

“Singapore is an ideal place to raise children.”

How far do you agree?

By Desiree Ng Yu Qing (16A11)

As Singapore celebrated its golden jubilee last year, it was a time of reflection for the government and citizens alike. It marked an important milestone, reminding us that Singapore has successfully overcome and conquered many seemingly insurmountable problems that have plagued our shores since our independence. Yet, one problem remains - our dipping birth rates. It raises questions about the ideality of Singapore as a place to raise children. After all, the fate of our nation lies in their hands. Most parents hope to be able to spend time with their children. They hope to raise their children to have good morals, be good citizens, have a healthy life and a prosperous future, where they can pursue their passions. I believe that Singapore is an ideal place to raise children, as its multiracial society is key to raising children of moral stature, and its holistic education and healthcare systems ensure that parents are able to meet their goals of parenthood - which lies, essentially, in their children's welfare.

Singapore has long been hailed for being a multiracial society. This provides children with the right foundation to be imbued with positive values and important life skills, like embracing diversity and accepting one another's differences as strengths. Home to many different racial and religious groups, Singapore as a society functions by being a cohesive entity, where people live harmoniously despite their differences. Thus, children in Singapore have the opportunity to mix with different races, through the policies put in place by the government. A key example is the Ethnic Integration Policy that enforces an ethnic quota in Singapore's common living spaces, such as HDB flats, to ensure diversity. As such, if children were to be raised in a diverse environment that allows the 'Kampung Spirit' of unity and togetherness to be forged between neighbours, they would be imbued with the value of acceptance. They would learn the importance of being comfortable with our complementary differences. Furthermore, this continues even in schools. Students of different races are mixed, and they forge bonds with one another through shared experiences, thus reinforcing the value of diversity and acceptance. In a survey conducted by Nanyang Polytechnic's 'Early Childhood' research team, 70% of parents agreed that embracing diversity and acceptance is of utmost importance in today's world. The world is becoming increasingly divided along social and cultural lines, giving rise to acts of extreme terrorism, as seen by ISIS's recent terror attacks globally. Thus, Singapore's multiracial society is one where children can be raised to be discerning citizens, with moral values that enable them to respect people with differences. This is especially crucial in the current climate, where race and religion are being used as divisive tools that threaten violence to mankind. Raising such children is key to putting an end to the vicious cycle of hate in the world. These children can make a great difference, and Singapore provides an ideal foundation for them.

Singapore is also home to an extensive and holistic education system that constantly adapts, catering to the needs of the 21st century. Children have the opportunity to receive a globally sought-after education, which can be seen by the masses of foreign students that pay exorbitant amounts of money just to receive a Singaporean education. Singapore's education system, as proclaimed by Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, is one that is steering its students to prepare for the future, in alignment with Singapore's goal of being a Smart Nation. The education system in Singapore ensures that students will

develop critical thinking skills, which is evident in the 2015 PISA test that revealed Singaporean students to be one of the world's most creative problem solvers and thinkers - crucial skills that will enable them to be successful as part of the workforce. Furthermore, Singapore's education system has seen the rise of more specialised schools to cater to students' diverse passions, such as the School of the Arts (SOTA), Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (NAFA) and Lasalle College. The increased enrolment in these schools, and the subsidies given to them, point to the obvious fact that children who choose to pursue unconventional fields of study in Singapore will have the chance to do so. This gives rise to many opportunities to children raised here. Furthermore, with recent developments, the government has announced that computer literacy classes will be included in the schools' curriculum, to ensure that students are well-prepared for the future. While some may argue that this comes at the expense of students' well-being and causes them additional stress, it must be noted that the government has adopted effective measures to mitigate such problems, such as removing the 'T Score' in the Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE), reducing competition and stress amongst students. As revealed by Times magazine, Singapore is also home to the best and third-best universities in Southeast Asia: the National University of Singapore (NUS) and Nanyang Technological University (NTU). This illustrates the multitude of educational opportunities that children raised here get to take advantage of in the future. Singapore's education system is apt for today's dynamic world as it promises a prosperous future for children, realising their parents' dreams.

Singapore is also a state that greatly prioritises its citizens' welfare. It is an ideal place to raise children, as there are many policies put into place to ensure it is a fruitful process. For example, the government grants parents baby bonuses and extensive subsidies when they give birth to children, which helps reduce the cost of raising them. Furthermore, Singapore also implements a five-day work week, a shift from the past. This allows parents to spend more time with their children, and help them forge a deeper bond. As seen in the Ministry of Social and Family Development's report, more families took part in family-based activities held around the island, and there has been a reported increase in the number of hours parents spend with their children. After all, this is arguably the most important part of raising a child - being able to spend time with them, and watch them grow and develop. This was also seen when the government introduced longer maternity and paternity leaves, and elicited positive responses from expectant mothers. Thus, it is clear that the welfare policies put into place by the government are effective, helping the process of raising children to be a less arduous one.

However, critics who do not think that Singapore is an ideal place to raise children may argue that Singapore is becoming more expensive to live in. Its income disparity keeps increasing, as reflected by the Gini coefficient, with Singapore ranked as a society with large income inequality. What does the future truly hold for children raised here? Is Singapore truly an ideal place to bring up the next generation? While these concerns are not entirely unfounded, it is important to note that the government has started to implement mitigating measures, such as increasing transfer payments, as well as increasing funds and subsidies to industries that ensure the citizens of Singapore have a place in today's globalised world. The future of children raised in Singapore is indisputably bright. Though I concur that it may not be the perfect place to raise a child, it is definitely an ideal one.

In conclusion, it is perhaps time for our citizens to reconsider the idea of raising children in Singapore. With a greater reflection on our society and in light of the government's various policies, what was once deemed expensive and undesirable can now be considered an ideal option.

Comments:

Effective introduction and conclusion, and a variety of language is used. There is also sufficient depth which illustrates your knowledge of the Singapore context in this issue.