

National Education Blueprint: A Black-Print for Children with Disabilities?

We, children with special needs, families, NGOs and professionals, had hoped that the National Education Blueprint 2013-2025 would result in better services and a true inclusion for children with disabilities. However the reverse seems to be happening. Teachers and headmasters, obsessed with the Ministry of Education (MOE) KPIs for achievement, have increasingly been excluding children.

One of the important early targets set by MOE in the Education Blueprint is to have 30% of special education needs (SEN) students in the inclusive programme by 2015. This target of 30% inclusion for children with disabilities in 2015 is not just unattainable but there does not appear to be any serious initiatives by MOE to achieve this. Current inclusion rates are less than 3%, making a mockery of our National Transformation Policy and the National Education Blueprint that many of us worked hard to develop.

More importantly, registering your child as SEN or disabled, works against the child and family. We had hoped that the registration process would help identify children who have SEN and thus they would be offered more help. But instead these children are conveniently pushed to special classes for the disabled, even if they can manage in mainstream education with some help (inclusion). There seems to be an increasing pressure to segregate children with SEN to the point that at times, children are registered as disabled without their parents' permission or presence. This is a serious violation of the basic rights of the child and family.

It is important to ask why this serious failure on the part of our Ministry of Education? We believe the core reason is a lack of the proper "heart-set" (as opposed to a "mind-set"). Our leaders and those in authority have no sincerity or little compassion for the 10-15% of our children who have special needs (disabilities that impair learning). Rather than work hard and invest resources in educating these children, the easier solution seems to be to push them aside, to exclude them from the mainstream.

Granted there are some big government projects, like the provision of RM 100+ million for a few lucky SEN children (exclusively catering to only one specific type of disability) in the Klang Valley, while, by and large, most services for children with disabilities in the country are very poorly funded. Resources for teachers are limited, a teacher-aide service to support SEN children in normal class is almost non-existent and the MOE "road-show" on inclusive initiatives has fizzled out. We are truly on target to becoming a less developed nation.

The National Early Childhood Intervention Council (NECIC) appeals to the Prime Minister and MOE to please make real the targets of the National Education Blueprint for SEN children. Please do not let the dreams of any single child fail because we did not offer them a chance to realise them.

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