

The NECIC is grateful to the Education Ministry for requesting feedback from the public and organisations on the needs and services to be provided to children. The National Early Childhood Intervention Council (NECIC) is a registered coalition of parents, therapists and professionals from a large variety of NGOs and government agencies that are involved in and advocating for early childhood intervention as a right and is keen that to optimise the learning and development of children with special needs.

While there are many pressing issues for education reform from syllabus content, to homework volume, an unhealthy focus on examinations, rote learning, etc, the NECIC would like to bring to the attention of the Education Ministry and the public the large proportion of children which have special education needs.

Data and experience show that, if children who reach the primary school going age (6 years) are not school-ready, they enter school with problems and are difficult for schools and teachers to handle. The gap then continues to widen as they grow. Children can be roughly divided into three groups in terms of their education ability/needs.

70-80% of children usually do not have not much barrier to learning. These are however the children are the one who received most of the educational resources in our country.

3-5% children have a major disability and are identified early by health professionals, usually at birth or before the age of 5 years. These include children with multiple or severe disabilities who would need specific special education. Generally there is some provision for them in our education system, although the quality and distribution (access) of the services is questionable.

15-20% children have more subtle problems. These children have milder disabilities or problems specific learning disorders (e.g. Dyslexia), high functioning Autism, ADHD, emotional problems, environmental deprivation (poor social background), etc. They are children with a normal intelligence with many barriers to education. They are often identified at school entry or a little later. They often present as behaviour problems, poor school performance, school failure, etc. Early and meaningful help and educational support for this group of children is limited.

The NECIC would like the Education Ministry and the public to recognise this third, large group of children, that our current education programme is failing. Teachers are unable to deal with these children in the large main stream classes. With the KPI (key performance index linked to promotion) of teachers being full literacy at Standard 3, there has been a large move by teachers all over the country to send these children for a medical assessment and push for them to be registered as OKU. This is inappropriate as we cannot be labelling 20% or more of our children disabled.

The problem is more with the system and KPIs than with the children. Imagine if the KPI of every government doctor was that no patient should die in their care. What would happen is that doctors will start transferring very ill patients to other hospitals or encouraging them to go home. Similarly we are now trying to achieve full literacy at Standard 3 by conveniently excluding a significant proportion of our children.

The experience from other countries has shown that have also struggled with similar problems. Their approach has been to include all children within main-stream education (aliran perdana) and not segregate them to a disability syllabus. Can we please emulate the models/ideas from these countries which include: Recruiting the best school students to be teaching professionals; Providing the best teachers for the most educationally challenged kids; Offering better school environments for children with education needs with smaller

class in main stream; Not registering them as disabled but recognising that they have special needs.

The quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers. The NECIC would like to advocate for our best teachers and the education system to support our weakest children so that a nation of 1Malaysia, we all move forward without leaving any behind.

Dato' Dr Amar-Singh (President)

Ms Khor Aina (Vice-President)

National Early Childhood Intervention Council

(Note: This statement was prepared collectively by NGOs represented in the NECIC)

