



# IMPROVING LEARNING, TEACHING AND THE QUALITY OF PROFESSIONAL LIFE IN SCHOOLS

A Mid Term Report  
on Curriculum  
Reform to School  
Heads and Teachers

Education Bureau  
Hong Kong Special  
Administrative Region  
of The People's  
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## An ambitious programme of reform

In September 2000, after an extensive process of consultation, the Education Commission submitted to the Government its *Reform Proposals for the Education System in Hong Kong*. These proposals, which were accepted by the Chief Executive, were designed to respond to the substantial challenges we face in an increasingly globalised world and, in particular, to enable our students to succeed in the knowledge-based, technological, constantly changing society they will enter when they finish school.

The comprehensive report *Learning to Learn — The Way Forward in Curriculum Development* issued by the Curriculum Development Council in 2001 then set out the blueprint and guidelines for curriculum development in Hong Kong. This blueprint seeks to use a learner-centred approach to promote students' interest in learning, their capacity to learn how to learn through the whole of their lives, and broader whole-person development. It includes such important initiatives as:

- the four key tasks of moral and civic education, reading to learn, project learning and information technology (IT) for interactive learning;
- the five essential learning experiences of moral and civic education, intellectual development, community service, physical and aesthetic development, and career-related experiences; and

- the promotion of nine generic skills, with an initial focus on the three key skills of communication, creativity and critical thinking.

More recently the new academic structure being introduced for the senior secondary years has sought to build on these changes by providing more diversified choices, meeting the learning needs of students of different aptitudes, interests and needs, improving learning effectiveness, and ensuring a smoother articulation to programmes in tertiary education institutions.

The ultimate aim of this student-focused programme of reform is to

*enable every person to attain all-round development in the domains of ethics, intellect, physique, social skills and aesthetics according to his / her own attributes so he/she is capable of life-long learning, critical and exploratory thinking, innovating and adapting to change; filled with self-confidence and a team spirit; willing to put forward continuing effort for the prosperity, progress, freedom and democracy of their society, and contribute to the future well-being of the nation and the world at large.*

With the short-term phase of the programme from 2001-02 to 2005-06 now complete, and the medium-term phase from 2006-07 to 2010-11 at its start, it is timely to report in some detail to leaders, teachers and other staff in our schools on what you have achieved to date, the challenges you have identified for us to collectively address, and the plans for improvement the Bureau has in place.



## Thanks and appreciation are due

This comprehensive programme of education and curriculum reform constitutes, as the former Secretary for Education and Manpower Prof. Arthur K C Li has put it, 'a mammoth and complex task'. It critically depends for its success on your commitment and support which, to date, has been willingly given and received.

As will be seen in the discussion that follows, much already has been implemented and achieved, and this largely is due to the efforts of school heads, curriculum and key learning area leaders, teachers, teacher librarians and support staff in both primary and secondary schools, including the special schools in Hong Kong. For this, you deserve our appreciation and thanks. Your efforts have not gone unnoticed by the Education Bureau (EDB) and the Hong Kong public at large.

That said, we know that these efforts have not come without cost. No programme of education reform anywhere, let alone one as comprehensive as this, can proceed without having an impact in the initial stages at least on the workload of those who must implement it in schools. There are new policies and practices to be learned, new approaches to trial, changes to enact, and always difficulties to manage. This is something we recognise and have tried to begin to address as discussed in more detail later in this report.

As the people in the front-line of change, you also require our support. This too is something we continually seek to provide and will explore in more depth as the remainder of the report unfolds.

## We have sought your views

From the start of the process in 2001, the EDB has continually sought to monitor what you and others think of the reforms and how they are being implemented in schools. This helps us to see the extent to which people support the reforms and, at the same time, enables us to learn from the experience of implementation so we can improve our approach.

We have, over this time, conducted a number of major surveys to determine the views and responses of school leaders, teachers, parents and students to what is underway. These have included:

- three consecutive annual surveys from 2003 of front-line practitioners in primary and secondary schools including school heads, subject leaders and teachers, and teacher librarians to explore the progress made in curriculum reform and the key factors that have helped or hindered this;
- a systematic collation of feedback in 2006 from school heads, middle managers, teachers and students, known as the Survey on the Curriculum Reform (called Interim Survey in this report) conducted by the independent Department of Educational Policy and Administration from the Hong Kong Institute of Education (HKIEd), to gain a snapshot of views on the implementation of curriculum reform and its impact at the end of the short-term phase;



- the administration in 2004 and again in 2006 of questionnaires to eight different groups of stakeholders encompassing school sponsoring bodies, school management committees, principals, teachers, students, parents, early childhood educators and teacher educators to gauge their perception of the education reform and major education initiatives. These were complemented by the Thematic Household Surveys coordinated by the Census and Statistics Department in 2004 and 2006, where face-to-face interviews were conducted with a random sample of households to gather the public's perception of education reform and major education initiatives; and
- a study of survey data gathered from teachers, parents and students in the 2003-04 and 2004-05 school years during the External School Review process, which is particularly comprehensive and reliable since it involves more than 100,000 completed stakeholder questionnaires (more than 5,000 primary and 5,000 secondary teachers; over 20,000 primary and 26,000 secondary students; and almost 25,000 primary and more than 25,000 secondary school parents).

These quantitative surveys have further been complemented by a series of structured focus group interviews with school leaders, teachers and students to gain additional insight into their views, and targeted evaluations of key curriculum implementation support programmes such as the Collaborative Research and Development ('Seed') Projects and the Seconded Teachers Strategy.

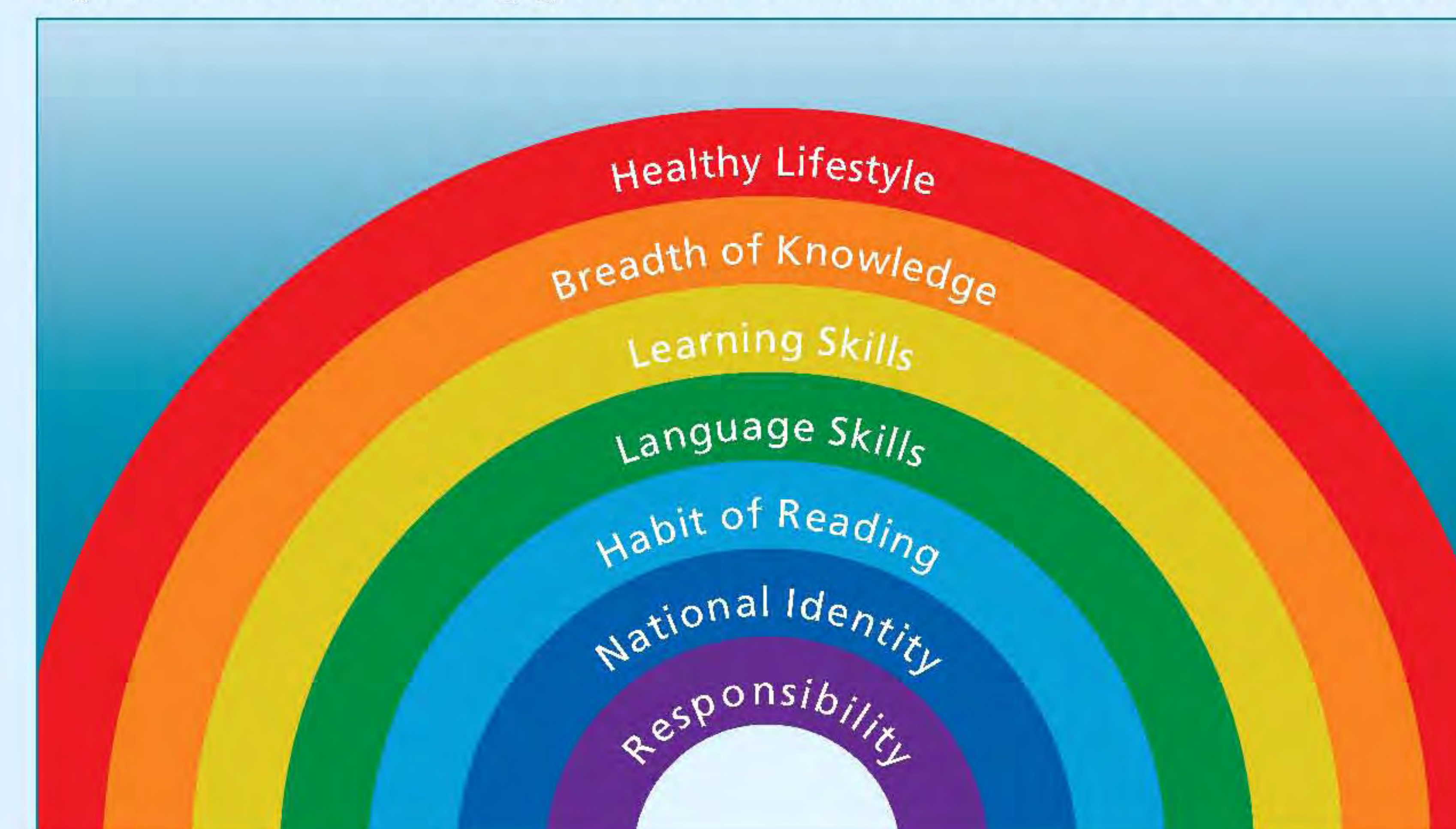
## The reforms have your support

Perhaps the clearest and most important message to emerge from the vast array of data we have collected on your views is that, while specific criticisms and challenges remain as outlined in more detail below, the curriculum reforms enjoy very strong and growing support.

The Interim Survey conducted in 2006 for instance, which built on the studies of stakeholder views that preceded it, found that:

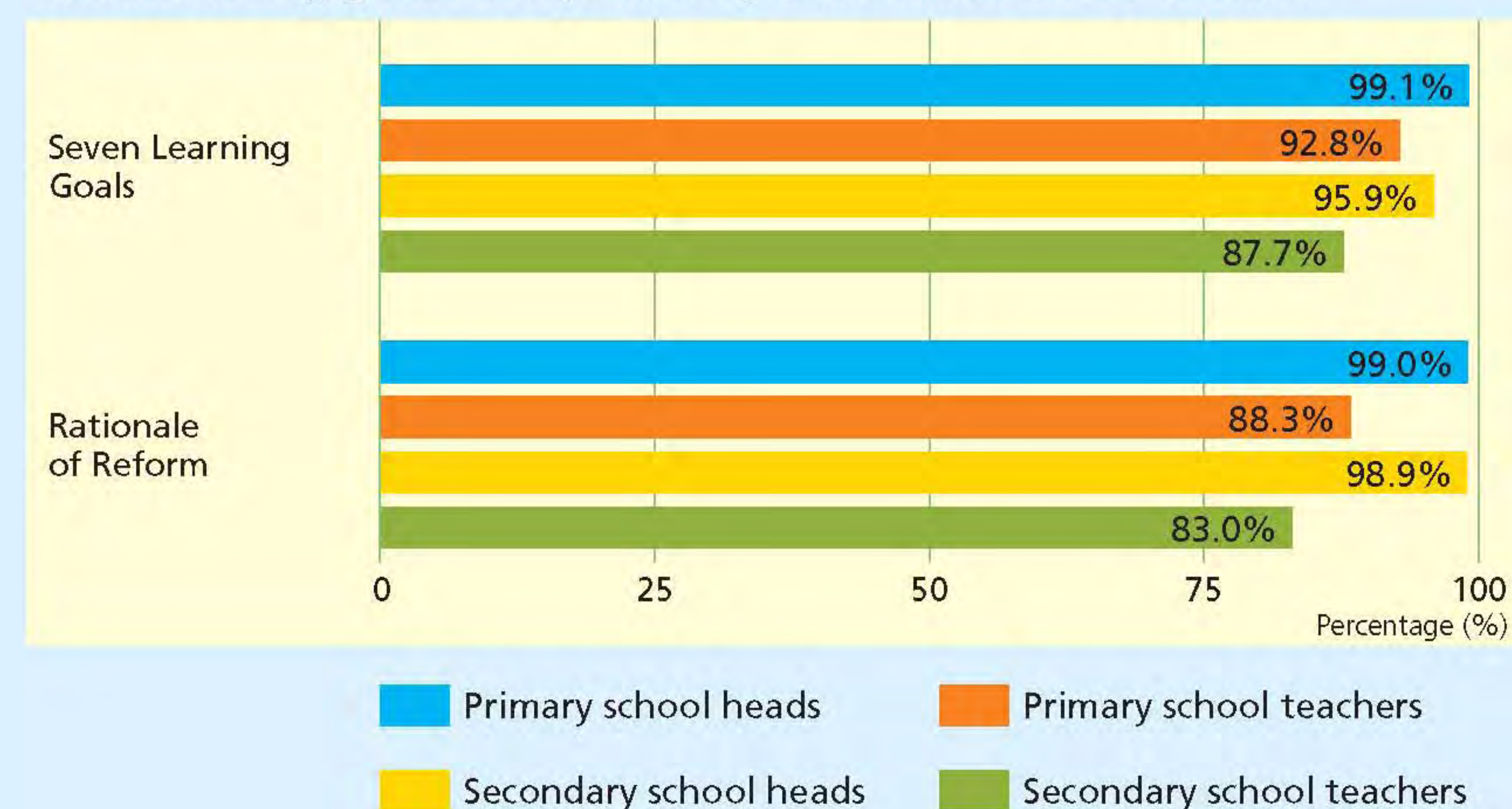
- more than 80% of primary and secondary school heads and teachers agreed with the rationale for curriculum reform and its seven learning goals (See Figures 1 and 2);

**Figure 1: Seven learning goals that students should be able to achieve**





**Figure 2: Agreement with the rationale of the curriculum reform and seven learning goals as reported by school heads and teachers**



- more than 85% of primary and secondary school heads felt the reform programme helps students to meet the challenges of the 21st century and, in particular, the impact of information technology and the rising need for moral considerations; and
- the level of agreement with various aspects of the reform was observed to be higher in 2006 than it was in 2001, which suggests the reforms are really starting to take hold.

In addition, although there is only limited data at this stage related to the New Senior Secondary Curriculum (NSS), primarily because implementation will commence much later than the new system for basic education in primary and junior secondary schools, the 2006 Stakeholder Monitoring Survey results do suggest there is strong initial support as a base on which to build. More than half of all respondents in secondary schools, for instance, agreed that the changes proposed would result in

a widening of the curriculum to meet the educational needs of Hong Kong, and supported such changes as the introduction of Liberal Studies to develop students' independent learning capability and critical thinking skills.

The quantitative outcomes from the surveys on curriculum reform are supported by the qualitative focus group interviews as well. The HKIEd report on the most recent interviews conducted in 2007 concluded, for example, that:

*Schools and teachers are more and more in agreement with the rationale of the curriculum reform after five years of professional development, research and practical experience. They acknowledge that the direction of curriculum reform is correct and that the fact that it is learner-focused and fosters students' interest in learning helps students to develop communication skills, creativity and commitment, which then helps students through learning to learn to achieve life-long learning and whole-person development.*

This very strong stakeholder support for the direction of the reforms is further bolstered by high levels of public support. The 2004 Thematic Household Survey, for example, showed very strong public support for the four key tasks promoted by the reform (i.e., project learning, reading to learn, moral and civic education and information technology for interactive learning) as well as the five essential learning experiences (moral and civic education, intellectual development, community service, physical and aesthetic development and career-related experiences). Levels of agreement with the four key tasks among members of the public interviewed ranged from 78% to 87% with support for the five essential learning experiences equally high, ranging from 76% to 92%.



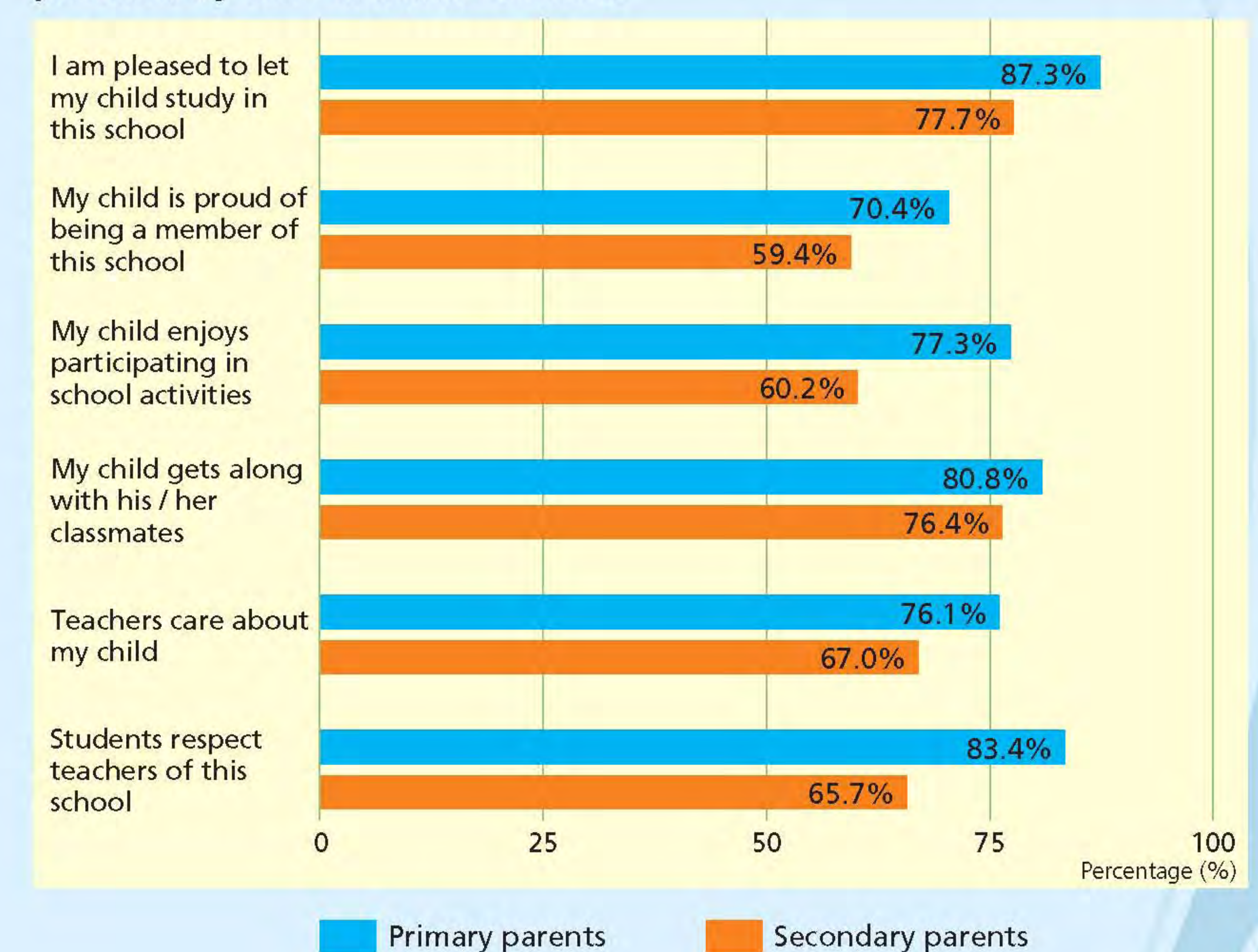
Possibly even more encouraging still is to find that the high level of public support was maintained in 2006, by which time these approaches already were being implemented in schools. The overwhelming majority of persons aged 18 and over who were interviewed not only expressed their support for these reforms, but also indicated they felt they were making a positive difference in preparing students for a modern, globalised world. Almost 85% of respondents felt, for instance, that the implementation of information technology for interactive learning had improved students' competence in gaining access to and processing information, while about 80% believed that reading to learn had helped to increase students' competence in reading, that project learning had helped improve students' generic skills and independent learning capabilities, and that moral and civic education had resulted in more positive attitudes and values in students in Hong Kong schools.

In fact, an analysis undertaken of the trend of responses of all stakeholders between 2004 and 2006 revealed that a higher percentage of principals and teachers indicated that their schools had used the four key tasks in developing independent learning capabilities among students and they were highly confident that their students could acquire the five essential learning experiences.

The message is that the work of teachers and leaders in schools in the implementation of the reforms enjoys a high level of public support. Certainly the evidence suggests that, despite some ongoing implementation concerns which the EDB acknowledges and, as will be seen, has plans to address, the reform programme is growing in fertile ground.

This only is strengthened by the strong support that exists for the overall work of Hong Kong schools as evident in the surveys of teachers, parents and students undertaken by schools in the course of school self-evaluation and External School Review in the 2003-04 and 2004-05 school years. Particularly noteworthy in this context is that more than three quarters of primary students and over half of our secondary students positively like their school and a very high 87% of primary parents and 78% of secondary parents are pleased to let their children study at the school. (See Figure 3.)

**Figure 3: Parent perceptions of the quality of educational experiences provided by their children's schools**





## Much has been achieved

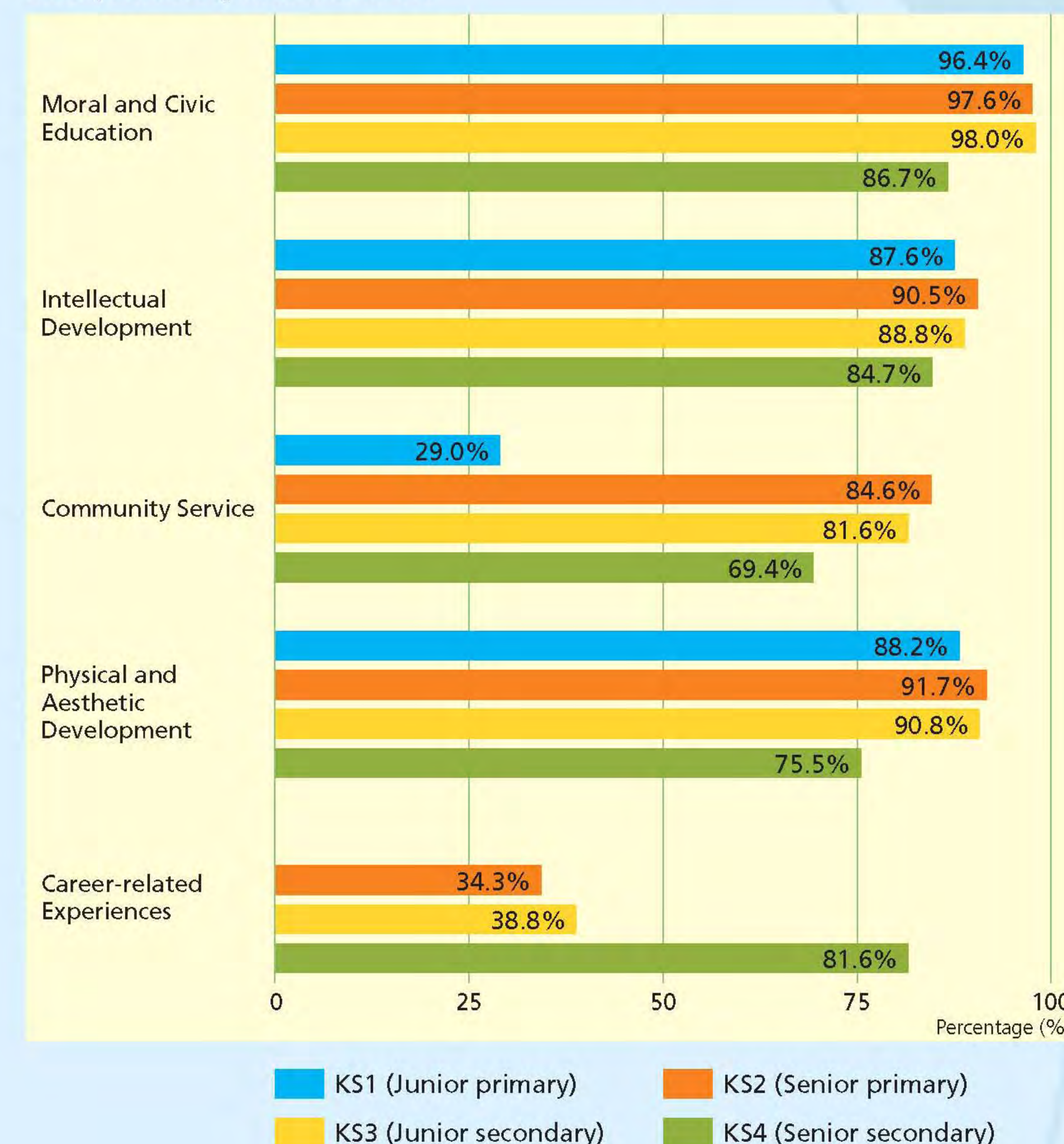
The real test of any reform programme always is less in what is said than what actually is done. Here again, the quantitative and qualitative data we have collected is very encouraging indeed.

The third annual survey of front-line practitioners in schools, for instance, found that most schools had:

- organised lesson time and staff resources to provide a broad and balanced curriculum in terms of students' learning opportunities and essential learning experiences;
- provided the five essential learning experiences to every student in different key stages, with a significant rise in the percentage of schools providing career-related experiences in the senior secondary years (See Figure 4); and
- made organisational arrangements to provide continuity of learning across the key stages, and hence a smooth transition for students between them.

Similarly, the Interim Survey in 2006 revealed notable increases in the proportion of school leaders and teachers who reported they encouraged students to learn through every learning opportunity and motivate students' learning interest, and the most recent report of focus group interviews conducted showed that all school heads believed that in 2006, schools created more space for learning and teaching.

**Figure 4: Provision of five essential learning experiences to every student as reported by school heads**



It must be acknowledged in this context that leaders and teachers involved in focus group interviews did call for more exemplars from the Bureau on how to build their repertoire of strategies and hence more effectively implement the reforms. Similarly, the interviews conducted showed that,



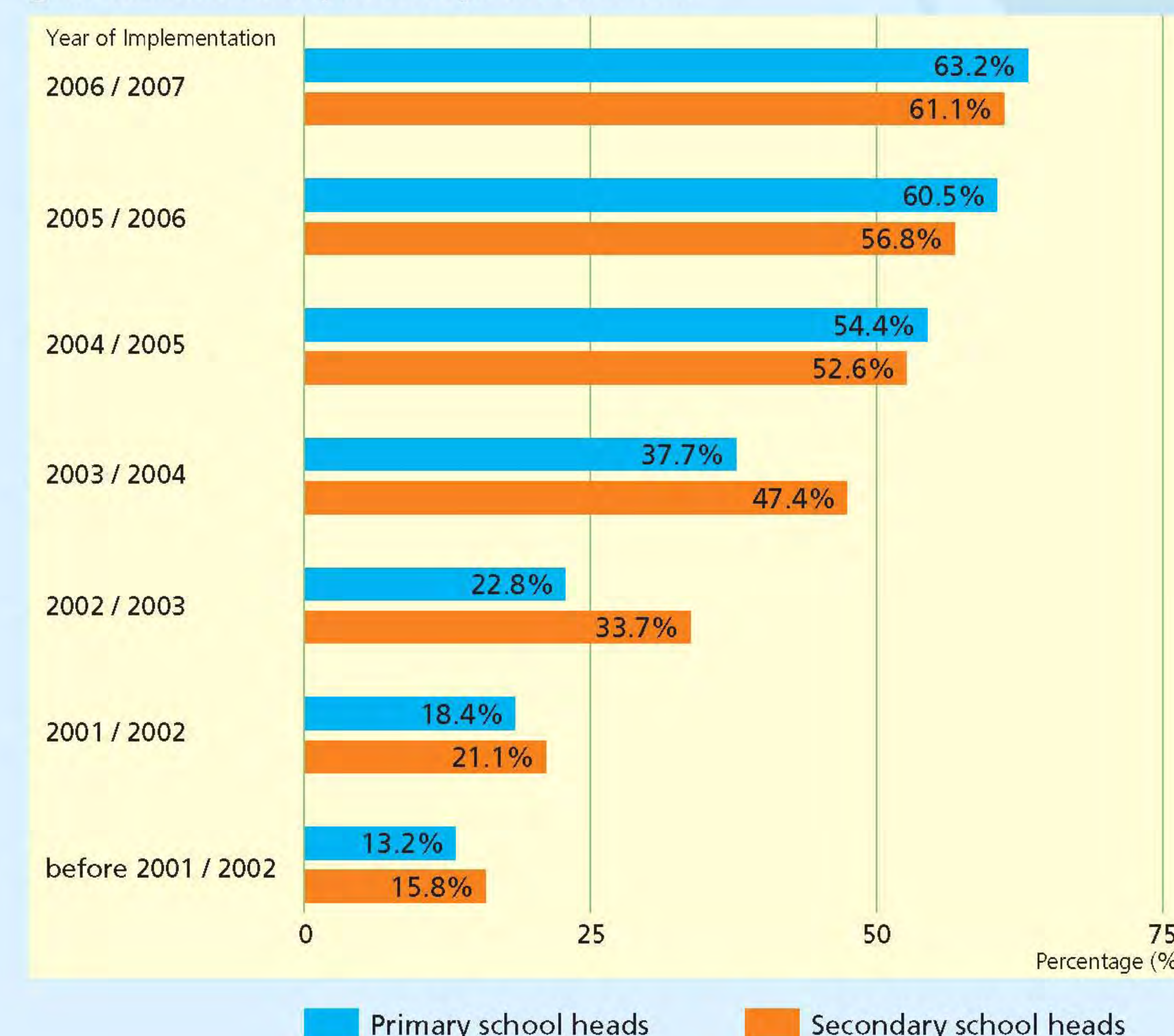
although you highly value the professional development and training the EDB provides, you also would like to have more, particularly if it involves more sharing with colleagues and peer observations to build on the formal programmes you attend. This is something we progressively are seeking to address, as outlined in more detail below, but it also serves as a further measure of your support for the implementation that is underway and your desire to do an even better job.

All surveys reveal that implementation of the four key tasks of moral and civic education, reading to learn, project learning, and information technology for interactive learning has been particularly strong. The recent Interim Survey, for example, reported that at least four times as many primary and three times as many secondary schools were using the tasks to promote learning and teaching in 2006-07 as before the introduction of the reforms.

Similarly, schools and teachers report they have provided appropriate learning experiences to help students to develop their generic skills, and especially the three core skills of communication, creativity and critical thinking. In addition, the relative priority accorded to these skills by schools has, according to school heads reported in the Interim Survey, markedly increased over time. (See Figure 5.)

It is important to note in this context that, in general, the views of primary school respondents were more positive than those of their secondary counterparts, and school leaders were more positive than the teachers with whom they work. Neither of these outcomes is particularly surprising and conforms to international trends. Stakeholders in primary

**Figure 5: According priority to the 3Cs in strengthening students' nine generic skills as reported by school heads**

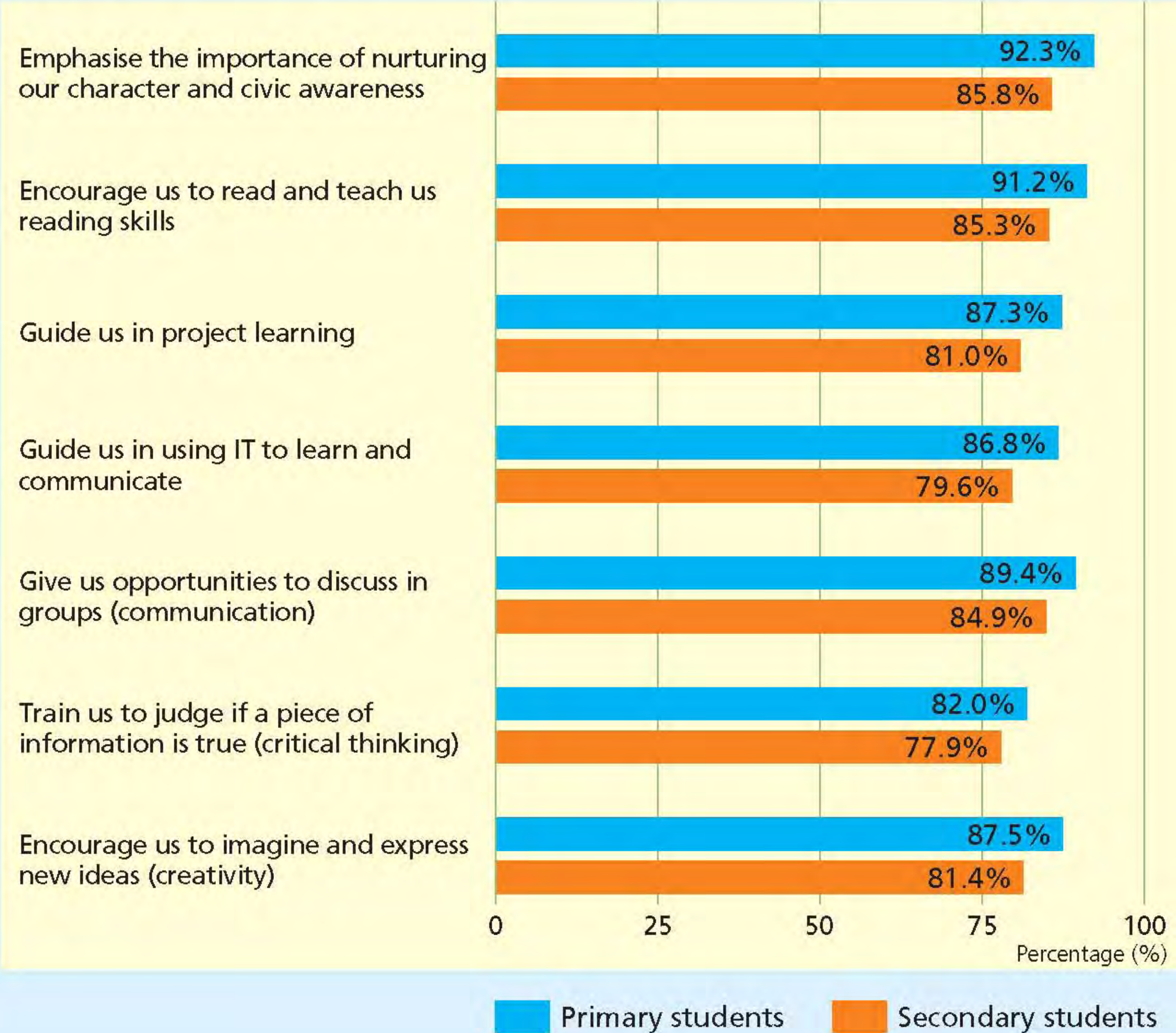


schools throughout the world are generally more positive than secondary stakeholders in part, perhaps, because adolescence is a stage where students can be more difficult to teach. Similarly, leaders throughout the world tend to be more positive about changes and reforms that are initiated, in part because they usually are the first group to be targeted and engaged, and in part as a natural function of their leadership role in the school.



Regardless, however, the actual outcomes of the data gathered are very positive for primary and secondary stakeholders, and leaders and teachers alike. And of particular importance in relation to these positive findings about the implementation of the reforms is that they are confirmed by the students themselves. At least 80% of the primary students surveyed and more than 75% of secondary students indicated their teachers did promote the four key tasks and gave them opportunities to develop their generic skills. (See Figure 6.)

**Figure 6: Teaching of four key tasks and generic skills as reported by students**



Little wonder in this context, then, that the comprehensive Interim Survey study conducted by the HKIEd was able to conclude that

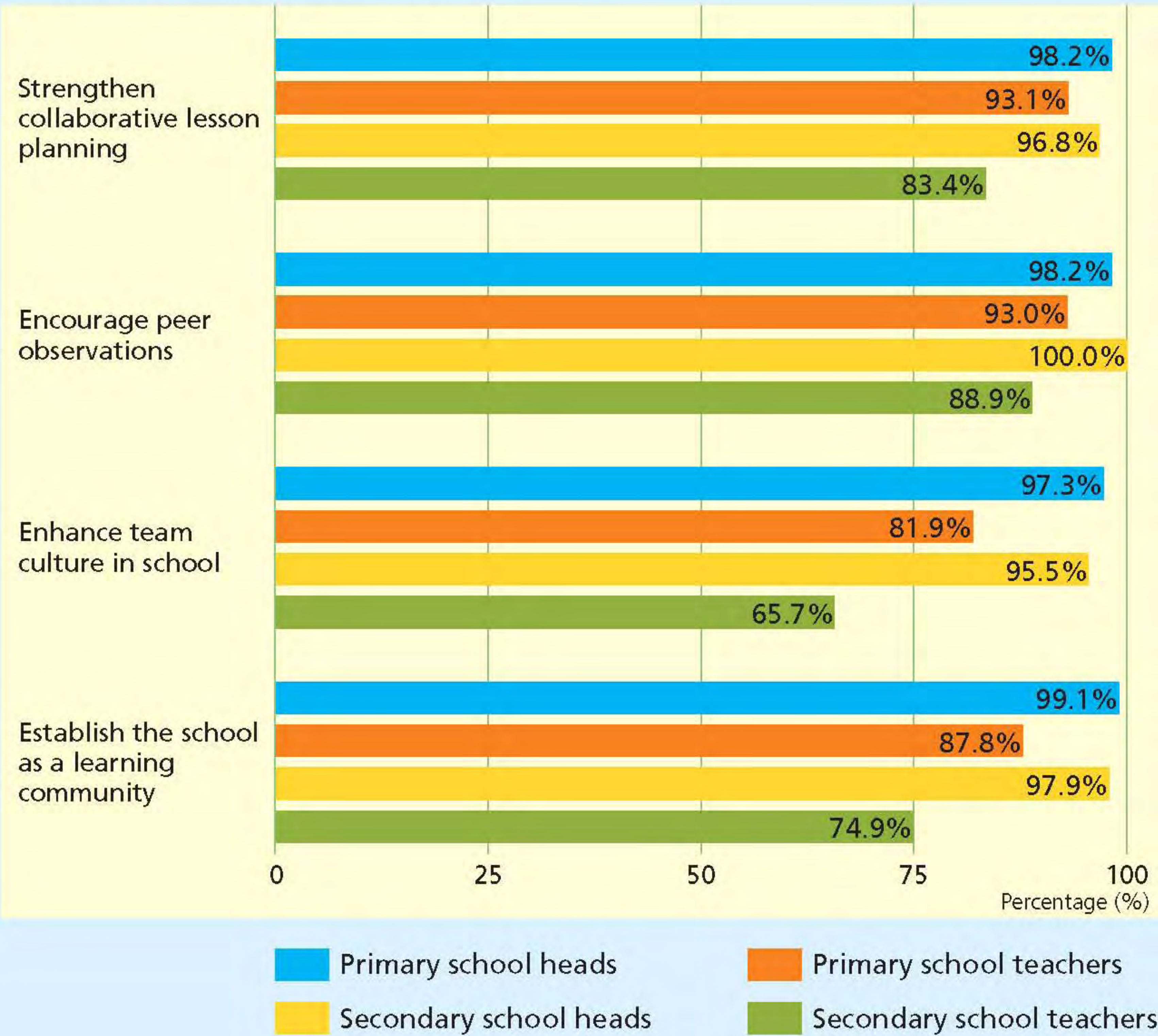
*Significant progress has been made in almost all key targeted areas of curriculum reform. Various strategies proposed by the curriculum reform have been adopted since the reform and there was a rising trend in current years in some of the areas ..... Initial achievements have also been made in all three major key tasks during the short-term phase: formulation of curriculum development plans at the school's own pace, four key tasks, and three generic skills.*

These achievements have not come without significant planning and work, with the result noted earlier that many of you feel that your workload has increased. While this issue is discussed in its own right later in this report, and is the subject of supportive measures the EDB has decided to undertake, it is worth making the point that one particularly significant achievement to emerge from the focus group interviews which can help to manage workload more effectively over time, is the progress made in establishing learning communities in schools.

More specifically, the HKIEd report found that schools are 'establishing a learning community and nurturing team culture through collaborative lesson planning and lesson observation by SH [school heads] and teachers'. Similar evidence can be found in the Interim Survey. (See Figure 7.) In the short term this may, of course, mean some additional meetings and work, but over time it will help to ease the burden of every teacher having to manage everything on their own, and will help ensure that more strategies are shared and successful practices spread.



Figure 7: Schools' progress in nurturing collaborative culture as reported by school heads and teachers



## There are positive effects

Just as important as the implementation that is underway is the impact it is having on schools and their leaders and teachers, as well as the students you serve.

### STUDENTS

We are in the process of collecting systematic data on student achievement. While we can say these data are promising, we also have significant survey evidence from you that implementation of the reforms is having a positive impact on students and schools; particularly from the recent Interim Survey which built on the range of other stakeholder surveys which preceded it.

The major determinant of how students learn and develop at school is, of course, the quality of teaching and how teachers interact with their students and teach. It is extremely encouraging in this context to find through the Interim Survey that almost all school respondents (more than 99% of school heads, more than 92% of primary and 83% of secondary teachers) indicated that they have developed improved learning and teaching strategies to strengthen student learning.

Teachers, it should be noted, are encouraged to vary their roles from being transmitters of knowledge to resource people, facilitators, consultants, counsellors and the like to achieve different purposes of learning and to meet the learning styles, abilities, interests and needs of their students. The third and most recent survey of front-line practitioners in schools found that most teachers had a high weighting for playing



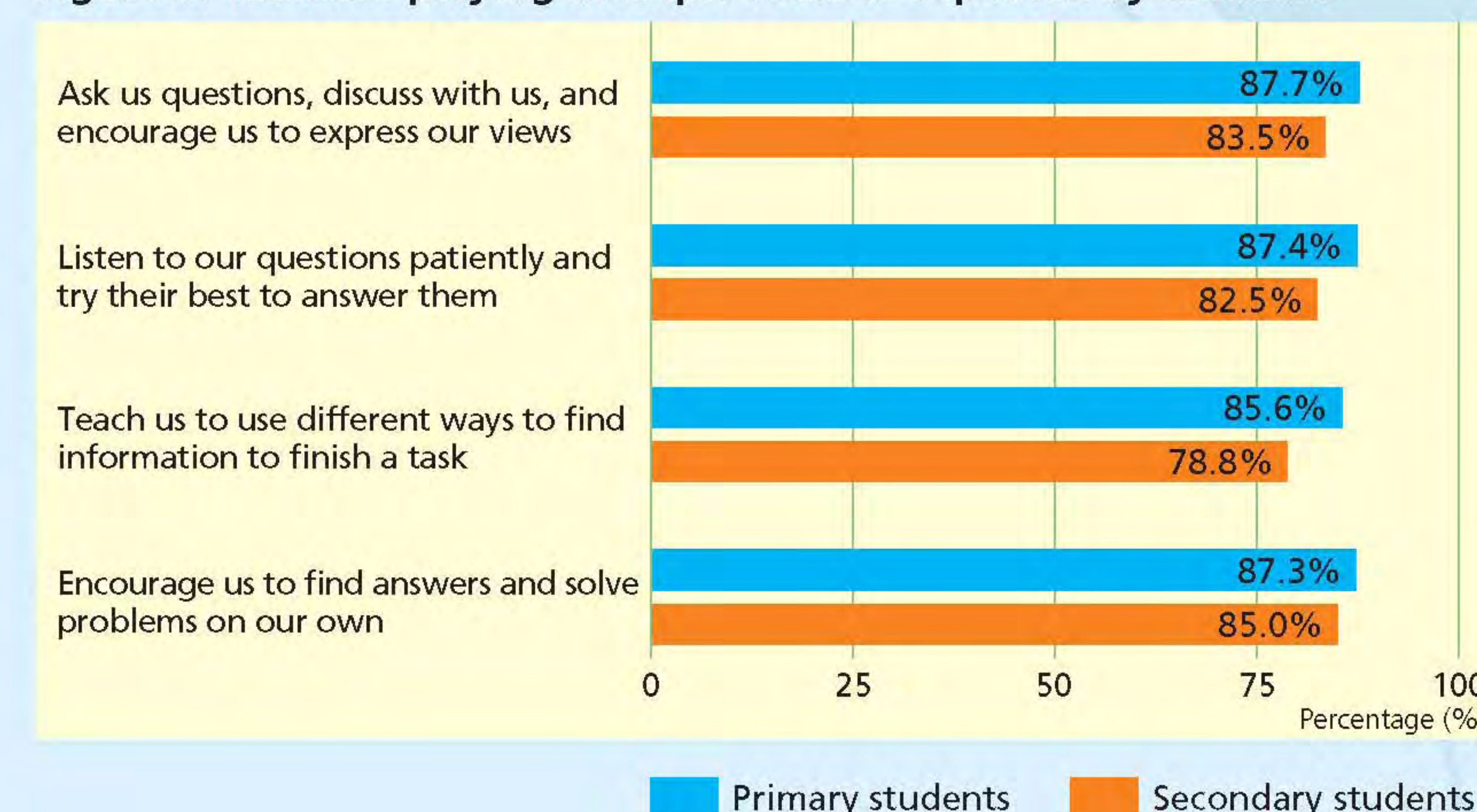
the role of transmitter in class before the introduction of the reform, and that the percentages of teachers giving a high weighting towards playing the role of facilitator in particular have grown much higher since (from 31-37% to 66-71%), with similar shifts in relation to acting as a resource person or counsellor when required. This suggests, as the survey report concludes, that teachers are progressively developing a broader repertoire of teaching approaches for 'enhancing the independent learning capabilities of students for whole-person development'.

Equally important is that this judgment is backed by the students themselves, who overwhelmingly state that their teachers have adopted more effective learning and teaching techniques. There have, according to more than 85% of the primary and 75% of the secondary students surveyed for the Interim Survey, been many more instances where teachers 'ask us questions, discuss with us, and encourage us to express our views', 'listen to our questions patiently and try their best to answer them', 'teach us to use different ways to find information to finish a task', and 'encourage us to find answers and solve problems on our own'. (See Figure 8.)

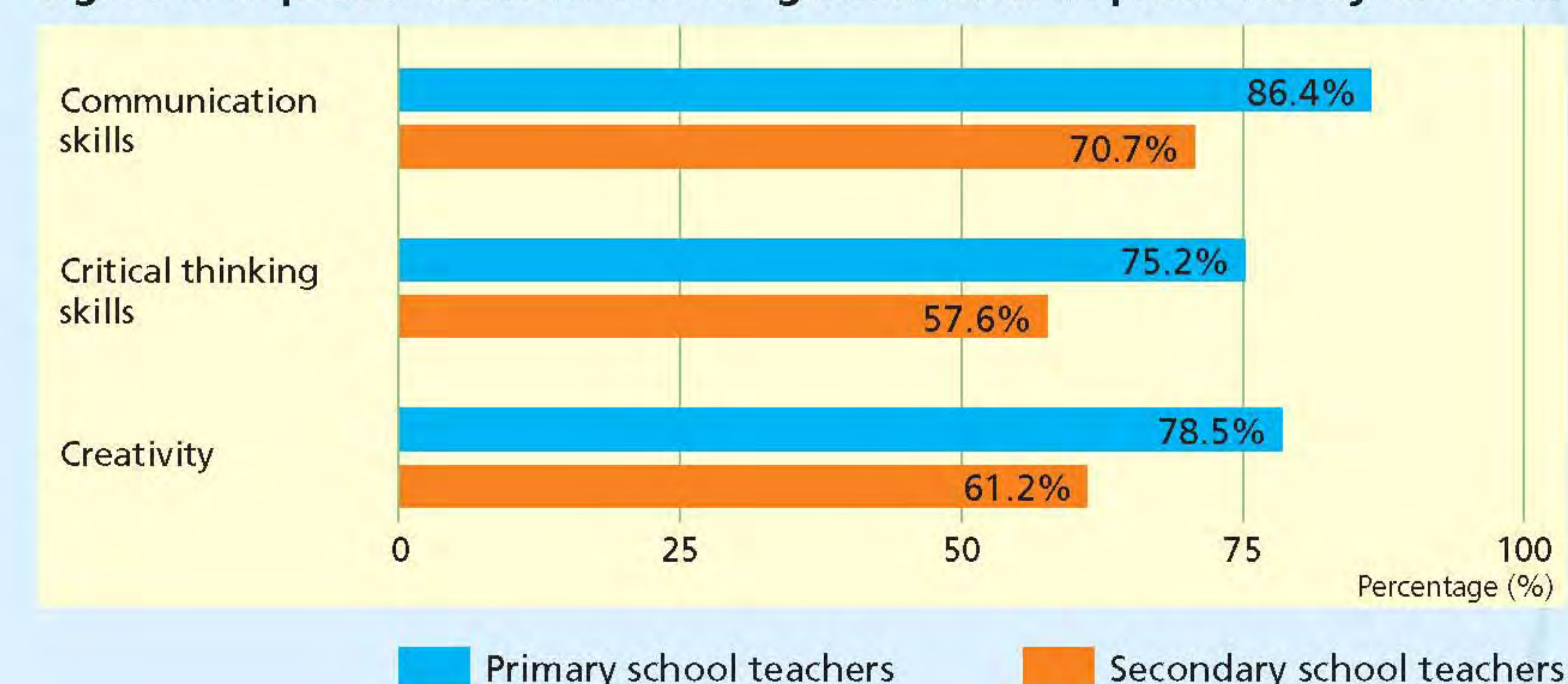
The result is, as indicated earlier in this report, that students' generic capacities in such areas as communication, creativity and critical thinking have noticeably improved, as perceived by 75-86% of primary teachers and 58-71% of secondary teachers and they are developing as more independent learners as a result. (See Figure 9.)

At a more behavioural level, an extremely high 98+% of school leaders feel their schools have achieved progress in strengthening the cultivation of students' positive values and attitudes since 2001-02, and significant numbers of school heads and teachers believe an improvement in values

**Figure 8: Teachers playing multiple roles as reported by students**



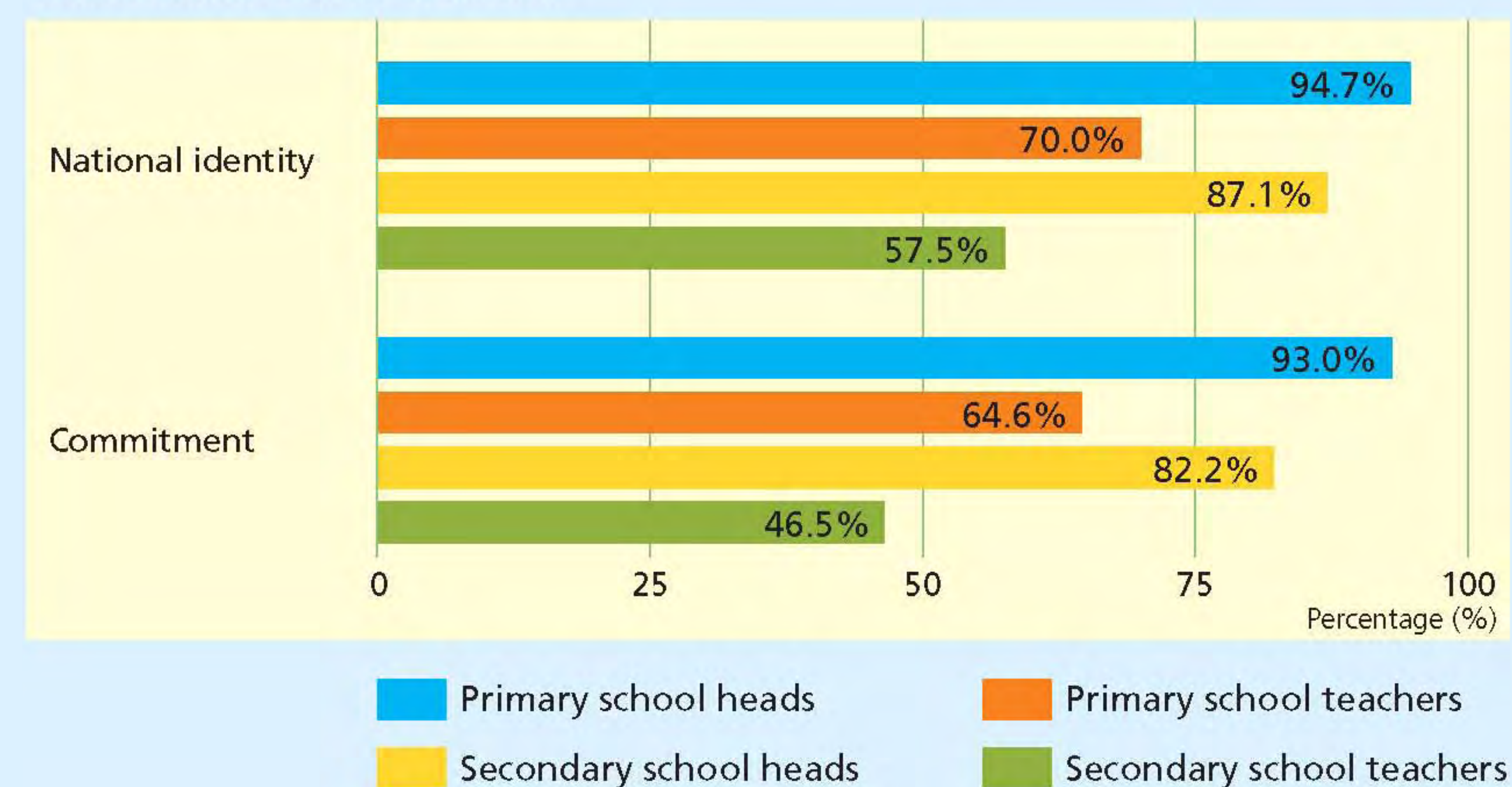
**Figure 9: Improvement in students' generic skills as perceived by teachers**



and attitudes related to national identity and commitment has been achieved (See Figure 10.); albeit recognising as they did in the focus group interviews that it will be a long process particularly since, as some interviewees noted, they have had to combat some counter forces in



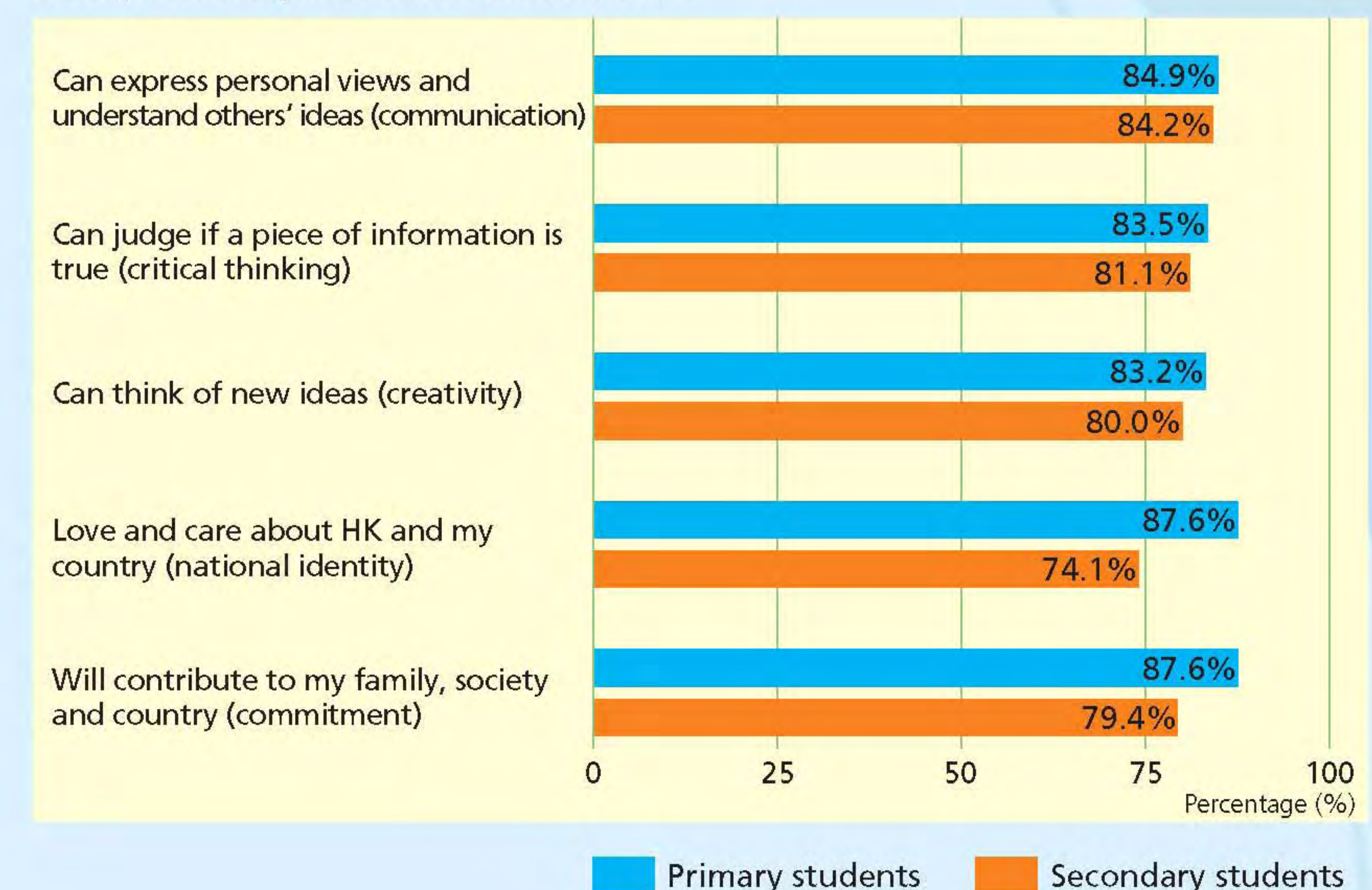
**Figure 10: Improvement in students' values and attitudes as perceived by school heads and teachers**



the community and mass media. It is, nonetheless, a process they see as worth the effort, since it will have positive benefits not only for the students themselves, but also for Hong Kong society as a whole.

Students echo these teacher views, with more than 80% of primary and secondary students describing their own performance in positive ways in each of these generic skills, with 74-88% of them agreeing that they have developed positively in the values and attitudes related to national identity and commitment. (See Figure 11.)

**Figure 11: Students' performance in generic skills and values and attitudes as reported by students themselves**



That said, it is a work in progress, and the focus group interviews in particular did reveal that leaders, teachers and students alike feel they have made more satisfactory advances in communication and creativity than in critical thinking where, at the primary level at least, the skills are more demanding and the teachers feel they may lack sufficient training for the task. This is something we will need to monitor over time and, if necessary, take further action to address.



For the most part, efforts by teachers and schools to employ effective strategies to help all students acquire basic competence in Chinese and English have seen an improvement in language teaching in our primary and secondary schools; with 82% to 99% of primary and secondary stakeholder respondents believing that Chinese and English language learning and teaching has improved since the implementation of the reforms.

## TEACHERS AND SCHOOLS

The reforms have also benefited many leaders and teachers in schools. The responses of school heads and teachers to the questionnaires concerning their practice and perceptions as part of the third and most recent annual survey of front-line practitioners were such, for instance, that the survey report concluded that:

- **Most school heads had**
  - extended and enriched their professional knowledge and capabilities as the leaders and managers of change in their schools;
  - improved their understanding of the school-based curriculum development process; and
  - enhanced their ability to work collaboratively with their teachers in effecting organisational and curriculum change within their schools.
- **Most teachers had**
  - improved their understanding of the curriculum reform;
  - developed their pedagogical content knowledge with respect to both the objects of learning and learning-teaching strategies;

- improved their ability to use effective 'assessment for learning' strategies;
- improved their ability to plan and organise the curriculum in a form that catered for their students' learning needs; and
- improved their ability to participate in whole-school curriculum development and to develop a holistic view of the curriculum.

There is, in this context, still a long way to go with the reforms given we have only just entered the medium-term phase, but the positive impact already is being felt as teaching practices change and students become more engaged with their classroom learning and work.

## Significant implementation challenges remain

It generally is the case that the major hurdle facing any programme of reform is to gain stakeholder buy-in and support. The evidence outlined above, however, demonstrates that this already has been achieved, so the major challenge substantially has been overcome. And for that, you again deserve our thanks.

The key challenges that exist, in this context, therefore tend to be matters of implementation and, in particular, ensuring there is clarity of direction and you receive the support that you need. A number of key challenges are briefly discussed below, as a prelude to a discussion of how we will support you to meet these challenges over the coming years.



## TEACHERS' WORKLOAD

Far and away the issue most cited by school leaders and teachers as impeding successful implementation of the reform is teacher workload.

The Interim Survey, which specifically sought feedback on the factors which hinder the implementation of reform nominated teacher workload as the major hindrance to overcome. Similarly, the most prominent hindrance to emerge from the focus group interviews undertaken was teachers' workload and a perception that the EDB, to that point at least, had not done enough.

The EDB acknowledges that the concerns that principals and teachers have expressed are real and require a genuine response. That is why the independent Teacher Workload Study was commissioned in 2006 and a number of measures aimed at alleviating the burden on teachers were subsequently introduced. These are discussed in more detail in the following section on the support that EDB will provide.

## LEARNER DIVERSITY

We know from what you have told us in surveys and interviews that you struggle with learner diversity and the range of students you may find in your class, which also contributes to your growing workload.

Primary School Masters/Mistresses (Curriculum Development), for example, who primary school heads suggest in the Interim Survey Report play a very important role in helping to unite the teaching force, were clear in their focus group interviews on the need to increase teachers' understanding of 'how to cater for learner diversity'. Similarly, Secondary

school panel heads 'hoped' that more resources could be devoted to enabling teachers 'to understand and acquire the skills needed for integrated education'.

In part, of course, this requires training along the lines discussed in more detail below. Equally, though, it poses a challenge to produce the sort of exemplars of successful practice, either from the 'Seed' Projects or from other schools, that the Interim Survey Report envisages when it cites 'a great need for learning and teaching resources, and resources and reference materials for school-based curriculum development'.

## BUILDING CAPACITY

Workload, as school leaders and teachers well know, is only one side of the challenge you face in coming to grips with approaches that are new. Just as important is the need to ensure that you feel fully equipped to do your job the best that you can. That is why you have told us through surveys and interviews over a number of years that you value the professional development we provide, and equally that you would like to have more; particularly if it involves more sharing with colleagues and peer observation to build on the formal programmes you attend.

We know from a substantial body of educational research that the key determinant of students' learning at school is the quality of teaching they receive and, in turn, that a key determinant of the quality of teaching in a school is the educational leadership that the principal and leadership team can provide. That is why we continually must strive to build the capacity of leaders and teachers in schools.



Part of achieving this is through building professional learning communities in all schools whereby teachers and leaders regularly share and provide feedback on each other's work, observe and critique lessons in a constructive way, examine relevant educational research, and engage in dialogue about how they collectively can improve.

An important start has been made in this regard, with many schools noting through the surveys and interviews we conduct that, as the HKIEd report on the latest round of focus group interviews explained, as quoted earlier, 'since the implementation of curriculum reform, schools have, through collaborative lesson planning and lesson observations, nurtured a team culture and so have brought about exchanges on professional development and improved teaching effectiveness'. In addition, they observed that 'SH [school heads] have played an important role in changing school culture and establishing a learning community'.

This is something we will continue to promote, including through the provision of the well-received Capacity Enhancement Grant, and particularly in light of the finding from interviews conducted that teachers feel the EDB 'should provide them with professional training on teaching methods and lesson observation'. This also is why we provide an extensive array of professional training and development programmes which also are discussed more fully in the following section of this report.

## INVOLVING PARENTS

Parents have a major influence on their children and can support or counter your work. The development of a strong partnership between parents and their school can contribute positively to the social, emotional, interpersonal and academic development of all students, regardless of

whether they are in junior primary, senior secondary or any of the years in between.

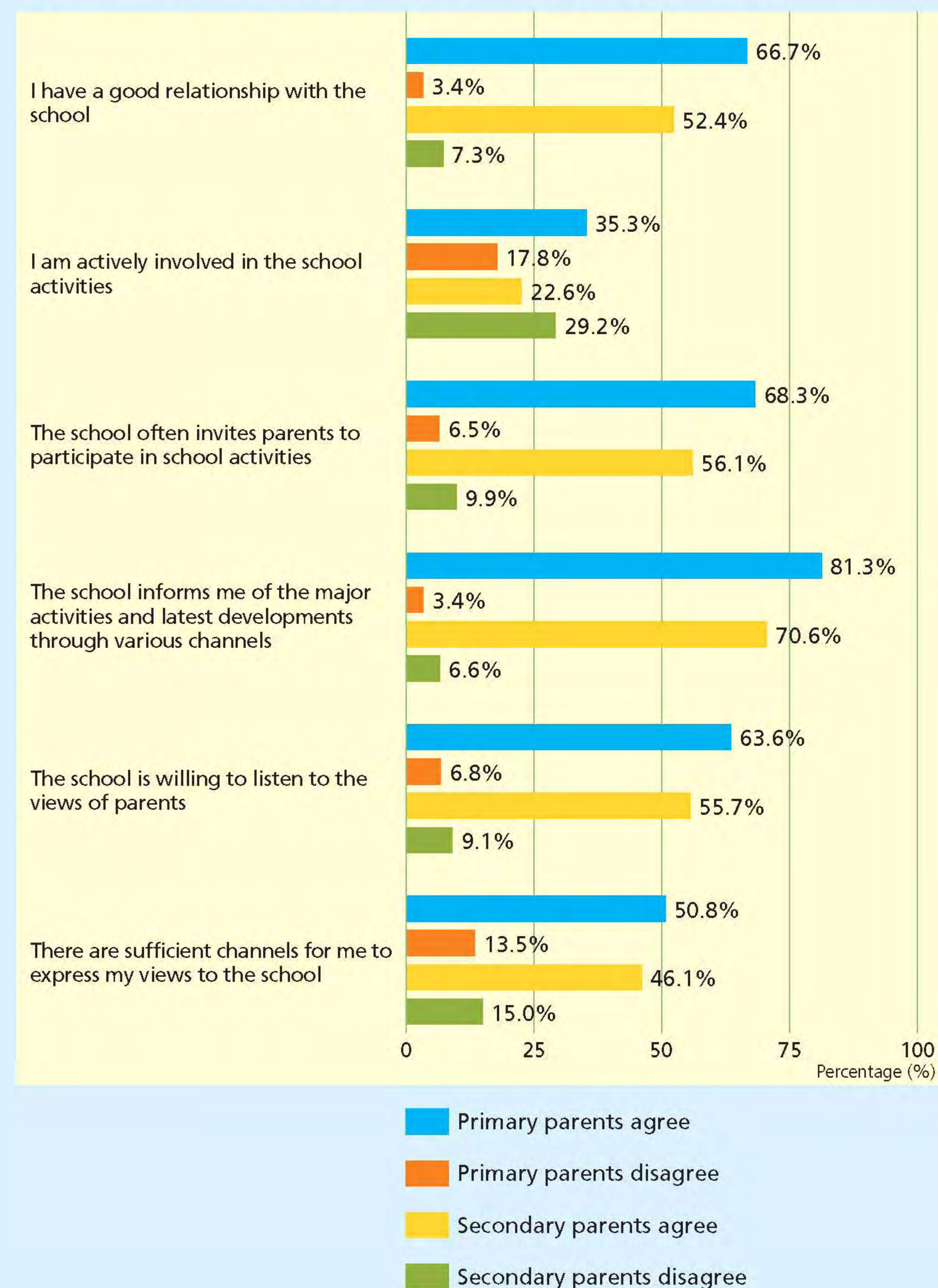
The importance of developing such partnerships readily can be seen when we examine the efforts of schools to develop moral and civic awareness and the generic skills of perseverance and self-management that are important for success in later life. A consistent finding from interviews conducted with teachers and leaders in schools was that many saw parents as 'over-protective' of their children, with negative effects on the extent to which they developed self-management skills. Similarly, parents often were described as doing too much for their children so their persistence tended to be weak, and as adopting moral and civic stances which conflicted with those being promoted by the school.

This suggests, as recommended by HKIEd in the Interim Survey Report, a need to 'enhance communication with parents and the community and to mobilise all sectors to work towards the same goal and help students to distinguish the important values that they have to develop'.

In this regard it should be noted that there already is a strong base on which to build. The 2006 stakeholder survey study of around 50,000 parent surveys completed as part of the External School Review process showed a healthy 81% of primary and 71% of secondary school parents feel, for example, that they are regularly informed of important activities and developments in the school through such channels as letters, the parent-teacher association and the school website. In addition, about half of the parents surveyed (51% primary and 46% secondary) feel there are sufficient channels to express their views to the school, though this also leaves significant room to improve. (See Figure 12.)



**Figure 12: Parents' perceptions of home-school cooperation (%)**



Counter-balancing this is the fact that only 35% of primary and 23% of secondary parents indicate that they are actively involved in school activities, even though 67% and 52% respectively feel they have a good relationship with the school. This suggests there is scope for schools, taking account of the family background of their intake, to aim for even higher levels of school-parent partnership that can contribute to stronger parental support for the overall work of the school and important facets of the learning and teaching programmes it provides.

## ASSESSMENT

One very clear challenge to emerge from the focus group interviews in particular is the need to more effectively manage assessment, especially tests and examinations, to create space for teachers and students and ensure more of a focus on assessment for learning as well as the substantial assessment of learning that already exists.

This in turn implies a need to improve teachers' understanding of the principles and practices of effective assessment (what often is called 'assessment literacy') so they can balance:

- summative assessment of learning to determine what students have achieved; and
- formative assessment which focuses on teacher feedback, student reflection and self-assessment throughout the year to inform the next stage of learning that will occur.

This primarily is a matter for further professional development (discussed in detail below), along with teaching methods, cooperative learning, lesson observations and assisting students to make the transition between



different key stages, which emerged as the 'most needed' areas for training identified in the HKIEd report of interviews conducted in 2007.

Similarly, when asked in the Interim Survey to describe the particular items of training courses / seminars / workshops they feel they most need, 99% of Primary School Masters / Mistresses (Curriculum Development), and 93% of primary and 92% of secondary coordinators / panel heads nominated 'strategies and ways to promote assessment for learning' as a priority.

## EXEMPLARS AND OTHER MATERIALS

A key contributor to teachers' feelings of anxiety and overwork when confronted with new and different demands is the belief that this is something 'I have to do on my own'. On the contrary, however, there is much that already is known about strategies that work which can be disseminated through exemplars and other support, while many schools and teachers are being supported to trial and learn from new approaches that then can be shared. The Collaborative Research and Development ('Seed') Projects and Seconded Teachers Strategy are two initiatives that aim to enable teachers to serve as curriculum change agents in schools and generate materials that can meet your demand for more resource support, and the Professional Development Schools Scheme supports schools with particular expertise to share this with other schools.

Beyond this, the EDB already has provided a range of learning and teaching support materials, primarily in the form of Curriculum Guides, which have generally received a favourable response. Those who have read them, the annual surveys show, not only find them useful, but also

tend to feel more confident and competent in their implementation as well; and we would, therefore, urge you to read the relevant guides if you have not already done so since they provide important exemplar support.

For all of this, however, it is clear from what you have told us through the surveys and interviews conducted that you strongly desire more exemplars and support materials in general, but with a focus on key elements of the reform. Two areas where this especially is the case are assessment and dealing with learner diversity which each are mentioned above.

## MAINTAINING MOMENTUM

Our major programme of curriculum reform is being progressively implemented over a very substantial period of time. This not only reflects the magnitude of the programme as a whole, but the need to build professional and public support, and prepare and skill people for the task.

While implementation over such a period will, as already suggested, build professional confidence and competence to make the change, there is a risk we could lose momentum as people relax because of what they already have achieved.

An important aspect of regularly collecting and analysing data on stakeholder views and reporting the challenges identified as a result, is to keep us all focused on the overall objectives we seek to achieve, and ensure a desire and willingness to persist. And the next section of this report on how we will support you in this task is in part aimed at ensuring the momentum is maintained.



## We will support you in your task

Hong Kong's programme of curriculum reform is accompanied by a massive programme of government and EDB support which we regularly evaluate and adjust to meet the challenges to implementation that emerge as well as your main expressed needs.

In reporting on the help we will provide for you to implement the reforms, it is important to distinguish between concerns and challenges we can tackle, and those which are subject to extraneous factors beyond our power to control.

### TACKLING EMPLOYMENT ISSUES FOR TEACHERS

Declining enrolments in Hong Kong coupled with economic downturn in previous years, and the impact they have in terms of surplus teachers and laboratory technicians, redundancy and the like are a fact of life which present a challenge for our community as a whole to tackle hand in hand.

Taking into account the latest population projections as well as the school sector's views, the EDB will review the arrangements for operation of P1 classes in the 2008-09 school year and thereafter to manage this as best we can. Nonetheless, we acknowledge that these are intractable problems where no perfect solution exists, and there will continue to be difficulties we must together seek to address.

What EDB can and is doing in this context, is to try to ameliorate the effects to the extent we can, within budget limits the government sets. That is why we have introduced such important support measures as:

- the Capacity Enhancement Grant which not only seeks to reduce teachers' workload to enable them to concentrate on the critical reform tasks, but also creates vacancies in schools which teachers who otherwise may become redundant are able to fill; and
- a range of ways in which surplus teacher numbers can be minimised such as
  - redeployment to fill vacancies in other schools under the same school sponsoring body;
  - voluntary job sharing where this does not detract from student learning, and the EDB has prepared *Guidelines on the Handling of Job-sharing in Aided Schools* to help in this regard;
  - appointment of surplus teachers to fill temporary vacancies of one year or more;
  - support for applications for leave without pay for reasons other than training or study, and for leave that is longer than one year; and
  - offsetting redundancies with teaching vacancies that may arise from the retirement or resignation of serving teachers, teachers joining the Early Retirement Scheme for Aided Primary School Teachers, and so on.

In addition, the significant number of additional teaching positions created by the Bureau's support measures to reduce workload announced in March 2006 and outlined below, have the added benefit of markedly reducing the number of surplus teachers throughout Hong Kong.

Taken together and used wisely, the additional resources these measures provide not only can enable the school to improve learning and teaching for its students, but also allow you to reduce teachers' workload and



significantly soften the impact on staffing that declining enrolments otherwise would have. Nonetheless, we recognise and accept that the impact of economic and population change is a source of anxiety for many teachers and schools, which is why we will continue to consult with you and your representatives on employment issues and plans, will continue to monitor your feelings and views, and are open to any constructive and realistic options we can further pursue.

The two key implementation challenges you have set us where we do have more control, and hence have taken deliberate action to address, are reducing your workload and ensuring you have professional development and other associated capacity-building support.

### **EASING THE BURDEN OF WORK**

A measure of the Bureau's acceptance that teacher workload is a matter of concern, was the decision to establish the independent Teacher Workload Study to investigate the issue and recommend on actions the EDB could take in response. This gave us substantial data on the nature and extent of the issue and enabled us to craft a comprehensive programme of remedial initiatives as a result.

In March 2006, therefore, the Bureau was able to announce a series of long-term support measures for teachers that improve the teaching establishment and provide you with some workload relief so you can concentrate on what matters most — your teaching. What is more, these measures are targeted at easing some of your key related concerns, already noted above, such as dealing with learner diversity in your classes and managing your assessment demands, whilst reducing the overall administrative burden that you face.

More specifically, the Bureau committed a recurrent expenditure of \$1.76 billion per year to fund a range of initiatives that involve 2,800 permanent teaching posts, 1,400 of which are new. This very substantial number of teaching positions is designed to:

- implement specialised teaching in all primary schools and adopt a permanent establishment class-to-teacher ratio of 1:1.5;
- turn the previously time-limited five-year post of Primary School Curriculum Leader into permanent establishment to assist the school head in leading whole-school curriculum planning and ensuring the implementation of these plans including targeted support to teaching staff;
- improve the student guidance personnel-to-class ratio from 1:24 to 1:18 to help meet the growing demand for support for pupils and parents, and provide personal growth and development programmes as well as advice to teachers in their schools;
- gradually providing additional teachers at junior levels in secondary schools which have admitted Band Three and bottom 10% students to help cater for student diversity and meet the needs of academic low achievers; and
- make the popular Capacity Enhancement Grant, which enables schools to hire additional staff and / or procure services depending on their needs and priorities, a permanent provision that not only contributes to reducing workload but helps improve student learning as well.



As well as these direct staffing measures, the EDB's response to the Teacher Workload Study included a range of other initiatives that should ease your burden over time, including:

- simplification of the process and requirements of school-based assessment for Chinese and English in the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination 2007 along with increased professional development and other supports such as handbooks, recommended texts and text selection guidelines and an introductory DVD on school-based assessment, and review the arrangements for Territory-wide System Assessment in light of the experience of the past three years;
- further improvement to the arrangements for External School Review such as the introduction of a pre-inspection visit to brief the school on the process and help avoid any tendency of over-documentation and over-preparation for the review; and
- allowing applications for the Quality Education Fund to be submitted throughout the year, rather than on an annual basis so schools can ease the stress of meeting the application deadline.

In addition to the above measures implemented in response to the Teacher Workload Study, the Bureau has also introduced other measures to reduce teacher workload and create more space for students to learn and teachers to focus on professional work.

Aside from these system-wide initiatives, it is important to recognise there is much you can do at the school level yourselves to reduce the workload you all face. Often we multiply our work by treating everything as though

it is equally important and has to be done at once, rather than prioritising what matters most and doing that first. Similarly we have a tendency, that has been alluded to earlier in this report, to want to do everything ourselves, rather than delegating to others and / or sharing the task.

At another level meetings, as we all know, demand a substantial amount of our time. A regular complaint from teachers and school heads, which emerged clearly in the focus group interviews was that, as one teacher indicated, the longer the meetings, the more time they had to spend drawing up minutes once they were held. One primary panel head even suggested that 'teachers' workload did not come from teaching, but from administrative meetings'.

There is a need in this context to seriously review the meetings a school conducts to ensure they all need to be held. When it is determined a meeting is required in the school, it is important to ensure that adequate preparation is done to avoid wasting your time and it only involves those who need to attend. While this may seem fairly obvious advice, it often is ignored in practice, and primarily is cited here to illustrate that some of the challenge related to workload is a challenge for you in your schools.

## **CAPACITY-BUILDING SUPPORT**

Since the commencement of the reform programme in 2001, the EDB has sought to provide school leaders and teachers with substantial capacity-building support to help ensure the successful implementation of the reforms. This has culminated in a very significant programme of professional learning in 2006-07, which is further supplemented by the Collaborative Research and Development ('Seed') Projects and the Seconded Teachers Strategy as well as a range of materials and other resources on which you can draw.



### Professional development and other school-based support

The professional development programmes and school-based support services the EDB has been providing are designed to link your continuing professional development to school-based curriculum development and broader school development in coherent ways that will enhance learning and teaching in schools.

This is consistent with the focus group finding that what schools and teachers most need is 'professional training in teaching methods, cooperative learning, lesson observation, course evaluation and assisting students to make the transition between different key stages', rather than more programmes for understanding the purpose and nature of the curriculum reform. As the HKIEd report observes:

*..... it can be seen that the training most needed by front-line teachers at present is no longer in understanding the rationale of the curriculum reform and strategies for its implementation, but in strategies for classroom teaching and curriculum planning, and the skills for setting up with colleagues a learning community in schools. This shows that the curriculum reform has already moved from the initial implementation stage to the continuation stage.*

Efforts to build capacity along these lines will assist schools and teachers to develop the repertoire of skills you need to manage learner diversity and assessment for learning where you identified a particular professional development need.

That is why the current EDB professional development programme:

- for primary schools includes strengthened programmes on sharpening teachers' understanding and mastery of whole-school curriculum planning and implementation, as well as consolidation of teachers' mastery of strategies to cater for learning diversity and to use diversified modes of assessment for improving student learning; and
- for secondary schools includes strengthened programmes on understanding and interpreting the NSS curricula, assessing student learning in NSS, learning and teaching strategies for NSS and enriching knowledge for the NSS curricula.

This substantial array of professional development programmes is supplemented by a range of school-based support services tailored to meet the specific needs of schools as identified through their own analysis of their situation and the major areas of concern identified through their school development plans. The services which your schools can access comprise:

- School-based Curriculum Development Support Services for Primary Schools and Secondary Schools in specific Key Learning Area (KLA) and issues (e.g. catering for learner diversity and preparation for NSS curricula);
- Language Learning Support Services;



- University-School Support Programmes in the form of the Quality School Improvement Project where universities work collaboratively with school practitioners to help them develop their schools as learning organisations, and the Partnership for Improvement of Learning and Teaching Project which provides school-based support on a KLA and/or cross-curricula basis; and
- The Professional Development Schools Scheme which enables schools with exemplary practices in KLAs or whole-school pedagogical approaches to lead professional sharing on their practices and expertise.

### **Research and development**

The Collaborative Research and Development ('Seed') Projects were initiated by the Bureau's Curriculum Development Institute (CDI) in 2001 as an ongoing means of sharing expertise and experience between schools and CDI personnel as they collaboratively try out new approaches to learning and teaching and curriculum development that then can be disseminated to other schools. Additional resources (e.g. supply teachers) have been provided to some schools (depending on the intensity and complexity involved in the 'Seed' Projects) to enable teachers to play the role of curriculum change agents, and also in some areas, to serve as seconded teachers in the CDI through the complementary Seconded Teachers Strategy. The Seconded Teachers Strategy enables indicate teachers to take up professional duties in specific job openings in the EDB for the mutual exchange of experience and expertise. Seconded teachers bring valuable front-line experience to the Bureau and, in turn, gain useful insights through exposure to new areas of work and collaboration

with other education professionals. The scheme not only builds the partnership between the Bureau and schools, but also is beneficial to individuals' professional development as well as service delivery when they return to their schools.

Evaluation questionnaires collected from participating schools since 2001-02 on the effect of the projects show, as the most recent evaluation report notes, 'very positive impacts on curriculum development, professional development, student learning as well as partnership building between the CDI and schools'. In addition, the report suggests the projects have generated 'a critical mass of curriculum change agents ..... and that would serve as a strong impetus to school-based curriculum development'.

While fewer survey respondents agree the projects have yet to produce a positive impact on student learning, or that their schools have achieved the objectives of their projects, they clearly recognise this is a longer term task. This is evident in the fact that 90% of primary and 80% of secondary schools involved intend to continue curriculum development in their schools as a result of their project. What is more, 84% of primary and 73% of secondary schools already have formulated plans to sustain the positive impact the projects had. These plans generally involve extending the influence of the projects to other levels in the school (e.g. to different KLAs and/or different year levels) and adopting a more whole-school approach.

Certainly surveys and focus group interviews conducted with seconded teachers after their experience shows it contributed to their professional growth and capacity to act as change agents in schools; which is why most see it as an important strategy for supporting curriculum reform. More specifically, the findings from the post-secondment evaluation



showed, according to the evaluation report, that

*..... on returning to their schools after the secondment, many of the seconded teachers made use of the experience from the secondment and successfully played the role of a curriculum change agent in their school. They set clear goals and planned for the school-based curriculum, and tried out new initiatives to enhance learning and teaching. More significantly, they had helped in nurturing a collaborative school culture, and building professional networks within and outside the school, all of which had facilitated the school-based curriculum development and implementation of the curriculum reform. Although they faced difficulties in these endeavours ..... many of them still regarded the strategy as essential in promoting professional development and enhancing learning and teaching in the school.*

Clearly there is much capacity-building support that the EDB provides. As is the case with teacher workload discussed above, however, there is also much that you and your schools can do for yourselves. Structuring the timetable to enable teachers to have time for collaborative planning or lesson observations, ensuring the materials the EDB has produced are read and discussed, or forming networks with other schools are all examples of school-based capacity-building actions you can take. It undoubtedly is something we all will continue to learn as we go, and the increased sharing between schools that the range of initiatives outlined in this report are designed to promote, can only help us in that task.

### **GOOD LEADERSHIP IS REQUIRED**

All of your efforts to implement the reforms in your schools, and our efforts to support you in the task, are only strengthened by good leadership in schools.

Several studies of school leadership across different countries (e.g. Sammons , Leithwood & Riehl , and Fullan ) provide clear and consistent messages about the important role that school leaders play. The highly-respected educational researcher and practitioner Professor Michael Fullan from Canada put it particularly clearly when he observed in 2001 that 'I know of no improving school that doesn't have a principal who is good at leading improvement'.

Interestingly enough, this is something that teachers in particular already have told us themselves through the large survey of stakeholders conducted as part of the process of External School Review. For both primary and secondary teachers surveyed, the greatest source of variation between schools is found in the quality of leadership and management of those schools. More specifically, wide differences can be found between schools in the perceived quality of principal, vice-principal and middle management leadership and the impact this has; and all of the other elements of the surveys that teachers completed were significantly and substantially predicted by the quality of school leadership. Results from the study also showed that curriculum quality in the school in teachers' eyes is linked significantly to the quality of the school's leadership and management.

While the quality of leadership and management in the overwhelming majority of our schools is very good, the challenge is to ensure it continually improves, particularly since it clearly has such a strong and direct impact on teachers' views and the quality of their work.

Once again, like teacher workload and capacity-building in schools, leadership is something that both the Bureau and people in schools can work to improve. From our point of view this means supporting



leadership development through such measures as the highly successful Primary School Curriculum Leadership initiative which now has been made permanent rather than fixed term, continued professional development and other opportunities for school heads and other leaders, and the workshops (e.g. school leaders workshops and middle managers workshops) for leadership teams implementing the NSS.

At the school level it primarily involves efforts to build leadership capacity beyond just the school head, and to ensure leadership at many levels in the school, particularly among middle level leaders. Leadership teams in schools help sustain school improvement, spread the leadership load, connect to more teachers in the school, provide a range of support and advice, and develop leadership in others. This in turn only helps build greater levels of trust in the school which underpin the development of the sort of collaborative learning communities that, as already noted, teachers and principals seek, and which sustain the momentum for improvement over time.

## **We welcome your views and want you engaged**

School heads and teachers are in the front-line of the curriculum reform programme in Hong Kong. You not only are implementing the reforms each and every day, but also have a good sense of the overall impact that they have. That is why we have been so concerned to regularly sample and gain your views. On the other side of the coin, however, we at the centre are in a position to gain a broader appreciation of the implementation of the reforms across Hong Kong as a whole, rather

than just one or two schools, and the territory-wide impact this has. That is why we have been equally concerned to report to you on progress at this mid-term stage.

Teachers and school heads have, as acknowledged earlier, done a magnificent job in the implementation of the reforms; and yet the challenge is only half way through and there is much more to be done. We have learned a great deal from what we have achieved to date, and this has informed the nature of the support programmes the EDB has put in place and much of the practice in schools.

We need to continue to learn from our collective experiences both in the Bureau and in schools, whilst also drawing on appropriate local and international research to deliver a world-class education to all students in Hong Kong. That is why we want to keep the two-way flow of communication going between the Bureau and schools, including constructive criticism when it is required. It is only through ongoing dialogue and collective analysis of our experiences of implementation as they occur that we can ensure we are using the best strategies that we can.

Building on the existing strengths and experiences developed during the short-term phase, most school heads and teachers agreed in the Interim Survey that their schools would focus on the five identified aspects for future school development in the medium-term implementation phase — i.e. 1) continue to develop the school-based curriculum; 2) continue to improve learning, teaching, and assessment strategies; 3) strengthen the implementation of moral and civic education in different KLAs / subjects; 4) reinforce catering for learner diversity; and 5) strengthen students' generic skills. We urge you to consider these aspects and this



report in your schools and use them as the basis for a conversation about what you are doing well, where shortcomings exist that you need to overcome, and how you can work with other schools to gain maximum impact from the sharing of expertise.

Six years is not long when it comes to changing education and schools. We are fortunate that we already had a strong and successful education base in Hong Kong on which to build, a clear and coherent programme of reform, and a dedicated and talented educational workforce to carry the programme through. The result is that much has been achieved in this time.

As we enter the medium-term implementation phase for our ambitious programme of reform, we are bolstered by the high degree of programme implementation that has occurred, the positive effects it is having in our schools and, in particular, the level of commitment, effort and professional support it has received from leaders and teachers in all Hong Kong schools.



