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Stop the hoodlums

EDUCATION is a prime agent of social change and progress, improving lives from the misfortunes of environment, background or culture. It is therefore doubly deplorable that gangsterism has been allowed to invade our schools, the very place where young people are supposed to be turned into decent, law-abiding and productive citizens. The Ministry of Education has acted swiftly in dealing with the appalling incident in Sekolah Tuanku Abdul Rahman, Ipoh, where a student was beaten up by 20 senior students. The delinquents were rightly expelled - as Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said, those who are not interested in studying should be kept away from school. Haven't these boys read Tom Brown's Schooldays and what happened to Flashman?

The decline of morals and ethics in society at large may be partly to blame. However, the school institution itself must ultimately shoulder the main responsibility for the increasing instances of violence, gangsterism and disciplinary breakdown among students. The Malay College Kuala Kangsar, for example, retained its aristocratic traditions long after it changed its enrolment to one based on merit. High standards of conduct as well as academic performance were expected and enforced. Nothing remotely like the Ipoh outrage has ever occurred in its 98-year history.

Left without parental supervision, residential students are susceptible to both good and bad influences. They must thus be closely monitored by their teachers. Secret societies of school gangsters should be treated with the same despatch as their adult counterparts, if necessary with the help of the police. Violence and gangsterism in schools, as in the rest of society, must be punished and stopped at source.