

'Cluster schools will not be costly'

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PUTRAJAYA: The Education Ministry has come forward to allay parents' fears that cluster schools will be turned into costly private schools, as the principals are given the autonomy to source for extra funds.

Its minister, Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein, said yesterday parents of students in the cluster schools need not worry that they would have to face higher costs.

He said it is not compulsory for the schools to make any changes as long as they were able to achieve and maintain their strong performance in the selected fields which would define their excellent status.

"There is no such criterion that parents in cluster schools must incur extra payment. What is important is we are giving some freedom to the stakeholders to make decisions in the best interests of their schools," he told reporters after chairing the weekly post-cabinet meeting.

Responding to the concerns by some parents, Hishammuddin said the government had, in view of past complaints, decided to

give cluster school heads some autonomy.

"Before this, they (schools) claimed they did not have the power or freedom, the ministry's requirements did not suit the

schools or the children's capability," he said.

"Realising that the development level of schools differed from one to the other, we took this approach. But, if they do not want to change, I am not imposing on them things which they think do not suit their wants."

On March 23, Hishammuddin announced that the cluster school heads will be given autonomy in five key areas, namely human resources, school funds, student intake, teaching and learning, and examinations and evaluations.

He advised parents to be involved in the parent-teacher associations and voice their concerns to the school's leadership.

Asked whether the ministry would chip in if the schools needed to incur extra costs to maintain their excellent status, he said cluster school leaders must be creative.

"Should there be extra costs, it would involve the parents. So, the schools must convince them of such a need and it must be acceptable to all of them," he said.

Hishammuddin is announcing the first 30 schools to be included in the ministry's cluster of excellence today.

**She's the one
who's always
the center
of attention.**

WHO IS SHE?