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Ensure safety of school premises

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THE holding of a 10-year-old schoolboy as hostage by a mentally deranged man for four hours recently was very disturbing as it happened in a school.

It was a miracle that the little boy escaped with minor injuries. I can imagine the trauma and mental anguish his father went through witnessing his son being held at knife-point.

As parents, we leave our children in school for about seven hours and we think it is the safest place because of the strict security there. This incident probably took place while children were still coming to school and before the school gates were closed.

My sons go to a primary school in town just opposite the hospital. The perimeter of the school facing the hospital is fenced up and there is a main gate which is closed during school hours. However, there is no fence on all the other sides and anyone can drive in through the other entrance at any time.

The explanation given is that there are three other schools in the vicinity and the district education office is also sited there. Hence, the public need access to this office.

But surely the Education Department and the school can think of other ways to fence up the school compound itself while not compromising accessibility to the education office.

The other issue on security is the fact that there is a small side gate at the fenced up area facing the hospital which pupils use for access to the school if they are dropped off on that side. However, this gate is never locked when the school is in session and hence a large number of hospital staff (mainly male) enter the school premises to go to the canteen via this side entrance.

As a parent, I have visited the school numerous times and found this happening. With so many unfortunate incidents occurring, how is that the school allows outsiders to enter the school premises while the school is in session? Are they all checked and investigated for their background before being allowed in? Can the school principal vouch for that?

We understand that there is a psychiatric ward in the hospital but I feel it is morally not right to view these patients as potential threats, as danger can come from anywhere.

There are two bus stops on either side of the road in front of the hospital and they are always crowded with people. There is nothing to stop anyone with ill intentions from entering the school via this open gate.

We have read of so many cases of mentally ill men running amok and killing innocent people recently. They killed their mothers and young children, even while they were on medication. You can see so many of these people loitering in the streets; hence we need to take safety precautions before something untoward happens.

Besides, we parents have been under the impression that school canteens are only authorised to sell food to the schoolchildren and staff. How is it that this canteen is being allowed to sell food to the public?

We have spoken to the school authorities on tightening security in the school over the last few years but we have seen no action so far. It worries us that the authorities do not act until a disaster happens and then the usual finger pointing will start.

This seems to be the trend in Malaysia where complacency is the order of

the day and authorities start jumping up from their seats when a tragedy happens and if Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad orders an investigation.

I appeal to the Education Ministry and the authorities to look into the safety of school premises as we parents leave our children in their trust and care during school hours.

All school premises should be fenced and locked up during school hours and outsiders who have no business to be there should be barred from entering.

We need our peace of mind as Malaysia and the world at large is not what it used to be, and there have been too many tragedies of late that need not have happened.