

**DAP calls for independent investigation of Seri Pristana
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BY LEE SHI-IAN**

The DAP has demanded an independent committee to investigate various issues in the on-going SK Seri Pristana saga, following conflicting statements issued by the authorities.

The party's Selangor state chairperson Teresa Kok said it was reported that the Education Ministry had announced that only one pupil had requested for a transfer from the school thus far.

The ministry also said it was probing the veracity of claims that the administration of SK Seri Pristana or its teachers had created an unwelcome environment for pupils.

Selangor Education Department director Mahmud Karim, meanwhile, refuted allegations that school authorities had photographed non-Muslim pupils.

He also added that his department had yet to be informed of the incident.

Mahmud also refuted claims that the school teachers had discriminated against non-Muslim pupils and called it a misunderstanding.

"Based on the statements from the Education Ministry and state Education Department, I doubt if continued investigations by authorities can inspire much public confidence," Kok said in a statement today.

She expressed doubt the department would be fair and accurate in its investigation into complaints from some parents.

"Firstly, Mahmud refuted claims that teachers had discriminated against non-Muslim pupils but the ministry had issued a statement saying it was investigating the issue," she said.

"Therefore, if the ministry investigation is ongoing, then how can Mahmud refute the claims?"

The second discrepancy was Mahmud denied the photographing incident but claimed that his department had yet to be informed of the matter.

"The claims of pupils being photographed has been widely reported in the media. Why has the department not taken the initiative to meet the parents and verify the claims?"

"I really wonder how Mahmud's department carries out its investigations. Do they wait for reports from the school before acting?"

"If this is the case, then how can the truth be unearthed? Is there truly fairness in the process?" Kok asked.

She also mentioned that whistleblower Guneswari Kelly had been forced to transfer her daughter from SK Seri Pristana to another school after she had been bullied by her classmates.

"An online news portal today quoted a parent of a pupil in SK Seri Pristana as saying that the students had been told to transfer out from the school if they didn't like it there," said Kok.

The parent, identified only as Raj, said that due to harassment, his daughter had not returned to the school after the Hari Raya holidays and had begun classes at a new school last Monday.

"So this means that there are at least two transfers out from SK Seri Pristana. Why is the Education Ministry claiming that only one pupil had been transferred out?" Kok asked.

She also took Education Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin to task as his silence over the issue has created the allegation that he is condoning or emboldening the wrong-doings at the school.

"The government must set up an independent committee to conduct a full investigation into the 'Meals in changing rooms' affair and the bullying and intimidation of pupils," Kok said.

There are 25 non-Muslim pupils among the 1,400 enrolled at the school.

The school became embroiled in this controversy about a month ago when Guneswari uploaded a picture of non-Muslim pupils eating in a shower room during Ramadan following a directive from the headmaster.

The picture went viral and subsequently 18 police reports were lodged against the school and the headmaster.

The ministry insisted that it considered the issue to be solved as several measures had been taken to rectify the situation such as closing the changing room and upgrading the school canteen to accommodate more pupils.

"The school's headmaster, senior assistant and teachers have been twice advised on the need to maintain the harmony of pupils from various races," it had said in a statement

The school pupils were also subjected to questioning by the police without the knowledge of their parents, a claim which police initially denied but later admitted.

On Friday, the Education Ministry announced that Mohd Nasir had been let off the hook as he hadn't committed any crime in ordering his pupils to have their meals in the shower room. - August 31, 2013.

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