Miss Ho Peng was Director General of Education from 2009 to 2015.

The 21st century competencies that are now so much a part of a school's plans were formulated during her watch.



"In 2007, I led a small team to various systems to study the focus of education in these countries. These study trips yielded rich insights. From our scans and study trips, we drew up the 21st century competencies, dividing them into three sets - Civic Literacy, Global Awareness, Cross Cultural Skills & Understanding because we are becoming so interconnected with the rest of the world; Creative and Inventive Thinking to generate new ideas that can bring Singapore forward; and, Information and Communication Skills, which would help develop the confidence in our young, and enable them to be plugged strategically into technology." It was a bellwether for schools and teachers. While the various sets had appeared now and then on the horizon, through conferences and readings and single initiatives, this 'swiss roll' as it came to be known, connected all the pieces.

As Director-General of Education, Miss Ho saw her greatest challenge in changing the mindsets of teachers and parents, helping them to accept the idea that success in education is defined not so much by the 'A's one gets in examinations, but rather, what the child has gained in terms of intangible, non-quantifiable qualities in his/her character. It became an overriding goal to help schools, teachers and parents see that education goes beyond ensuring students do well academically. With passionate fervour, she believes that developing a child holistically is crucial for the future, "*an important responsibility of our work*."

"*There have been several major changes in the Singapore education system since I first became a teacher in 1979. What is apparent is the breadth of study options now open to students. Over time, many pathways have been provided at secondary school level. This has allowed for more choices so students could progress at their own pace. Schools are so much better equipped today, both in terms of infrastructure, facilities and equipment.*

The quantity and quality of teachers has also improved vastly. The professionalism of teachers is very evident these days with more opportunities given to them to advance in different ways. We are now developing teachers such that they can specialize in teaching students with more distinct needs. In the last couple of years, we have introduced a range of support programmes such as the 'I-Can' which really helps kids who are struggling with learning. I see that as we move on as a system, the level of skills of teachers will continue to grow. This is the greatest investment we can have for future generations of children.

Yes, we have seen both qualitative and quantitative changes to the education system, especially in the last 20 years. "