The Star

‘Education is more than just exams’

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IT is crucial that our education system goes beyond mere facts and figures, memorisation and exams, as this is not how a human being grows and matures.

In an increasingly interconnected world, empathy and compassion are valuable skills for navigating complex social, cultural and global issues, said Education Minister Fadhlina Sidek.

“By prioritising these qualities in education, we can equip future generations with the tools they need to address challenges collaboratively and work towards a more just and compassionate world.

“A curriculum imbued with empathy and compassion is very valuable in a multicultural society like Malaysia as these values help bridge divides and foster understanding between individuals from diverse backgrounds,” she said during the 5th Distinguished Lecture Series on Youth Well-being: Cultivating Empathy and Compassion through Education on May 2.



Smile: Fadhlina (centre) posing for a wefie with UPM students after delivering her speech. — BERNAMA

Social and emotional skills, she added, are critical in a well-rounded education system as they improve student academic achievements and well-being.

There are plans, she said, to include these skills in the upcoming 2027 school curriculum to promote social cohesion and create a more inclusive society where everyone feels valued and respected.

This is part of the “humane education” concept that aims to cultivate compassion and respect for all living beings, she said, adding that values must be taught using a well-designed curriculum with targeted activities.

Fadhlina said education provides a structured platform to teach young people about the importance of understanding and empathising with differing perspectives and experiences, and of taking compassionate action to make a positive difference in the world.

She said education should be a constant and consistent medium to ensure human dignity is maintained and preserved.

“Education is about building cognition and character which encompasses academic excellence, character formation, refining manners and morals, and strengthening integrity.

“To foster these values, individuals must be taught to understand and share the feelings of others if they are to develop a deep concern for the well-being of those around them.

“This involves incorporating lessons, activities and experiences that encourage kindness and understanding of diverse perspectives in the education system,” she added.

She said there are five key steps to doing so, the first of which is promoting awareness about different social issues, cultural diversity, and the experiences of marginalised groups.

Students, she added, also need to be taught this through curriculum elements such as discussions about empathy in Literature or History subjects, and role-playing scenarios that promote empathetic responses.

“Educators and adults are role models for young people and by demonstrating empathy and compassion in their interactions with students and each other, they create a supportive environment that encourages these qualities in youth,” she said, adding that there should also be more service learning opportunities that allow students to apply their empathy and compassion to real-world situations.