly, 89.8 per cent of parents agreed that children in Singapore spend too much time on tuition and enrichment, yet 70.2 per cent said that they would spend more if they had the resources, and around half reported feeling pressure because other parents did so. These results suggest that individual parents may dislike the aggregate burden while still considering participation prudent for their own child. Tuition is principally understood as a means of improving examination performance and keeping up with schoolwork, whereas enrichment is more commonly associated with developing skills not taught in school, although a minority also use it strategically for DSA preparation.

School-choice findings reinforce the coexistence of holistic and positional considerations. For secondary schools, fit was the most important broad criterion and

practicality ranked second. Parents strongly valued character, values, discipline, support for weaker students and their child's own preference in decisions related to secondary school choice. Transport convenience and proximity were also important. Nevertheless, school cut-off points were important to 75.8 per cent of parents and remained the most salient indicator of school standing. Academic signals have therefore not disappeared, but sit alongside a wider set of developmental and practical considerations.

Differences across housing types also show why a single account of the "Singapore parent" is inadequate. Parents living in larger HDB flats and private housing generally placed greater emphasis on some holistic educational outcomes, while private-property residents attached relatively greater importance to school standing. Parents living in smaller HDB flats reported greater anxiety about their children keeping up academically and getting along with peers, and were also more supportive of standardised assessment and more positive towards DSA. Additionally, they were more likely to view enrichment as preparation for DSA, while parents living in private housing generally reported spending more time on tuition and enrichment. At the same time, parents residing in HDB housing were more likely to say that they would spend more on tuition and enrichment if they had the resources to do so. Taken together, these patterns suggest that families in different housing circumstances may adopt different educational strategies and face different constraints. They should not be reduced to a simple contrast between more competitive and less engaged groups of parents.

The policy findings point towards parental interests in reducing stakes of examinations and greater ease of obtaining a secondary school that they want; fewer parents favoured abolishing the PSLE altogether. Although 40 per cent were neutral towards the AL system and 85.6 per cent believed that it still caused significant stress, parents continued to regard the PSLE as a useful and fair checkpoint. The largest group preferred to retain it while making it less high-stakes. DSA was seen positively by 43.2 per cent and was widely regarded as an alternative pathway, but parents still preferred PSLE-based posting and were less knowledgeable about the schools and programmes available through DSA. Policy communication should consequently address not only the mechanics of scoring but also uncertainty about school choice, progression routes and the consequences of different pathways.

A second implication is that reducing pressure requires attention beyond assessment design. More accessible school-based academic support and enrichment could reduce the degree to which opportunities depend on private expenditure. Guidance on AL posting and DSA should be especially accessible to families who lack time, money or knowledge: 83.6 per cent wanted greater involvement but lacked time, 81.2 per cent cited financial constraints, and 72 per cent said they did not always know how to help. At the same time, policy shifts should preserve the features parents value, like fairness, clear and understandable progression pathways, child-school fit and developmental opportunity.

The three parental archetypes offer a further contribution by showing that achievement orientation and holistic orientation are not opposites. Loving Lions combine high achievement and process-development orientations with intensive involvement,

greater tuition expenditure and the highest stress. New-School Parents are more holistically oriented and socio-economically advantaged, and spend the most on enrichment on average. Detached Realists report lower scores across the dimensions and tend to be less socio-economically advantaged. While it is unlikely that parents can be neatly classified into these archetypes, they demonstrate that policy interventions will affect families differently and should be calibrated accordingly.

The study suggests that the central challenge for Singapore's education system is no longer simply to persuade parents of the value of holistic development, since parents already place considerable value on character, social-emotional development, and child-school fit. At the same time, academic signals and concerns about future opportunities remain salient. The harder task is therefore to make it easier for parents to act on their holistic aspirations while managing continuing concerns about their children's academic progress and future opportunities. If holistic development is to become more than an aspiration layered onto continuing competition, reforms will need to reduce the positional stakes attached to school placement, make information and support more accessible, and ensure that meaningful academic and developmental opportunities do not depend disproportionately on family resources.

A key question for the next phase of education reform is how to reduce the tension between the holistic development parents say they value and the strategies many continue to pursue to safeguard their children's academic progress and future opportunities. Achieving that alignment would allow educational ambition to remain strong while being expressed in ways that are healthier, fairer and more consistent with Singapore's commitment to mobility and opportunity.

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APPENDIX 1: ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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If education is a collective endeavour, research about education is no different. It takes many hands to understand how families, schools and systems shape one another; and this paper is very much the product of that collective effort.

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