



Centre for Education Systems

# INTERNATIONAL COMPARATIVE REVIEW

# ACCOUNTABILITY POLICY

## Summary of country report (3 pages)

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# Singapore

A decorative graphic in the bottom right corner consists of several overlapping, curved segments in shades of dark blue, light blue, and light green, resembling a stylized arc or a portion of a circular design.

**Authorship.** This AI generated summary has been created and checked by the CES team (see [ces.partners/resources/methodologies](https://ces.partners/resources/methodologies)). It is based on the original Country Reports created by EPPI. The author of the full report has not made final checks for accuracy.



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# Singapore – AI generated Accountability Policy summary

## RQ1: Purposes, Values and Aims

Singapore's accountability system aims to drive continuous improvement by blending vertical and horizontal mechanisms, moving away from a purely compliance-driven model. Its objectives are closely aligned with national education goals, emphasizing foundational skills. The system is underpinned by eight core values: Excellence, promoted through self-assessment; Meritocracy and Fairness, ensuring high-quality education for all students regardless of background; Inclusivity, focusing on diverse student needs; and Continuous Improvement, aligning with international best practices. Other key values include building Trust and Transparency, upholding Professionalism through ethical conduct, and fostering Partnership between stakeholders.

## RQ 2 – Levels, measures, and mechanisms of accountability

Accountability operates within a centrally managed system led by the Ministry of Education (MOE), with school principals and the National Institute of Education (NIE) as key actors. The structure is characterized by dominant vertical (top-down) mechanisms alongside horizontal (peer-to-peer) processes. Key vertical measures include the annual Enhanced Performance Management System (EPMS) for teacher appraisal and the School Excellence Framework (SEF), which involves school self-assessment validated by external MOE-led teams every three to five years. Horizontal accountability is fostered through Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) and cluster-based initiatives where schools collaborate on improvement. Public dissemination of school-level data is limited, as league tables were abolished in the early 1990s.

## RQ 3 – Managing change and policy processes

Accountability policy is developed and governed centrally by the MOE in close partnership with the NIE. Policy change is not driven by a fixed timetable but by a culture of continuous improvement and strategic alignment with broader national goals. Major shifts are typically announced by high-level political leaders, such as the Prime Minister or Minister for Education, and then operationalized by senior civil servants. This approach combines system-wide frameworks with incremental, iterative adjustments, allowing for flexibility and mid-course corrections. Reforms are often preceded by vision-setting speeches that guide structured, long-term implementation plans.

## RQ 4 – Assessments of effectiveness and evaluation

The effectiveness of accountability policy is evaluated internally by the Ministry of Education

(MOE) and the National Institute of Education (NIE). These bodies monitor policy implementation using a range of success metrics, including student academic performance in national examinations and international benchmarking studies such as PISA and TIMSS. National education plans are typically reviewed every six years to assess progress, identify unintended consequences, and make necessary adjustments. While feedback from stakeholders like students and parents has been used to inform policy, there is no evidence that an independent partner outside of government evaluates the accountability system.

## RQ 5 – Historical, cultural, and political influences

Singapore's accountability system is shaped by its unique context. Historically, the focus on meritocracy and performance reflects the state's priorities in nation-building and economic growth. Culturally, a competitive societal ethos and the influence of Confucian Heritage Culture—emphasizing diligence and respect for education—drive a strong focus on academic achievement. Politically, the system is influenced by neoliberal principles of performativity and a governance model of "Decentralised Centralism," where schools are granted autonomy but are monitored by central authorities. The nation's consistently high performance in PISA assessments has also served to validate and reinforce existing policies.

## RQ 6 – Impact on outcomes and workforce

Research indicates a divergence between the stated aims of accountability policy and its effects. While elements of the framework are positively associated with student performance, there are significant unintended negative impacts on the workforce. The Enhanced Performance Management System (EPMS), with its forced-curve grading, is reported to cause high levels of teacher stress, demotivation, and a substantial administrative workload. Teachers often feel constantly monitored and judged, fostering a culture of performative compliance. This creates a disconnect between the official rhetoric of holistic, student-centred learning and the reality of a high-stakes, performance-driven system that continues to prioritize measurable outcomes like exam results.

### Timeline- recent accountability reforms

- **1970s–1990s: Centralised Control Phase:** Rationale: To ensure national standards and support nation-building. Key Features: Accountability was characterized by strict regulatory mechanisms, centralized control, standardised testing, school rankings, and compliance-based inspections.
- **Early 1990s: Abolition of League Tables:** Rationale: To reduce the negative impacts of school rankings. Key Features: The government abolished the publication of public school rankings and league tables to shift focus away from narrow metrics.

- **1997: Thinking Schools, Learning Nation Initiative:** Rationale: To transition to an aspiration-driven education system. Key Features: A national vision that catalysed a shift from compliance-focused accountability towards models emphasizing continuous improvement and comprehensive development.
- **2000: School Excellence Model (SEM) Introduced:** Rationale: To promote school-led quality assurance. Key Features: A framework for school self-evaluation and external validation, empowering schools to set their own goals and assess progress against national benchmarks.
- **2012: Official End of School Ranking and Banding:** Rationale: To rectify an overemphasis on student attainment. Key Features: The Ministry of Education officially ended the ranking and banding of schools, although unofficial league tables persist in the media.