

MEDIA STATEMENT

COMPULSORY EDUCATION: BUILDING THE FUTURE THROUGH COMPULSORY EDUCATION

Bandar Sunway, 7 January 2020 - Recently, the Raja Permaisuri Agong Tunku Hajah Azizah Aminah Maimunah Iskandariah lamented in one of her tweets over the state of compulsory education in Malaysia. Like many Malaysians, our Queen was shocked to discover that compulsory education in Malaysia is only up to Standard 6. This places Malaysia as one of the countries with the lowest years of compulsory education; behind Finland, England and Canada whose period of compulsory education are at 9, 11 and 12 years respectively.

Her Majesty then led the call to extend the compulsory education to Form 5 and this was well received by the public. Earlier last year, on 28 January 2019, Deputy Minister for Education, YB Teo Nie Ching, highlighted that the government is currently reviewing the Education Act to make it mandatory for students to complete schooling from Year One till Form Five. She further stated that parents who failed to send their children to school could face a fine of up to RM5,000 or six months imprisonment.

These momentous calls for a reform of compulsory education in Malaysia resonate with ASLI's policy recommendations to the Education Ministry where we also urged the government to implement mandatory secondary education. As the right to education is enshrined in Article 12 of the Federal Constitution, it is pertinent that the government should provide the legal framework for compulsory education for both primary and secondary level.

Primary education in Malaysia was made compulsory since 2003 through an amendment made to the Education Act 1996 in 2002 (Education (Amendment) Act 2002). However to this day, secondary education is yet to be made compulsory although the Government has committed to make both lower secondary and upper secondary education compulsory by 2015 as stated in the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025.

Compulsory education is an effective policy tool to improve literacy level particularly among underprivileged children who are from the lower income group and the rural areas. Extending the period of compulsory education to the secondary level could break the vicious poverty cycle and this will increase the prospect for a student to earn a higher income in the future, lower the probability of dropping out of school without qualifications and reduce the dependency on government welfare. A study conducted by Asrari in 2015 on Preventing Child Marriage in the Commonwealth, concluded that there is a substantial body of evidence linking improved education with a reduced prevalence of child marriage whereby rights-based education is a powerful tool to end child marriage.

Extending the period of compulsory education from 6 to 11 years is also in line with the government's new Shared Prosperity Vision 2030 (SPV 2030) which aims to guarantee that the benefits of the country's growth are shared and distributed fairly and equitably leaving no one behind during the country's expansion flow, ultimately reducing the socio-economic gaps. As such, in support towards compulsory education in Malaysia, ASLI proposes the following recommendations:

1. IMPLEMENT 11-year compulsory education system whereby the present compulsory years of schooling should be increased from 6 to 11 years and implemented uniformly by amending the Education Act 1996 [Act 550] or introducing a new law such as the Compulsory Education Act;
2. NO education fee may be charged or imposed in the implementation of compulsory education to ensure that no parties are penalised due to unaffordability and household economic conditions;
3. ESTABLISH a guarantee mechanism for operating funds by the government towards compulsory education in order to ensure effective implementation of compulsory education;
4. QUALITY-ORIENTED education policy shall be carried out to improve the overall quality of education and promote all round development as well as to avoid any possible negative repercussions;
5. EQUAL RIGHT TO EDUCATION for children who have reached school-age and impose an obligation on parents/guardians to ensure that each child receives compulsory education, regardless of gender, race, religion, ethnicity, social background, etc;
6. GOVERNMENT shall ensure the right to compulsory education of all school-age children without compromise and exception;
7. SCHOOLS lawfully carrying out compulsory education shall complete the educational and teaching tasks as required and ensure the standards and quality of education are met;
8. ORGANISATIONS and individuals shall create a good and reasonable environment for school-age children to receive compulsory education;
9. IMPROVE the conditions of schools in rural areas and ensure that school-age children from families with financial difficulties especially the B40 groups or those who are disabled and/or require special needs have equal access and receive compulsory education in line with the "Zero Reject Policy";

10. The PUBLIC shall have the right to inform and lodge complaints to the authorities concerning any violations or act that denies the right of any school-age children who lawfully is entitled to receive compulsory education; and
11. PENALTY shall be meted out according to the relevant laws towards anyone forcing any school-age children by any means to leave school and/or quit his/her school education and/or illegally employ any school-age children who lawfully should be receiving compulsory education.

It is to our hope that the government will deliver a tide of substantial reform in the Malaysian education system. Improving the quality of education and extending the period of compulsory education will certainly help seal a better future for our students particularly those who are from the lower income group and the rural areas.

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