

EDUCATION: Don't ignore the needs of disabled
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PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak and the Education Ministry have repeatedly invited public feedback on the revision of our education system. We value these requests and many of us have responded.

The National Early Childhood Intervention Council (NECIC), a registered coalition of parents, therapists and professionals from a large variety of non-governmental organisations and government agencies advocating the needs of children with special needs, sent a memorandum to the ministry more than four months ago.

The memorandum advocates inclusive education as a national policy as research has proven that this will benefit all students, not just those with special needs.

Malaysia has ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Article 24 of the convention stipulates that "persons with disabilities shall not be excluded from the general education system on the basis of disabilities".

This has also been enacted in Clause 28 of the Malaysian Persons with Disabilities Act 2008.

Unfortunately, there is no indication that the ministry officials have considered its contents.

We suspect this may also be the case with others who have forwarded suggestions on improving our education system.

An important issue, such as the revision of our education system, should not be carried out behind closed doors and then presented to the public as a completed package.

It is essential that there is meaningful on-going dialogue, with opportunities for change, involvement, critical review, and holistic challenge.

Too many of our recent initiatives have been flawed because of a lack of a meaningful dialogue.

Preliminary plans should be provided to the public and concerned organisations for critical review and opportunities for change before they are implemented as law.

The NECIC, on behalf of children with disabilities and their parents, appeals to the ministry to listen and respond to feedback from the public on the education system.

In this 55th year of our independence as a nation, the new education system must liberate and empower our children, including those who are disabled, to be who they truly can be and not hinder their growth.

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