

Make real changes in schools

October 17, 2020 @ 12:00am



Improving communication and transparency can help ensure better interaction between schools and parents. - BERNAMA pic

LETTER: REGARDLESS of the changes in philosophy or strategy, education policy must improve the education condition of schools.

There are five lessons that I had learned while trying to enhance a school's educational environment.

First, a school should work closely with its Parent-Teacher Association (PTA). As a two-term PTA head of the largest elementary school in Putrajaya, I repeatedly get asked how we tripled the parents' total contribution to the association's fund.

Hard work to ensure change in a school is a prerequisite. Thereafter, it is two things – communication and transparency. Typically, a whole year passes before parents learn of a PTA's actions at the next annual PTA meeting. That is too late. Such associations should communicate faster, be it via letters to the parents or through social media.

Parents will make monetary contributions if they are informed regularly of how it benefits their children. Transparency, meanwhile, calls for going public with the collection count by class. Parents will not contribute if they feel they are not the only ones not paying unless they cannot afford it. That is how we tripled collections in only six months.

Second, talk frequently with parents to build trust. Pay attention to those with a first-time child entering school. They have many questions to ask and many answers that need further explanation. Encourage class WhatsApp groups because these can minimise information gaps.

Third, provide a room for teachers to be creative. Emphasise the achievement of student learning. During the recent Movement Control Order, many teachers had gone above and beyond to conduct classes for their students.

Recognise their efforts. They should be role models for other teachers, but more importantly, accommodate flexibility and encourage creative teaching.

Fourth, allow the private sector to invest in schools. Schools lack funds for the maintenance of such facilities. In urban areas, due to the limited public space, there is a huge demand for sports venues, such as football fields and badminton courts.

What if we were to lease football fields or badminton halls in schools for a fee during non-usage hours, such as weekday evenings, to be managed privately? It can allow schools to raise funds and help the government save taxpayers' money on maintenance. Grant some autonomy to the school as this idea can be bankable.

Lastly, instil good behaviour among children. You only have a small window to do this before they become set in their ways. Parents once complained to me about children not getting change from purchases at the bookshop. Interestingly enough, the school's bookshop complained about pilferage.

It occurred to me that the problem stemmed from children not queuing up. In the hustle and bustle, it is not possible to keep a watchful eye over all their wares, which led children rushing off without waiting for their change.

The bookshop owner was advised to instal queuing barriers. The move was not only cost-effective, but it had also taught the children to queue up.

The lessons shared were gained from actual life experience, mustering cooperation between parents, teachers and school administration to introduce real change by challenging the old school of thought.

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