

Two M'sian trust schools shortlisted for World's Best School Prizes

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Two Malaysian trust schools have been shortlisted as top 10 finalists for the inaugural World's Best School Prizes, with a prize pool of US\$250,000 (RM1.1 million) to be shared equally among the winners of the five categories under the award.

SK Kempadang in Kuantan is in the running for the World's Best School Prize for Innovation, while SMK Kampong Jawa, Klang, is one of the finalists for the World's Best School Prize for Overcoming Adversity.

The awards were launched by digital platform T4 Education in partnership with Yayasan Hasanah, Templeton World Charity Foundation, Accenture and American Express and are meant to celebrate schools everywhere for their pivotal role in developing the next generation and contributing to society's progress.

"We have launched the World's Best School Prizes as a grassroots solution to help build the systemic change needed.

“By telling the stories of inspirational schools that are transforming the lives of their students and making a real difference in their communities, schools can share their best practices and have their voices heard at the top table to help transform education.

“I want to congratulate SK Kempadang and SMK Kampong Jawa for making the top 10 shortlists for the inaugural World’s Best School Prizes. Educators all over the world will not be able to learn from the examples of these outstanding Malaysian schools,” said T4 Education founder Vikas Pota in a statement today.

The top three finalists for each of the five categories of the World’s Best School Prizes will be announced later this year, while the winners will be announced in October 2022.

The five categories are community collaboration, environmental action, innovation, overcoming adversity and supporting healthy lives.

The winner of each prize will be chosen based on rigorous criteria by a judging academy comprising distinguished leaders across the globe, including educators, academics, civil society, government, the private sector and so on.

Yayasan Hasanah managing director Shahira Ahmed Bazari said they are

honoured to be one of the sponsors of this global prize as it is a valuable initiative.

“Our finalists are wonderful examples of strong schools with inspiring stories of success. We are especially proud that two Malaysian trust schools are amongst them, proof that our public schools are capable of being amongst the world’s best,” she said.

Innovating education

The Trust Schools Programme is a public-private partnership between the Education Ministry and Yayasan Amir, which aims to revitalise school culture and enhance teaching and learning to produce holistic student outcomes.

According to the press release, SK Kempadang came up with an innovative solution to track their students’ progress in their studies as they grappled with the pandemic and the scrapping of the standardised UPSR exams.

The school had created Smartzoom, a fully-automated tracking system that follows students’ progress in their studies using data input on Google Sheets and Google Chrome.

“Using that data, staff were able to devise concrete and detailed lesson plans tailored to their specific class.

“The majority of the student population of SK Kempadang comes from the bottom 40 percent of household incomes in Malaysia.

“Despite the vulnerability of its students, the school has invoked a strong faith in its ability to educate those who walk through its doors,” the statement read.

Turning hardship into success

Meanwhile, SMK Kampong Jawa was once in the bottom two out of the 38 schools in the Klang district for its academic results, but it has since seen its scores improve by 20 percent and was given an award for highest online attendance during the pandemic.

The school – where 75 percent of its pupils come from families with lower household incomes - had previously garnered a bad reputation where vandalism and theft were common, and students were often groomed into local gangs.

In 2018, only 59 percent of the school’s students obtained their leaving school qualifications.

“But in 632 days, SMK Kampong Jawa managed to turn hardship into success.

“The catalyst for that change came with the appointment of a new principal in August 2020 who helped redirect the school policies to align with his vision for change through the implementation of the Trust Schools Programme,” read the press release.

Under the new principal’s helm, the school made over 500 phone calls to parents to learn more about students and their home environments, with school counsellors making home visits for those who still did not attend classes.

SMK Kampong Jawa also designed online classes that experimented with breakout rooms and collaborative learning structures that offered close peer-to-peer support and ensured small group sessions were productive and engaging.

The school also began to help some of its students with challenges they were facing in their home environments, including networking with local charities to help those struggling financially.

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