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'Bad apples' spoil ministry's disciplinary guidelines, say experts

By Amalina Kamal, Iylia Marsya Iskandar - June 1, 2024 @ 6:01am]

KUALA LUMPUR: Experts believe that while the Education Ministry's guidelines for teachers on disciplining school children are comprehensive and sufficient, they are hampered by a few "bad apples".

Parent Action Group for Education (PAGE) chairman Datin Noor Azimah Abdul Rahim said it was unfortunate that the actions of a small percentage of teachers were tarnishing the reputation of teachers as a whole.

She said existing policies and guidelines were already in place but some teachers were either unaware or indifferent to them.

She said any gaps on how teachers exercised disciplinary actions against students must be looked into to ensure there were no potential recurring incidents of abuse.

"While the general public is horrified, parents in general are indifferent as they are only protective towards their own children, until it happens to them personally.



Parent Action Group for Education (PAGE) chairman Datin Noor Azimah Abdul Rahim "There will be a lull for a while until the events are forgotten. Then, it will happen again because the lessons are not learned," she added.

Former deputy education minister Datuk P. Kamalanathan suggested a review of the existing directive on the authority of teachers to identify potential loopholes or ambiguities that can be exploited.

Thorough and regular training for teachers on the appropriate use of disciplinary measures, he said, could also be done.

"The directive should be updated to provide more specific and comprehensive guidelines on disciplinary measures, with a focus on preserving the well-being and dignity of students.

"It has to be emphasised that any punishment that puts a student's health and safety at risk is strictly forbidden," he said.

Kamalanathan also proposed that programmes emphasising child psychology, conflict resolution and positive disciplinary approaches be highlighted as the way forward.

"Ongoing professional development should be mandatory and there should also be clear and swift consequences for teachers who abuse their authority."



Former deputy education minister Datuk P. Kamalanathan

On Monday, it was reported that a Year Five pupil had to be rushed to hospital after allegedly being forced to stand in the hot sun from 10am to 12.50pm on April 30.

Ampang Jaya police chief Assistant Commissioner Mohd Azam Ismail said police had completed their probe and handed the investigation papers to the deputy public prosecutor's office for further action.

The National Union of the Teaching Profession, when contacted, declined to comment.

DISCIPLINING STUDENTS: DO'S AND DONT'S

Under the Education Ministry's School Discipline Procedures Guidebook for Headmaster and Teachers 1998, teachers are urged to understand the child's perspective when disseminating any form of punishment. It also compels teachers to use constructive methods to help students understand why they are being punished.

In its section titled Examples of Disciplinary Actions in the Classroom, the guidelines, among others, suggest:



1 When addressing disciplinary issues, teachers must understand child psychology and avoid punishing just for the sake of punishment or out of anger or revenge



2 Giving advice and warnings to students who have been proven guilty



3 Assigning constructive tasks with the aim of fostering a sense of pride and love for their school, such as cleaning the classroom



4 Referring the student to the headmaster for advice and punishment. This method should not be used too frequently, as it can lead to the teacher losing their own authority and being viewed poorly by the students



5 Gradually assigning responsibilities or specific tasks to students, such as making them the line leader, ensuring classroom cleanliness, becoming a committee member for certain activities, and other similar roles

Corporal Punishment (MOE circular dated Oct 29, 2003)

- Can only be meted out by headmasters or principals, or teachers given authority, such as disciplinary teachers
- Caning, the only acceptable form of corporal punishment, cannot be done during assemblies or classes
- Only applicable to severe or moderate offences, such as smoking, drinking alcohol and violence

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