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Make students the priority

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KUALA LUMPUR: The promise of the Government Transformation Programme (GTP) is one that is full of high expectations.

Complemented by the 10th Malaysia Plan, which highlights education as one of the National Key Results Areas (NKRAs), more quality teachers and an extra focus on education seem to create the right path to developing highly-skilled and highly-educated human capital.

The many changes that have come to the education system of late - such as the debate on whether science and mathematics should be taught in English or reverting to Bahasa Malaysia, or the proposed abolition of the UPSR and PMR examinations - have definitely worried parents and suggested a "knee-jerk reaction" education system.

Loke Yim Peng, secretary-general of the National Union of the Teaching Profession (NUTP), said that to rejuvenate the education system, the system would have to prepare and enhance the students from Form 1.

"To solve the problems of dropouts or truancy, there should be academic streaming, where bright children who do well academically will learn in their advanced pace,



a vocational stream, where those who are skilled or talented in vocational areas can be trained and developed, and the basic skills stream, where students can be given basic work skills to enable them to be absorbed into the workforce," she said.

Loke also called for a centralised network for educators and to phase out obsolete computers in schools.

"The government must ensure that a centralised

computer system is in place that is integrated into our education system. This is to reduce repetitive paperwork," she said.

Datuk Dr Paul Chan, founder of HELP University College, said there must be a development of teacher leadership to innovate learning and teaching methodology and "customise it to fit our cultural background and prepare our students for 25 years ahead".

Ezra Mohd Zaid, the host of PopTeeVee's That Effing Show, said the learning system must still be between teacher and student and not restricted to the syllabus.

"There must be creative elements towards arts-based subjects and creative thinking, and these should not be dismissed so quickly," he said.

"The ministry needs to also make bold moves in this direction because everything

starts at the top."

Kalai Arasu, 50, a former teacher, pointed out that "change of policies" all the time is the biggest problem. Each and every policy needs to be well thought-out.

A concern for Kirubaleni Arul Dass, 30, who works with a private college, is how there seems to be no go-to standard for how the education system wants to be shaped. It seems to rely on the current administration's own thoughts and policies, rather than a consistent one where the student is the focus.

The changes in the education system are a huge concern for a majority of parents with school-going children.

Anushia Shanmuganathan, 40, has two of her three children in a national primary school. She is deeply concerned that policies are changed, formulated and implemented seemingly overnight. For her, the move to return to Bahasa Malaysia in the teaching of science and maths was a step backward.

"Also, every classroom has a student-teacher ratio of 45 to 1. Being underpaid only compounds the problem," said Anushia.

A parent, who did not want to be named, said the teaching profession has become a job, not a vocation. That same parent said the profession is no longer respected as a noble one, merely as a job that "nobody wants".

This is an image that needs to be changed immediately. It is imperative for the system to attract the best minds to create a stellar crop of educators.

The exam-based system is also an issue that has been debated over for many years.

All parents interviewed supported the proposal of abolishing the UPSR and PMR

examinations.

The rigidity of school has hampered, to some extent, the creative development of students and it is important to have students who are well-balanced. This includes realising that quality is preferred over quantity; the numerous As achieved sometimes contrasts strongly against poor command of English and a lack of soft skills.

Parents and educators alike state that an overall shift towards encouraging creative thinking in the education system is now obvious.

Another huge step in the right direction is also an increased focus on educating not just Malaysian children, but children who are stateless or marginalised.

Dr Hartini Zainuddin, from Nur Salam, a shelter for street children, said developments in education policies with regard to non-documented children have been more inclusive.

"There has been a keen interest in a more wholesome and inclusive education system that not only educates Malaysians, but all children in Malaysia," said Hartini.

She, however, said it should not be only at the primary stage.

The NKRA for education might have had steps drawn up to create a wholesome system to improve student outcomes but as in every planning, there needs to be a support system that will efficiently carry out these new policies.

It must be a concerted and consistent effort to improve all areas in education and not spur-of-the-moment decisions which are placatory or temporary. The GTP's Education NKRA to improve student outcomes is a step in the right direction.



Anushia



Kirubaleni