

DPM: New blueprint will defend vernacular schools

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By Lawrence Yong

Education Minister Muhyiddin Yassin has given the assurance that vernacular schools have a right to exist and will be defended under the new National Education Blueprint launched today.

The deputy prime minister cited that the right of Chinese and Tamil schools to use mother tongue as a medium of instruction had been guaranteed under the Education Act 1996 (Section 28).

"The ministry does not intend to sidetrack any school stream that currently exist," Muhyiddin said at the launch of the 13-year education blueprint for 2013-2025.

"Their right to exist has never been denied."

He then paused to ask the audience - comprising ministers, politicians, education officials, academicians, teachers and students - for applause after announcing this.

He also assured continued equal access to quality education for all schools.

The National Education Blueprint is aimed at raising quality of Malaysian education system to match its already satisfactory enrolment rates. Nearly 96 percent of children are now enrolled in primary schools and 81 percent in secondary schools. But recent tests showed that Malaysian students were far below international standards in Maths and Science.

The blueprint includes revamping the school curriculum by 2017, an emphasis on learning maths and science in Bahasa Melayu and raising the standard of English as a second language. Students would also be encouraged to learn a third language - Chinese, Tamil, Arab, Spanish, French and Japanese -but this would only be gradually introduced.

To raise English teaching standards, some 9,000 teachers will be trained for the Cambridge placement test in October by the British Council, up from 5,000 previously, Muhyiddin said.

Schools would also be tasked to conduct extra classes for BM and English and

ensure that Year One to Three students will be screened twice a year.

The government also plans to rope in private sector involvement in education with the aim of setting up 500 Trust Schools by 2025.

The blueprint also incorporated previously announced rollout of Internet learning facilities in all 10,000 national schools, through 1Bestari Net, which would also allow parents to monitor their own children's progress. The project's cost was recently questioned in Parliament.

Lowering teachers' admin burden

"This is one way in which the teacher's burden can be lightened and it also levels the playing field between rural and urban schools," Muhyiddin told reporters later at a press conference.

Teachers should also applaud as the blueprint also aimed to lower administrative burden for teachers and help chart better career growth, he said.

"In the next five years, 4,000 school principals or headmaster will retire and opportunities to fill these positions will be opened," Muhyiddin said.

He added that the government aimed to eventually employ only the top 30 percent of university graduates to be teachers in the future. Those less qualified may be given administrative duties instead.

A copy of the 300-page blueprint which took two years to put together can be downloaded from the government's website.

It was first presented to the public by Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak in September 2012. Besides an annual progress report, the entire blueprint will be reviewed again in 2015, 2020 and 2025.

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