

How your child can gain direct entry into IP Schools *even before* taking the PSLE

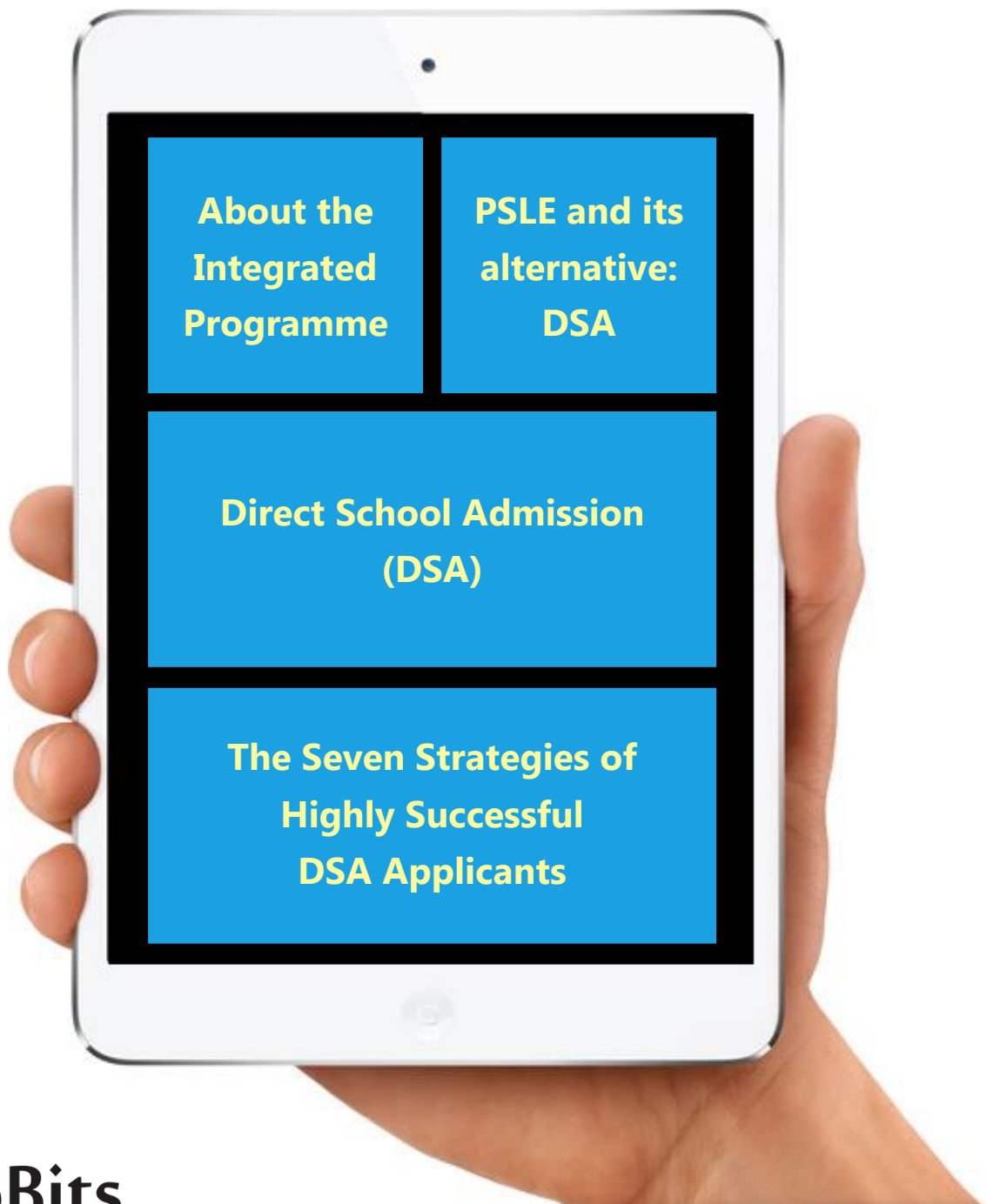


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Preface

Greetings! Chances are that you are a parent who's keen to find out more about how to help your child gain successful direct admission into Integrated Programme schools. We are both impressed and touched by the love you have for your child.

As students who've been through the Integrated Programme at one of the top schools in Singapore, we've benefited from the broad-based education that stretched our potential with exhilarating opportunities. On the other hand, we've observed how the increasing number of IP Schools has actually made it harder for students to get into top JCs via the traditional 'O' level route. Coupled with a lack of information online regarding the Direct School Admissions (DSA) system for Primary School students to get into IP Schools, we decided to gather together our resources and networks to publish this comprehensive resource to assist parents like you.

We hope this fifty-eight page ebook benefits you and your child's endeavors.

How to use this e-book

For parents who have already done their research, you might want to skip directly to the strategies. For parents who are new to the system, we strongly recommend you to read from cover to cover. Take your time to read the ebook and comprehend fully what we are conveying through our words. Of course, we have tried our very best to ensure the accuracy of the content. However, should you spot any errors, do feel free to contact us and we will make the relevant changes.

We have adopted a casual tone in the composition of the e-book and should we inadvertently cause any offense, we would like to apologize for it beforehand.

We certainly hope that you will enjoy reading this book as much as we have enjoyed writing it.

Introduction: Chapter 1

The Integrated Programme (IP)

The Integrated Programme (IP) uncovered

In the year 2004, MOE of Singapore had a *brilliant* (or otherwise, that's for you to decide) idea.

Officer A: "Why not we exempt some of our *top* students (hey this is Singapore right?) from the mind-boggling 'O' levels?"

Officers B-Z: "What a wonderful idea!"

Viola! The Integrated Programme was born! And so did the intense fight for the best primary students in Singapore and cheesy taglines by top schools around Singapore. "The Bishan Programme emphasizes real-world applicability. Students draw parallels between what is learnt in the classroom and apply that knowledge to real life situations," - Bishan JC

Now bear with us as we share with you some boring facts about the Integrated Programme.

- First introduced in 2004 by the Ministry of Education
- A 6-year "through train" programme.
- Students bypass their GCE 'O' Level examinations, and take their GCE 'A' level examinations or equivalent directly after 6 years of study.
- Certain schools offer diplomas (e.g. Hwa Chong Diploma and Raffles Diploma) that can be used for university admissions

Introduction: Chapter 1

The luster of being in the Integrated Programme (IP)

For the benefit of parents who have yet to acquaint themselves with the IP, we are going to share with you some of the benefits of being part of the programme.

The key advantage is that your child doesn't have to prepare for the 'O' levels. Your child saves precious time, which opens the door to many opportunities. A common goal of the large array of IPs in Singapore is to nurture "all-rounders." Hence, that is where all the saved time goes to—the nurturing of a child who is excellent in both the academics and non-academics. More enrichment opportunities, greater involvement in CCAs, less time spent with the books and examination stress, and eventually, the nurturing of a future-ready student in the dynamic world.

In essence, IP equips your child with the competitive advantage over merely book-smart 'O' level students – which will be imperative in standing him in good stead in this dynamic society.

Introduction: Chapter 1

Top schools are almost all IP schools—by chance or by design?

Here are the lists of (future) IP schools.

Schools that offer the 6-year Integrated Programme culminating in the 'A' Level:

1. Dunman High School
2. National Junior College
3. River Valley High School
4. Temasek Junior College

Schools that partner together to offer the 6-year Integrated Programme culminating in the 'A' Level:

Secondary School (4 years)	Junior College (2 years)
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Nanyang Girls' High School 2. Hwa Chong Institution (Secondary) 	Hwa Chong Institution (College Section)
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Raffles Girls School 2. Raffles Institution (Secondary) 	Raffles Institution
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Victoria School 2. Cedar Girls' Secondary School 	Victoria Junior College
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Catholic High School 2. CHIJ St. Nicholas Girls' School 3. Singapore Chinese Girls' School 	New Government JC (to be built in 2017 for students who enroll in the partner secondary schools from 2013 onwards)

Introduction: Chapter 1

Schools that offer the 6-year Integrated Programme culminating in International Baccalaureate:

1.	Secondary School (4 years)	Junior College (2 years)
	1. Methodist Girls' School	Anglo Chinese School
	2. Anglo Chinese School (independent)	(independent)

2. St. Joseph's Institution

Schools that offer the 6-year Integrated Programme culminating in NUS High School Diploma:

1. NUS High School

As you can see, most (if not all) schools offering the IP have a certain level of prestige and reputation for quality teaching. Is it sheer coincidence? We, as the authors, are cynics.

This brings us to another benefit of being admitted into an IP: access to reputable teaching and guaranteed quality of education. Though we run the risk of sounding clichéd, access to good education does not guarantee a bright future but trust us when we say that it does make a difference. Sometimes this difference matters.

Introduction: Chapter 2

More IP schools: A Double-Edged Sword

A step closer to an IP-dominated era

“The Integrated Programme (IP) will be extended to seven more schools. Currently, the through-train system - which allows students to skip the O levels and take the A levels or International Baccalaureate (IB) directly - is offered at 11 schools,”*Leow Si Wan, The Straits Times, 30 Aug 2010*

Simple math will tell you that will bring the total number of IP schools to 18. 4,000 Secondary 1 students or 12% of the cohort will find themselves having the luxury to skip the gruelling ‘O’ levels.

The previous chapter has tantalised you with the benefits and opportunities IPs offer. Now, we are going to share with you how the above piece of (innocuous) news is going to impact you as a parent who is concerned with the future of your children, as well as how it will impact primary school-leavers stepping into an increasingly competitive society.

Introduction: Chapter 2

The Good

The benefits and opportunities of IP need no further elaboration. No doubt having more schools offering the coveted IP will grant more primary school-leavers the chance to immerse in the rich and diverse learning environments of IP. Logically speaking, since these IP schools lead to direct entry to the choice Junior Colleges, such as (but not limited to) Hwa Chong Institution and Raffles Institution, more students will have access to the best education that Singapore can offer.

Granted, MOE has maintained that “every school has the same quality” and there isn’t a distinction between a “good school” and a “mediocre school”. Let us just go with the official stance. However, there is still an obvious preference for more “established” schools such as those mentioned above. As parents who want only the very best for your children, the opening of more doors to top education is indeed a cause of celebration! But...

Introduction: Chapter 2

The Bad

This is not an Economics e-book but a short introduction to Economics 101 will help you to understand the situation better. In the secondary school education market, the aforementioned piece of news signals an increase in supply of IP school vacancies. Assuming other factors do not change, e.g. the size of the cohort, the abilities of the students, you would expect the “price” of gaining entry into IP schools – i.e. the level of competition and the amount of effort required of a student) – to fall.

However, as noted previously, “these IP schools lead to direct entries to the choice Junior Colleges.” This makes the situation much more complicated. No more simple economics where increasing the supply will cause the price to fall. Gone are the days where the competition for top JCs lies during ‘O’ levels. Since the ultimate goal of a student is to gain admission into the Ivy League (top US universities) and Russell Group (top UK universities), the A levels and IB are of utmost importance. Back at home, Business programs offered by local universities have high ‘A’ level grade requirements. You might think that we, as the authors, are being excessively paranoid and *kiasu*. “I mean, come on, my child is only in primary school! Why are we talking about universities already?!” Let us explain why this should be a cause of concern for you, a parent who is serious about securing your child’s future.

Introduction: Chapter 2

For example, if a primary student gets into HCI via PSLE, he is assured of a place in HCI (College Section) for his 'A' levels. Because of this "reservation system", the vacancies left in HCJC for 'O' level students are greatly reduced. To make matters worse, many IP schools only admit students into their programmes at Secondary 1. Even though getting into a good JC certainly *does not* guarantee good 'A' level results, it does however stand your child in good stead. With the increase in supply of IP vacancies, demand will also increase as more people see IP as the golden ticket to doing well for the 'A' levels or the IB examinations. Correspondingly, the "price of IP" might in fact increase rather than fall, meaning the competition has heightened and more is required of your child to outshine his peers!

Ironic huh? The aim of MOE is to alleviate the pressure of secondary-school leavers by granting greater access to the opportunity to skip the demanding 'O' levels examinations. Yes, fewer students will now take the national examination that effectively determines a big part of the student's future. However, *greater* stress is now placed on primary school-leavers as the PSLE is viewed as ever more important. Because if they don't perform well, the ever-elusive top JCs may well be out of their reach!

Now, dear parents, do you see the need to panic?

Introduction: Chapter 3

Is PSLE the one and only way to IP?

Do you still remember the last time you took an examination or a test? Shifting nervously as the examiner gives out the examination paper, constantly looking up at the clock to make sure you are on track, finally handing in the examination paper, hoping all went according to plan?

Taking examinations and tests is part and parcel of every Singaporean student's life. The level of education which you are at doesn't change the fact that *examinations are the ultimate turn-off to learning*, not mentioning the stress and the fear of failure.

PSLE, just like any examination or test, will create stress. To make matters worse, as discussed in Chapter 2, increased importance is being placed on the PSLE, which means your 12 year-old little prince or princess will find himself or herself in a make-or-break situation. This translates to an unprecedented level of stress for a child who has only just started his formal education.

Introduction: Chapter 3

A risky affair

A week-long examination that will very much determine the future of your child, PSLE is a risky one-time affair, period.

As experienced test-takers, I believe you as parents will know that being good at the subject doesn't necessarily guarantee that A. Exam skills and the ability to cope under stressful conditions are equally, if not more important, to gaining the coveted grade. Your child might have fared very well in his school examinations but given the insurmountable stress, he could underperform during "the real thing." Worse, he might fall sick before the examinations. Consequently, due to this "sheer bad luck", your child might lose the chance to gain entry into his dream school.

Introduction: Chapter 3

Will your child excel in IP?

The story of a bookworm (real life example)

Jane is a book-smart girl who excelled in her primary school education. Never failing to make it into the “Top 10” list of her school, she gained admiration from her peers and teachers alike. Not surprisingly, she scored exceedingly well for her PSLE and gained entry into her dream girls’ school. Expecting to replicate her feat, she worked equally hard for secondary school. However, she realised that not only did she not gain equal recognition, she found herself failing badly in the IP system.

How did this happen? Let us take a closer look of Jane’s success story in primary school. Abandoning her passion and interests for the books, Jane is without question a model student...only in primary school.

Why do we say so? Having experienced the IP system ourselves, there is one thing we can say for sure. IP doesn’t seek to nurture students into muggers, but rather thinkers and all-rounders who can *lead* Singapore into the next era of excellence. As parents, you may then ask how does this tie in with your child who is only in primary school.

Introduction: Chapter 3

Learning is a habit cultivated from young. In order to triumph in the IP curriculum, students are not only expected to be book smart, but also be equally excellent in their areas of interest. PSLE forces students to be book smart because it is merely a test of academic abilities. However, even though it can help students gain entry into their dream IP schools, they will soon realise there is a clear divergence between their learning style in primary school and in these prestigious programmes.

Clearly, PSLE isn't the way to go for a successful learner but we are not questioning the system here as there still lacks a proven better standardized way to measure the students' readiness for secondary school education. What we are saying is that as parents who not only wish your child enter IP but also succeed in it, you can't just nurture your child to merely meet the requirements of the PSLE, as in the case of Jane.

"Don't put all your eggs in one basket." The wisdom of the idiom has transcended space and time and it will find its application here too. Read on to find how you and your child can "hedge your bets" and have a better shot at IP schools rather than counting solely on PSLE! Also, we are going to introduce you to strategies to nurture your child into an IP-ready future learner, and not just another bitter yet entirely avoidable case of Jane.

Introduction: Chapter 4

The Direct School Admission (DSA)

“DSA-Sec is an admission exercise to allow participating schools to select some P6 students for admission to Secondary 1 based on their achievements and talents before the PSLE results are released.”

–MOE Website

Introducing to you...the Direct School Admission!

Question: You mean we can get into top IP schools without going through PSLE?

Answer: No, life is not so easy (unfortunately). Your child will still need to take the PSLE and do well for it.

Question: Then why would you want to go for DSA since it doesn't exempt my child from the stress of taking the PSLE?

Answer: If your child has already secured admission to an IP school via direct school admission, the PSLE T-score requirement becomes lower (more often than not much lower). Instead of having to score 268 to get into School A, it could take just a score of 200 (the usual requirement) to get into School A after you've secured direct admission. Hence, the stress of taking the PSLE is effectively reduced! Wouldn't it be great for your child to gain admission into his dream school before he even took the PSLE?

Introduction: Chapter 4

What are schools looking out for in the DSA application?

If you have visited the school websites of the IP schools, you will find that their selection criteria are by and large similar! They are all harping on a few tangible merits that can be discerned from your child's report card and portfolio, such as "academic excellence and potential", "leadership" and "strong involvement in CCAs"; as well as some intangible qualities like "passion", "creativity", "integrity" and other forms of social and character qualities.

Tell me more about the Application Process.

1. The Online Application

The DSA process starts with an online application, which usually ends in June. In this online form, you will need to indicate your grades, school programme, and CCA involvement. This is perhaps one of the most "prepare-able" parts of the application.

As every school has its own requirements, we are unable to provide you with a simple explanation of the process. Some schools will ask the student to decide on which "DSA route" he wishes to apply through while the rest do not require choosing from different available routes within the DSA application.

Introduction: Chapter 4

What exactly is meant by the different “routes” you may ask? As we all know, every child has different strengths and weaknesses. Acknowledging that you can’t pitch a monkey against a fish in a tree-climbing contest, many schools have devised a system of pitching students with similar strengths against each other to ensure a certain degree of fairness. Hence, the introduction of the three routes of DSA.

There are three main routes:

a) Direct Admission via Gifted Education Programme (GEP)

If your child is studying in the GEP, you have a huge advantage in securing a position via DSA.

However, this does not mean that you should by all means push your child to get into GEP if he or she is currently in lower primary. Admittedly, there are some benefits of studying in GEP, but not everyone will enjoy being stretched at such an early age. Some students are late bloomers. Also, the GEP Selection Test is largely designed to test your child’s natural intelligence. While some preparation may help, it might not do your child any good to get into the programme via intensive coaching. He or she may end up not being able to cope with the rigor of accelerated learning from P4-P6.

Introduction: Chapter 4

If your child does get into GEP, should he or she enrol in it? The draw of getting into IP after primary school is no doubt attractive, but if your child is gifted, chances are that he will make it via other means (such as academic performance, mathematics talent etc.) too!

Question: Don't you find it unfair for GEP students to gain "easy entry" into top IP schools?

Answer: A simple analogy will help to illustrate this. Let us imagine the PSLE as a nationwide 400-metre race. The GEP programme is like a Decathlon Training Programme given that GEP students undergo more in-depth study of the various subjects. On the other hand, the mainstream students are prepared in a very focused manner for the 400m race (PSLE) from as early as P4. Hence, the DSA is an important lifeline to these GEP-ers. It is an arduous task to intensively prepare for the 400m race in a short span of a few months in P6 and yet expect to be on equal ground with a whole cohort of well-prepared athletes.

Introduction: Chapter 4

b) Direct Admission via Academic Route

Remember, these top schools typically admit those with the highest PSLE T-scores. Similarly, they look out for good academic performance by DSA applicants too.

To the cynic, this is not just to make the selection difficult. It really is to ensure that the students admitted will be able to cope with the rigours of the IP.

What then is considered good academic performance? This is entirely relative. To be safe, try to ensure that you are in the top 10% of your school for the P4 and P5 annual examinations.

Also, if your child has extremely strong potential in certain subjects such as Mathematics and has won awards in National competitions such as the Singapore Mathematical Olympiad for Primary Schools (SMOPS) or RI World Maths Contest, he or she will have a great chance of succeeding in DSA with his or her academic potential.

Introduction: Chapter 4

c) Direct Admission via Special Talent

Does your child hold leadership positions in school? Does your child have athletic or aesthetic talents?

There are a variety of special talents recognized by schools. These can range from sports to music to leadership to biculturalism. Different schools may have different preferences. For example, a SAP school like Hwa Chong Institution will have a strong preference for those with bilingual and bicultural interests and potential.

2. The Written Tests

After submitting the online application, your child will (hopefully) be invited for the written tests (some schools call them ability tests).

These could include reading comprehension, mathematics, science and abstract reasoning tests – and the style and difficulty of the questions depends on the school.

Is there a way to prepare for these tests?

Unfortunately, the answer is no, because they usually do not contain recall questions that you can study for.

Introduction: Chapter 4

However, your child should have been preparing for these tests for the past 5-6 years of school. Skills such as comprehension, numeracy and logic are taught throughout primary school. As long as your child has been a conscientious learner who kept pace with the school syllabus, he or she should be in a good position for acing these written tests!

So what do we learn from this? Preparing for DSA is not a last minute affair. Your child should have been a good student for the large part of primary school. Any conceptual misunderstandings should have been clarified and corrected over the years. Because while DSA allows your child to 'escape' the pressure of PSLE, it does not mean his or her academics can flounder. Do ensure that your child's academic understanding is sound!

3. The Interview and/or Activities

After the written tests, some schools hold an interview. Others have some activities followed by an interview. But in any case, this round is focused on identifying and assessing the intangible qualities of the applicant.

Introduction: Chapter 4

What are some of these qualities?

They include:

- Communication skills
- Passion for learning
- Teamwork
- Creativity
- Critical Thinking
- Compassion
- Resilience
- Civic Awareness
- (the list is not exhaustive)

Some questions that have been frequently asked in the interview include:

- I. What is your favourite subject?
- II. Do you read the news?
- III. How many friends do you have? Is it better to have a few best friends or many good friends?
- IV. What do you like about this school?

Introduction: Chapter 4

Because school teachers understand that primary school students are still young, the interview questions are not going to be too difficult. But as confidence displayed during the interview is important, it is still good to go through some mock interviews and rehearse some answers.

4. Receiving of an offer

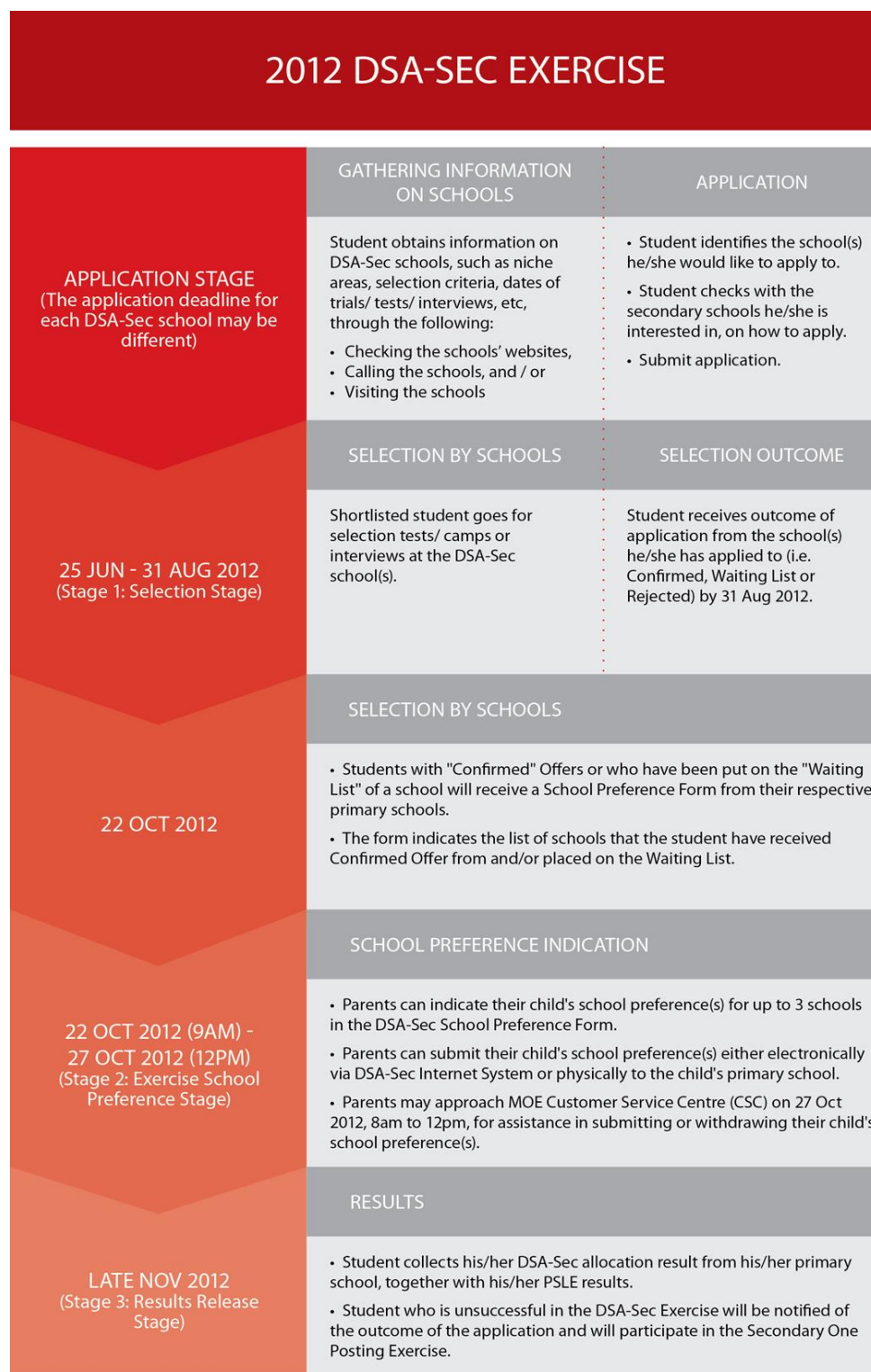
After the various ups and downs during the application process, your child has finally received an offer!

Offers can be categorised into two: confirmed offer and waiting list.

If your child has received a confirmed offer, congratulations! Your child has successfully secured a place in his dream school! However, if your child has only received a waiting list offer, fret not. It is already a commendable result and the chance of him getting into his dream school is still pretty decent! ("an average of 50% of those who opted for the schools who gave them a WL offer was successfully allocated a place in the school," *MOE website*)

An overview of the DSA application process:

Introduction: Chapter 4



Source: MOE Website

Introduction: Chapter 4

Frequently Asked Questions:

Question: What are the grade requirements for DSA via GEP?

Answer: 70% is the baseline for GEP subjects, meaning it's the minimum the students should be scoring for any subject from P4-P6. If you score below 70% you'll be asked to buck up, attend remedial etc. However, this does not mean that a score above 70% will get your child into the IP school via GEP DSA.

Generally, if you score >80%, you are not required to take GAT (written tests) and your chances of being offered a place in the school are high, though not guaranteed.

Question: My child didn't do as well I had wanted him to in P4. Will it affect his chances of getting into his dream school via DSA?

Answer: No, DSA only considers the P5 and P6 results of the student.

Question: What are some of the flip sides of accepting confirmed offers?

Answer: One of the dilemmas faced by many parents can be clearly illustrated with the following scenario.

Let us suppose there are two very capable boys, A and B. A's dream school is HCI, but gets waiting list (WL) from HCI and confirmed offer (CO) from RI. On PSLE results day, A did not manage to gain entry into HCI as the WL did not materialise into a CO. He scored 263. As he has been allocated to RI via the DSA option exercise, A will not be taking part in the S1 posting exercise. A goes to appeal to HCI from RI via the supplementary exercise. However, HCI only has 50 slots for appeal, and A, being ranked 51 for whatever criteria HCI has put in place, gets rejected by HCI, and has to stay in RI.

On the other hand, B did not participate in DSA and scored 263 as well. By selecting HCI as his first choice for the posting exercise, B will gain entry into HCI.

Thus, it is important to consider if your child has the confidence to do well in the PSLE supposing he did not manage to gain DSA entry into his dream school, but yet managed to receive a CO from another reputable school.

Other FAQs:

<http://www.moe.gov.sg/education/admissions/dsa-sec/faqs/#successful>

Strategy #1: Planning ahead for your child

A quick question: when we mention primary school, what are the things that come to mind? You wouldn't recall the difficult assignments that you found so hard then. Neither would you remember the tests that you sat for.

Fun.

Yup, you would think of fun. It would be weird if you *didn't* find your primary school life fun. You certainly weren't thinking about your future. Hence, why would you expect *your child*, at the same age, to make concrete plans for the future?

An 8-year old is unlikely to (or rather, shouldn't) be concerned with the need to plan ahead. Your child needs to have an enjoyable childhood! Needless to say, he or she probably hasn't thought about using DSA to get into good schools either.

We, as the authors, knew nothing about DSA then too! Life at that time seemed to be about after-school hide-and-seek games with our playmates and looking forward to recess time for an intense game of soccer. However, the fact that we were admitted into our dream IP school was by no means a coincidence.

Strategy #1: Planning ahead for your child

A Personal Recount of one of the Authors:

The 8-year old who loved Math

In the summer of 2003, I was first introduced to mathematics. Well, not exactly. But rather, it was when mathematics really caught my interest. It all started with an overseas business trip to China that my Dad went on. Hoping to pique my interest in the subject, he brought back with him these A5-sized booklets containing innumerable brain teasers, puzzles and trivia questions. It was a magical moment for me – a defining moment in my life when I found my life-long passion and love.

For the rest of that year, I found myself participating in numerous mathematics contests, most of which I won (yes, I have the bragging rights). Eventually, I went on to participate in Mathematical Olympiads and did sufficiently well in them for me to be accepted by my dream schools.

Strategy #1: Planning ahead for your child

The Importance of Planning

Undeniably, we owe a large part of our accomplishments to the prudent planning of our parents. Looking back, I am really grateful for my parents' wisdom to recognise the need to plan ahead for my interest. You may recall from previous chapters that DSA application only starts in P6 (or P5, for some schools), and that only your child's P5 and P6 results and portfolio will be referred to. However, passion can never be ignited overnight. In my case, my keen interest in Mathematics started way earlier in Primary 3.

Lessons learnt

An important take-away for readers is that getting into IP schools is never an easy process. Neither is it "predestined" or sheer luck. The key to having a higher chance is to start early. Design a plan for your child and have the end in mind.

In the next chapter, we are going to share with you how to bring this plan to reality through discovering your child's passion.

Strategy #2—Understanding your child

Ever had the unpleasant experience of having something forced on you? Despite your child being much younger than you are, he experiences the same distaste of being forced to do something or like something.

This brings us to our next point. There is a frequent and yet oft-overlooked divergence between what your child wants and what you, as a parent, want for your child. The key to nurturing a successful learner is to let him do what interests him. You may then ask how you can help your child achieve that without running the risk of appearing too pushy – and this is where things get a little tricky.

Let us examine this dilemma in greater detail. On one hand, your child wants to do things that he likes. On the other hand, the things that you view as imperative to your child might not be of interest to him. Hence, the way to go around this is to pique your child's interest in things that you see as beneficial so that he will be genuinely interested in them.

Casting the net wide


In order to interest your child, you must first expose him to a wide array of activities and hobbies. It is virtually impossible for an 8-year old to stick to the same hobby or interest for the rest of his life. Be it due to the change in environment or needs, as a child ages, what interests him varies too.


Strategy #2—Understanding your child

Hence, the aim is to let your child pick up as many interests as possible so that at the end of the day, one or two will remain as lifelong pursuits. In essence, avoid specialising too early. Given his early age, he still has a long time to discover where his true passions lie. Rather than pressurising him to pursue a certain interest, the parent should merely act as guiding posts (take a break, parents!), providing occasional encouragements and tips.

Recalling the earlier chapters, to succeed in the IPs, your child must be an all-rounder who is not only well-versed in his academics but also be equally passionate for non-academic pursuits.

In view of this, we have come up with a non-exhaustive list of activities grouped according to areas of interest:

The Sciences	<p>1. Singapore Science Centre</p> <p>Rating: </p> <p>For budding scientists, the world-acclaimed Singapore Science Centre will keep your mind racing with more than 1,000 interactive exhibits depicting the wonder and beauty of science.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ A great attraction with plenty of hands on displays to look at and interact with. Need we say more?
	<p>Opening hours: Daily 10am-6pm</p> <p>Admission fee: Adult: \$12.00 Child: \$8.00</p> <p>Website: http://www.science.edu.sg/Pages/SCBHome.aspx</p>

The Humanities	<p>“Through exploration of the humanities we learn how to think creatively and critically, to reason, and to ask questions.”— Stanford University</p> <p>1. Asian Civilisations Museum</p> <p>Rating: </p> <p>The Asian Civilisations Museum (ACM) is the first museum in the region to present a broad yet integrated perspective of pan-Asian cultures and civilisations.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ With 11 themed galleries on three storeys as opposed to a chronological approach usually expected of a history museum, ACM presents Asian civilisation in an exciting way with multimedia and interactive components. <p>Opening hours: Monday 1pm-7pm Other days 9am-7pm Admission fee: Adult: \$8.00 Student: \$4.00</p> <p>Website: http://www.acm.org.sg/visitor_info/opening_hours.asp</p>
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Nature/Out
doors

Singapore is not all skyscrapers and tarmac. Take a breather from bustling city life without having to travel far.

1. **Jacob Ballas Children's Garden**

Rating: 

"Jacob Ballas Children's Garden is Asia's first children's garden. Dedicated to all children of Singapore, it is designed to provide unique discovery and learning experiences in a garden setting."—Singapore Botanic Gardens Website

- ✓ Through play and exploration, the garden will nurture your child's appreciation for the flora and fauna. Also, it will help to pique your child's interest in the life sciences.

Opening hours: 8.00am - 7.00pm (last admission at 6.30pm)

Admission fee: Free

Website:

<http://www.sbg.org.sg/bukittimahcore/ChildrenGarden.asp>

2. **HSBC Treetop Walk**

Rating: 

"The TreeTop Walk (TTW) is the highlight of several long hiking routes in MacRitchie that brings you through different stages of mature secondary forest." –NParks Website

- ✓ A great place to have a morning hike. Immerse in the serenity and breathe in some fresh, forest air that you will certainly find invigorating to both the body and soul.

	<p>Opening Hours: Tue to Fri: 9am-5pm, Sat, Sun and Public Holidays: 8.30am-5pm Admission Fee: Free Website: http://www.nparks.gov.sg/cms/index.php?option=com_visitors_guide&task=attractions&id=64&Itemid=73</p>
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Alternatively, one of the easiest and budget-friendly ways to ignite your child's interest is simply give him a book about the subject. However, reading others' vicarious experiences will never be as good as undergoing the process himself!

*Disclaimer: The above recommendations are not influenced by any firms and government agencies. This list is compiled objectively by the authors without incentive or compensation from the respective firms and government agencies.

Strategy #3—Nurturing the X-factor

Finding the “knack”

By now, your child should have gotten his hands dirty and experienced a wide array of interests in varying subjects and areas. Now comes the important part of focusing on a specific interest that your child has developed over the years.

“Hey, aren’t you contradicting yourself? Didn’t you just mention in the previous chapter that the child should avoid specialising too early?” The keyword here is “too early.” You may recall from our introductory chapters that certain schools with DSA require applicants to choose from different available routes which suit their strengths: GEP, academic, and special talent. We recommend identifying some of your child’s strengths at Primary 4 so that he will be able to clock in enough hours of training to stand him in good stead to win championships and contests in Primary 5 and 6 (remember that the portfolio of the child in these two years are taken into account for DSA). This ties in closely with the need to expose your child to a wide range of activities, as elaborated in the previous chapter, because it is imperative that the chosen area of focus must be able to capture your child’s interest for at least the next 2 years.

Strategy #3—Nurturing the X-factor

It is virtually impossible for us to persuade parents to allow your child to make the decision on his own. Neither should that be the case because as the adult in the house, your life experiences will prove invaluable in aiding your child in making a sound decision. A keyword for achieving a balance of the two, where the child has a voice in deciding on his own interest while you have fulfilled parenting responsibilities, is “communication.”

Find a good Sunday morning to talk to your children over breakfast. A common mistake committed by parents is imposing their hopes on their children. Yes parents, we do understand your pressing desire to want the very best for your child. However, sometimes there is a need to take a step back and hear your child out. Find out what he wishes to pursue. After that, advise him on his selection. Trust us when we say this: “force-fitting” your child into a certain interest that you find best for him is not only extremely painful for the child, but counter-productive as well.

Sustaining his interest and your role as a parent

After a discussion of his aspirations, you and your child have come to a consensus (hopefully). What now?

Strategy #3—Nurturing the X-factor

Recalling my own experience, I first fell in love with playing the piano at the age of 6 when I heard the most beautiful piece of music—Chopin’s Nocturne Op. 9 No. 2 (which I eventually learnt to play). I can still remember attending regular private piano lessons and there was this point of time where I had a lot of trouble coordinating both of my hands. I was just that close to giving up. Fortunately, I didn’t and went on to earn my Grade 8 certification. However, my resilience was not congenital and would not have existed without my parents’ constant encouragement.

In the process of pursuing an interest, it is inevitable that adversities will be encountered along the way, especially at the initial stages. We understand that it is rare for a child to be resilient to such challenges at such a tender age. After all, we have undergone that period ourselves. This is when you, our dear readers, come into the picture. Who else is in a better position to constantly motivate your child?

Even though not all schools require the declaration of the DSA route, there is a common thing that all of them look out for: the X-factor, something that makes your child really stand out from the hundreds or even thousands of applicants. We hope this chapter will stand your child in good stead. Next up, we answer a common and pertinent question: “Does that mean my child can relax in his academics since we are equipping him with the X-factor?”

Strategy #4—Never overlook the academics

The answer is a definite no. Let us first take a look at a real-life successful case of DSA application. A friend of the authors was offered a confirmed offer via DSA to Raffles Girls' School (Secondary) due to the recognition of her outstanding performance in the sports arena. You would be surprised that a certain level of academic prowess is required of student athletes as well! This friend of ours had to meet a minimum PSLE T-score of 235 (thankfully she did excellently) before she could don the deep blue pleated pinafore. Additionally, prior to her receiving of the offer from the prestigious school, she had to undergo a series of rigorous academic tests.

The importance of grades

Evidently, possessing the X-factor solely is insufficient. Your child must also have a sound academic standing. The emphasis that IP schools place on the academics can be seen from how academic tests is an integral part of the DSA selection process, no matter which route you have chosen or what talents you have.

This is not surprising at all.

Strategy #4—Never overlook the academics

IP schools are known for their stringent academic requirements, the secret recipe of their outstanding 'A' level results. Getting into the dream IP school is certainly not the end of the story. Your child needs to thrive under the system as well in order to make full use of the opportunities presented to them.

For instance, in one institution, entrance requirements into the prestigious Humanities Programme (an express train to the nationally-recognised programme at JC level) at Secondary 3 level are so stringent that every year sees an admittance rate of less than 10%.

Academic programmes aside, should your child hold leadership positions in the various CCA groups, he must also meet the minimum academic requirements or risk being barred from attending CCA activities. Just when you thought your child can finally take a breather from the gruelling PSLE!

Relax though, because as long as your child has a firm grasp of his primary school knowledge, he will do well. Thus, ensure your child remains academically-strong amidst the nurturing of his X-factor. In order to achieve that, we will aid you in identifying which kind of learning style best suits your child.

Strategy #4—Never overlook the academics

The three different types of learners

Identifying which type of learner your child is will aid in his learning process immensely because you will be able to assist him in finding learning methods that suit him best. In essence, learning will be more efficient.

There are three broad categories of learners:

- Visual learners
- Auditory learners
- Kinaesthetic learners

Visual learners

Visual learners best gain knowledge through “seeing”. Does your child like to keep an eye on the teacher by sitting in the front of the class? Does he look attentively at the white board throughout the lesson? There is a very good chance that he is a visual learner. He also loves doodling, scribbling and drawing, especially with colours.

This type of learner works best with mind maps, especially one with a variety of colours and pictures in place of text, wherever possible. He might also find the use of flashcards useful. Another trick is to highlight important parts of the textbook with different coloured highlighter pens.

Strategy #4—Never overlook the academics

Auditory learners

Does your child benefit greatest from listening attentively in lessons rather than frantically taking down notes or trying to figure out what is written on the board? Then he is probably an auditory learner. Other characteristics of such a type of learner include active class participation i.e. answering and asking questions in class, having a liking for oral presentations, being adept at explaining, and enjoying listening to music.

So how does this type of learner best take in knowledge? A tried and tested way would be reading text aloud, be it from textbooks or questions. Rather than doing so in a monotonous manner, read it dramatically. He might also find repeating facts with eyes closed very helpful in helping him process a piece of information.

Strategy #4—Never overlook the academics

Kinaesthetic learners

Kinaesthetic or tactile learners are those who learn through action or experiencing it. As a result, it is expected to see a tactile learner becoming bored more quickly than other students while listening in class. To help you understand this type of learner, imagine trying to remember the password to an email inbox. A kinaesthetic learner may remember the pattern of their fingers as they press on the keyboard of the computer. Usually, such learners are good at sports, likes science lab and adventure books and movies.

To help them learn better, you can bring him on field trips to allow him to have a hands-on experience with the information he is dealing with. Also, for learning the sciences, it would be a good idea to introduce them to more lab experiments.

Is your child already in primary 4 or primary 5? Panicking over whether it's too late to change anything? Fret not, for we are going to share with you how you can best make use of the limited time available before your child's primary education comes to an end.

Strategy #5—It's never too late

Time flies and your child is already in Primary 5! You are not exactly looking forward to the end of his Primary education because your child will be facing the demanding PSLE in less than two years' time. On the other hand, he is not exactly among the top in his class. Neither is he having really outstanding results in his CCA. However, you still hang on to a thin ray of hope that your child can be admitted into his dream IP school via DSA, alleviating part of the stress from the PSLE. However, it seems he stands no chance at all.

In this chapter we are going to share with you how to best utilise you child's remaining time in primary school to maximise his chances for the DSA.

Be pragmatic

Your child no longer has the time to slowly explore his interests and finally decide on one. At this point of time, pragmatism takes precedence. Look back at your child's track records for his CCA. Does he have a particular area which he is good in? Because only the Primary 5 and 6 portfolio of your child is considered for admission via DSA, it is still possible to accumulate enough achievements and honours to stand your child in good stead. For the area which your child is excelling at, be it in sports or

Strategy #5—It's never too late

clubs and societies, focus on achieving results. By that, we mean taking part in as many competitions as possible. Even if your child fails to gain victory, the experience will still be beneficial to him. Also, his active participation will signal to admission officers a strong interest in that particular area, which aids them in selecting passionate students that will thrive under the IP system.

In terms of academic ability, your child needs to work extra hard. Results in Primary 5 and 6 are taken into account for admission via DSA so it is extremely important to have commendable grades that will impress admission officers. Through reviewing past academic reports, find out which subject your child is weak at and focus on it.

Strategy #6—Finding the best fit

"So... My son is pretty good in his academics, and he has an equally impressive CCA track record. I think he stands good chance when applying for his dream IP school via the Direct School Admissions exercise. But to which schools should my child apply for DSA?"

This is a particularly important question because after accepting a DSA offer, the student does not go through the S1 Admissions Exercise after PSLE, which means that it becomes harder for the student to make a change in school choice later on (as explained in Introduction Chapter 4). Hence, it is imperative that you and your child put in extra thought when it comes to applying to schools via DSA, and subsequently, accepting an offer.

If your child is still in lower primary, this section probably isn't relevant to you. But if you've already completed what's taught in the previous sections and (hopefully) prepared your child for a highly competitive DSA application, your concern now lies with the choice of secondary school.

Finding the right fit is all about choosing the right school for your child. Just like how it's important to choose the right schools to apply to after PSLE results are released, it is imperative to choose the right schools to apply to for DSA.

Strategy #6—Finding the best fit

It is advantageous if your child is applying to a school that fits him or her well. Chances are, your child will be happy going to that school for interviews and activities and naturally, he or she will fare better!

Whether it 'Feels Right'

Have you ever known someone for a very long time, yet never found a way to connect with him or her? But have you also met someone for the first time and discovered it extremely easy to get along with him or her?

You probably understand the concept of 'fit'. Some people just get along better. On a macro-level, certain organizations are better fit for some people, but not necessarily for the rest. Schools follow exactly the same principle. More often than not, it is difficult to put a reason behind your child's preference for a certain school. It could be due to the school environment, or even how the interviewer constantly smiled at him which gives him a welcoming feel.

In order to identify the intangible factors to which your child is attracted, is important for you to take your child to the Open House of various schools. Let your child experience the school environment, talk to the students there, and observe how he or she feels.

Strategy #6—Finding the best fit

Because the DSA online application ends by June, you are advised to take your child to visit the prospective schools earlier in the year. Even though we have talked about the “feel” that your child has for the school, there are still tangible characteristics of the school that can aid you and your child in deciding on a school.

The Tangible Factors

Consider the following:

1. Location

How long does it take to travel from your house to the school? Are you willing to move? If you live all the way in the West and the school is in the East, it might not be a very good idea to attend that school.

Additionally, if you don't plan to drive your child to school and your child loathes commuting long distances via public transport, the school might not be that suitable.

Strategy #6—Finding the best fit

2. Student's interests and the school's strengths

Another important factor is the fit between your child's interests and the school's strengths. If your child has a love for Chinese or biculturalism, keep an eye on Special Assistance Plan (SAP) schools. According to MOE, "Students of the Special Assistance Plan (SAP) schools can look forward to more opportunities to deepen their learning of the Chinese Language (CL) and culture as the SAP schools will be introducing enhancements to their programmes."

If your child has an inclination towards a particular sport or musical instrument, do check carefully if the school you and your child are considering has the right developmental programmes and opportunities in place.

Most of the information you seek can be found on the school websites, but for more personable interaction and in-depth answers to your specific queries, attend the open houses!

Strategy #7—Slow and steady wins the race

Because of the pressure of helping your beloved son or daughter to gain admission into good secondary schools, you may have considered pushing your child really hard and packing his schedule with a wide array of activities. We can truly understand your good intentions.

Author's Personal Experience

My parents had this exact mentality when they signed me up for Table Tennis, Math Olympiad, Piano, Chinese Calligraphy, Scrabble, Web Design, and Art classes when I was still in lower primary. While I actually found it fun to learn a variety of new things, it started to feel less meaningful and that my life was a bit too “rushed” when classes and activities started clashing with one another or filling my entire day (usually with less than an hour’s break between classes). I started having less time for playing games with my friends when I was supposed to have fun in primary school. I communicated the stress to my parents and only then did they realise I was being overstretched... so they dropped me from a couple of activities so I could have more free time!

Strategy #7—Slow and steady wins the race

Your child is supposed to have fun!

Grades and enrichment classes are not everything. A fruitful and enjoyable childhood should be the guiding principle instead. More often than not, the competitive nature of our society has goaded many parents into pushing their child hard from young, hoping that will stand them in good stead in the seemingly inevitable rat race. While a certain level of motivation is necessary, a surfeit is highly undesirable.

All of my friends who excelled in Primary School had a fun time going to school, which is causative to their results rather than merely correlated. The key to their success is a delicate balance between work and play. Rather than lock themselves up in their rooms to face the books, they knew when to play and when to get serious.

Jean Piaget, a prominent Swiss psychologist, who studied learning behaviour amongst children, found that children need to play – and that they also learn a lot about life through playing.

Strategy #7—Slow and steady wins the race

I learnt about cooperation, an essential skill in the workplace, when my friends and I played a game called “Ice and Freeze”. I learned about the joy of winning and the disappointment in losing and subsequently taking it in my stride. Most importantly, strong bonds between friends at a tender age are forged at the playground. I can still remember how I scraped my knee after falling during a game of “Catch” and the gratitude I felt towards my friends who helped me to the Sick Bay.

Additionally, balancing between work and play will provide a future outlet for stress as your child ages and things get tougher. This will grant him added endurance to successfully complete the rigorous education system in Singapore.

The fear of failure

No doubt everyone is afraid of failure. Quoting Alfred Pennyworth from the blockbuster movie, Batman Begins: “Why do we fall, sir? So that we might learn to pick ourselves up.” Failing the DSA doesn’t signal the end of your child’s endeavour to gaining admission into an IP school.

There are many inspiring stories of how students still managed to gain admission into their dream schools despite failing the DSA process.

Strategy #7—Slow and steady wins the race

Story of the DSA-Reject

A good friend of ours was dismayed when he failed to gain entry his dream IP school via DSA (Sports – Table Tennis). To make things worse, that was the only school he applied to. However, under the constant encouragement of his parents and peers, he worked extra hard for PSLE and managed to secure a place at that school.

Failing DSA has its own merits. Using your child’s PSLE results as the basis of admission grants him the freedom to choose his school (recall how a successful DSA applicant has to honour his choice, as mentioned in the introduction?). Perhaps your child may do well enough in the PSLE for him to gain entry into a better school than the one which he would have accepted through DSA? This is a frequent dilemma faced.

In addition, many parents, albeit being disappointed, find that the DSA process is a fulfilling experience as the child is given exposure to a selection process that bears resemblance to what he will have to deal with in the future, be it for university applications or scholarship applications.

Hence, even if your child does not successfully gain entry into his dream IP school via DSA, make sure to encourage him not to give up hope!

Conclusion

In this book, we have shared with you the benefits of the IP as well as the DSA process. Additionally, we have introduced seven original strategies that we have devised to improve the chances of your child gaining entry into his dream IP school via DSA.

The first step is to plan ahead for your child. It is not without reason that Alan Lakein asserted, “failing to plan is planning to fail.” Have an idea what you want your child to achieve at the end of his primary education!

Next, take the time to understand your child. Get to know his interests and inclinations so that you may best assist him in accomplishing his own goals. Try not to force your own hopes and ideas on him!

After identifying his strengths, nurture his X-factor or speciality. Encourage him to sign up for related competitions and contests, not exactly for the sake of winning them, but to develop his interest and knowledge in the subject.

However, take note not to let his grades slip. Academic performance is equally important as talent. Also, being academically strong will prepare him for when he is admitted to the IP schools – all of which are proponents of rigorous academic programmes. Learn which study methods work best for your child by first identifying his learning style.

Conclusion

Even if your child is in Primary 4 and beyond, it is never too late. Focus on your child's current strengths and take care to sharpen his skills in these areas. With hard work, he will have an equal footing as those who started earlier.

Now comes the part of choosing the school. Don't be lazy and take your child to the various open houses! Allow your child to experience the school environment first-hand before making a choice. At the same time, consider tangible factors, such as location and the programmes offered by the school which can help your child to further his interests and passions.

Finally, don't overstress your child. Sometimes, allow nature to take its course – after all, we're sure you want your child to have a fruitful yet memorable time in Primary School!

Conclusion

Changing education landscape

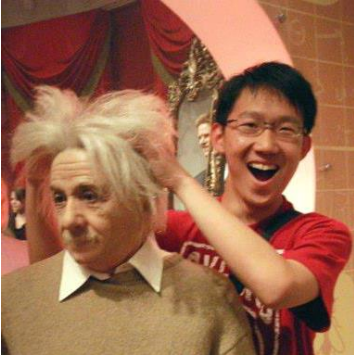
Your child will find himself stepping into an unprecedented level of competition. Not only will he compete with his peers in Singapore for the best jobs available, he will in fact be pitched against the very best all over the world all thanks to globalisation.

On the other hand, your child is also greeted by innumerable opportunities that were unavailable to your generation. In the case of education, he now has the choice to embark on an IP journey that will bestow on him a life-long curiosity to learn and prepare him for the challenges of adulthood.

“One today is worth two tomorrows,” says Benjamin Franklin. The time is now, dear parents, to prepare your child for the future.

We sincerely believe that it is our shared mission to help every child unlock his learning potential and realise his dreams and we truly hope our contribution will help you gain insight.

About the Authors



Ng Chow Hui and Xue Quan graduated from the Integrated Programme at Hwa Chong Institution in Singapore, forgoing the nationwide GCE 'O' Level examinations to take the 'A' Levels within a six-year period. They are passionate about seeing youths enjoy a holistic education, and were both shortlisted for the SPRING-SUTD scholarship.