

Free hand for 'clusters' to excel

NSR-17/1/2007

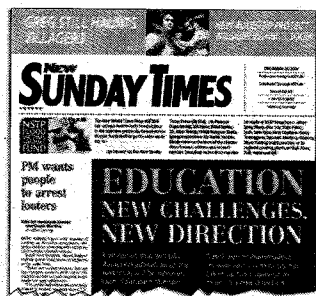
■ By Koh Lay Chin
laych@nstp.com.my

KUALA LUMPUR: "Short of giving them 14-carat gold-plated taps, I am willing to give them anything they want," Education Minister Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein has said of schools to be included in the "clusters of excellence".

And the blueprint details how the ministry aims to provide 300 selected schools with the autonomy meant to help them boost their standards sky high.

"The selection of principals and the school management will be based on applications or through identification by the top leadership or by the school's Parent-Teacher Association," says the document.

The school will see the selection of teachers based on applications or those identified by the school itself, something that was previously re-



Our report on Dec 24 last year

quested by schools but never allowed.

These schools will be allowed to "select 10 per cent of its student enrolment which are relevant to the specific fields or niche areas the school would like to develop", another request previously denied.

Those in the clusters will also be allowed to offer curriculum and teaching and learning methods which are in line with their targeted niche areas,

such as offering subjects out of the national education system like the O-level or General Certificate of Secondary Education and A-level.

"Schools will also be allowed to implement teaching and learning times which are more flexible."

Educational tools and equipment will be the prerogative of these schools, which will be allowed to source these things themselves, as well as the freedom to obtain additional funding meant to further its capacities.

"Among these are the collection of additional funds at a certain rate, getting additional allocations from parties outside of the ministry for programmes, paying higher salaries and giving incentives and special allowances not above a certain ceiling."

To allow them to compete with the best schools internationally, the ministry wants the schools in the clusters to be centres of change and reform.



Appointment processes will be tightened to ensure only good teachers are hired.

Stringent vetting to get the best teachers

KUALA LUMPUR: Only those who truly want to teach will become teachers and the ministry will screen potential teachers thoroughly from now on.

It also aims to reduce the minefields associated with the teacher mismatch — the supply of teaching graduates from teacher training institutes, the teachers who come out from public universities, and those who undergo courses such as the Teaching Diploma For University Graduates (better known as KPLI) and a programme for those with a basic degree in other fields but who want to be teachers.

For KPLI hopefuls, they have to sit for the MteST (a teacher selection test), be active in co-curricular activities, pass a security screening and go through several rounds of interviews.

Those who want to enter teaching courses after their SPM will face additional hurdles: They must have ex-

celled in their studies and sit for a written English test.

Those entering teacher training institutes, who are guaranteed jobs by the ministry, will undergo more stringent tests which will take into account their aptitude as well as factors like emotional quotient.

The Education Services Commission will tighten the appointment processes and ensure each teacher obtains a minimum standard before they are posted anywhere.

Also in the works are the establishment of teaching schools, more effective training in teacher training institutes, and a better look at the training offered for teachers in these institutions.

But the ministry also "aims to look after teachers and support them", said the education minister, and in this aspect the blueprint goes into several points to assure the teaching

profession.

When it comes to unruly children, teachers in charge of discipline will undergo a disciplinary task-force course and a course on legislation literature in the next few years so they can better relay the rule of law to students.

When it comes to leadership of schools, the ministry wants to arm all school administrators with leadership training by 2008.

This year, the ministry is also "looking to enhance the criteria for the selection of principals and headmasters for schools and will appoint deserving and talented ones through a fast-track system".

And an increase in the number of non-Bumiputera teachers in national schools will happen as early as this year, according to the blueprint. Teachers serving in remote areas will receive better incentives, including accommodation and basic facilities.

HIGHLIGHTS

● Drug Prevention/Discipline

An Act is being mooted to fine or penalise parents who do not give co-operation in tackling their children's problems when it comes to the abuse of drugs.

● On Safety

A total of 590 pedestrian bridges will be built for schools where students need them. For other schools, traffic lights and zebra crossings.

● Early Learning

A National Pre-School Curriculum for children five years and above to be established by 2010.

● Special Education

One hundred special education pre-school classes for children with special needs to be set up by 2010.

● Single-session schools

To have 90 per cent of all primary schools and 70 per cent of all secondary schools becoming single-session schools within four years.

● Smaller classes

To decrease the number of students from 31 to 30 per class for primary schools by 2008, and from 32 to 30 students in secondary schools by 2010.

● Niche schools

Three new sports schools. Two new Arts Schools. Two more Special Schools with a capacity of 750 places and 21 skills courses for the hearing and learning impaired.

● More options for students

22 more vocational subjects, an 'Invention' subject at 150 schools, expansion of Sports Science subject to 80 schools and more music lessons with the upgrading of 233 music rooms.

WEAKNESSES IN EDUCATION

● Schools still without electricity and water supply. 10 per cent of primary schools and 1.4 per cent of secondary schools do not have 24-hour electricity supply. Twenty per cent of primary schools and 3.4 per cent of secondary schools have no public water supply.

● Not enough classes and still many double-session schools.

● As many as 78 per cent of primary schools and 42 per cent of secondary schools are over 30 years old and require refurbishment.

● In 2005, 4.4 per cent of primary students and 0.8 per cent of secondary students still had not mastered the 3Rs (Reading, Writing and Arithmetic). The numbers have improved slightly but there is still a lot of work to be done.

● Eighty per cent of students participate in co-curricular activities but the ministry wants to increase this figure.

● Schools without science laboratories and rooms.

● The drop-out rate for secondary students is 9.3 per cent for urban areas and 16.7 per cent in rural areas (2000 to 2004 cohort).

● Not enough trained teachers in the critical areas of Mathematics and Science.

● Access to education and academic performance of the Orang Asli, children with disabilities and the Penan in Sarawak leaves much to be desired.

Review of curricula soon

KUALA LUMPUR: The Dream Children who started Year One in 2005 emerging as confident, inquisitive and raring-to-go graduates for the job market in 2020.

The Plan: A review of the national curriculum for primary and secondary schools, in place since the 1980s, to fashion these dream students. Will it work?

The Kurikulum Baru Sekolah Rendah (KBSR), implemented in primary schools in 1983, and the Kurikulum Baru Sekolah Menengah (KBSM), in secondary schools since 1988, will be re-evaluated by the Education Ministry to churn out students who are more well-rounded, capable and armed with good moral values.

Both have been periodically reviewed, the last being in 2000, but this time the curriculum will aim to produce students who are ready to take on the globalised market.

And there is more: Additional vocational subjects will be available for students, an alternative assessments system which encourages skills and character development, and a heavy emphasis on co-curricular activities.

Under the Blueprint for Education Development (2006-2010), the ministry has laid out wide-ranging plans in an effort to map out a holistic and transparent path towards achieving Vision 2020.

The dream student will not be just concerned with getting all As. Sports and co-curricular activities will also take a giant leap starting this year.

"We want the development of *modal insan* (model citizen), students who can think critically and creatively, who are able to solve problems and have the ability to adapt themselves to an ever-changing global environment," says the blueprint.

The implementation of KBSR and KBSM over the years will be reviewed for more emphasis on "higher order thinking skills", which is scheduled to be completed in 2008.

It also wants the curriculum to give emphasis to the subject of

"History, cultures and traditions of the different races in Malaysia, and the main faiths in the country".

To instill the love of arts, heritage and culture, there will be a development of an arts curriculum for the establishment of Art Schools.

Although it wants to step up the mastery of the English Language, the national language will not be neglected.

Next year will see an increase in the publication of Bahasa Malaysia books, foreign works translated into the national language and also more courses and training for literature, novels, translations and publishing.

But for the market place, students will need to be well versed in English, and the blueprint sees the building of two new English Language training centres, a new English teaching pilot project in schools, as well as the piloting of 19 language labs for English and Bahasa Malaysia.

But the dream student will not be "just concerned with getting all As". Sports and co-curricular activities will also take a giant leap starting this year.

Sports schools will see enhancements in terms of administration, its teachers and the physical amenities, as well as undergo scrutiny into its teaching and assessments system to ensure it is in

line with athletes' requirements.

Students need to be more aware of their world and the surroundings; hence the Reproductive and Social Health Education Guidelines, covering topics as diverse as teaching a child what kind of "touching" is right or wrong, to contraception and the dangers of sexual online predators.

For those who are less academically inclined and more suited for trades and apprenticeship, there is plenty of good news.

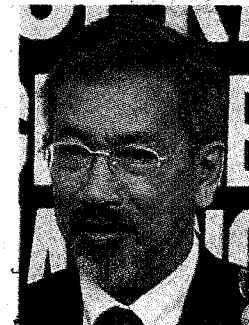
This year, there will be early implementation of technical subjects which will be benchmarked to Australia's Mayer Competencies and the US SCAN's (Secretaries Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills).

With this also comes a new curriculum that is based on competency for vocational schools, slated to be ready by 2009, and gradual additions to vocational subjects and elective subjects in secondary schools.

The ministry also plans "to complete a tracer study by 2010, where it tracks the continuation of students' education through tertiary studies in and outside the country, as well as to the job market".

A new model for public examinations, which will see fewer subjects and more schools-based tests will be introduced in 2010.

The blueprint is first class, but I hope the implementation will not be third class. The blueprint must see execution and proper implementation at all levels. There must also be a monitoring mechanism to ensure it is executed well.



Associate Prof Mohammad Ali Hassan
National Parent-Teacher Association chairman

The revamping of the teachers' training system is welcome. The blueprint will only work if the concept of unity is knitted into all school programmes.



Loke Yim Pheng
National Union of Teaching Profession
secretary-general

We do not need this blueprint to produce excellent students. What we need is a revival of the old education system... meaning the education system we had before 1957. That was when we saw dedication from the teachers. The Malaysian education system then was second to none in Asia. We did not have sports schools but we produced citizens who were Asian class, if not world class. But now, take for instance our football team, it is ranked below even Sri Lanka.



Khoo Kay Kim
Universiti Malaya Professor

My concern is in the teaching of Tamil and Chinese subjects in more national schools. There is already a shortage of Tamil teachers. So, the teachers who will be teaching Tamil are likely to be not trained for teaching the subject. I urge the Education Ministry to recruit more people to be trained to teach the Tamil language.

M. Purushothaman
Tamil Primary School Headmasters'
Association president

Enhancing racial unity in national schools

KUALA LUMPUR: Lydia Chong's only wish for education is a simple one — to make national schools a beacon of multi-racialism and unity.

"I have two children in the national school system because I came from the system, and I still believe in its beauty. But I do hear things that scare me and I really hope the ministry addresses our concerns," she said.

Will racial unity once again shine in national schools, or will more non-Malays opt for vernacular and private schools?

The blueprint plans to strengthen national schools in several ways. There will be more activities focusing on racial integration next year and several important additions to national schools will take place this year.

There will be seminars on the Malaysian Constitution, more motivational camps to raise cultural and racial awareness, cultural film screenings, food festivals among the races and essay competitions on different traditions.

The long-awaited Mandarin and Tamil classes will be taught in 220 national schools in a pilot project this year.

The Students' Integration Plan for Unity, better known as Rimup, had its ups and downs last year but the ministry aims to enhance it by encouraging more involvement from local communities, school administrations and teachers and students.



Will racial unity once again shine in our national schools?