

'Roadmap for online learning should have been done months ago'

KUALA LUMPUR: The Education Ministry's latest directive to allow physical classrooms for only secondary school students sitting major examinations is necessary in view of the rising number of Covid-19 cases, education groups and stakeholders said.

The crisis caused by the pandemic, which has forced the ministry to introduce alternatives to physical classes, they said, also underlined the urgency to improve and strengthen online learning.

Parent Action Group for Education president Datin Noor Azimah Abdul Rahim stressed the need to come out with a roadmap for online learning.

"The government needs to seriously start with an earnest approach to online learning, which will not happen overnight.

"In fact, a roadmap for online lessons should have been done months ago for teachers, students and parents to have a clear guidance. Stakeholders will then know what to do at each step of the way."

To ensure the success of online learning, the National Union of The Teaching Profession (NUTP) said it was imperative for the government to ensure that affected pupils were equipped with tools to embrace teaching and learning at home (PdPR).

Its secretary-general, Harry Tan, said apart from tax breaks,

the government should consider introducing tax exemptions for parents to acquire digital equipment for children to continue their studies online.

"I am sure the government is looking into addressing this issue.

"At the same time, NUTP would like to appeal for greater participation from non-governmental organisations (NGOs), the private sector and individuals to help families who are poor and less fortunate, as well as those with disabilities.

"We hope the government would lead the call to rope in participation from NGOs and private sectors as the latter need leadership and guidance on ways they could assist needy families."

Parents, said Tan, played a crucial role to ensure the successful implementation of classes conducted via virtual platforms, such as Google Classroom.

"Parents need to intervene by disciplining their children to follow virtual classes.

"NUTP has received suggestions to have classes conducted after parents' working hours. This proposal, however, needs to be deliberated and agreed upon by all parties."

Despite weaknesses, PdPR was sufficient to ensure that education among primary schools was not affected due to the pandemic, he said.



A guard opening the gate to a secondary school in Kuala Lumpur yesterday in preparation for students taking major examinations on Wednesday. PIC BY EIZAIRI SHAMSUDIN

National Parent-Teacher Association president Associate Professor Datuk Dr Mohd Ali Hassan stressed the need to ensure a safe and conducive learning environment for secondary school students involved in major examinations.

Prior to the reopening of schools on Jan 20, he said, the authorities must ensure that the premises were safe and complied with all the guidelines and the standard operating procedures (SOP) introduced by the National

Security Council, Health Ministry and Education Ministry.

This is particularly relevant to schools in states hit by floods.

"Apart from ensuring all classrooms and laboratories are safe and equipped with hand sanitisers, the authorities should also consider having teachers who conduct face-to-face classes undergo Covid-19 screenings.

"This will reassure parents and students on their safety, apart from encouraging greater interaction between students and

teachers," he said.

Ali proposed that the ministry offer classes during weekends for students sitting major examinations.

Sufficient time for leisure and exercise for students and teachers was needed, he added.

Azimah said it was important for schools to provide guidance and support to students to improve their mental health, following the pandemic.

"School counsellors will play a major role here."

The Education Ministry, in a statement on Saturday, said all primary schools had been instructed to conduct PdPR starting Wednesday.

The same applies to secondary students not involved in major examinations, whether they are attending schools in states under the Movement Control Order (MCO), Conditional MCO or Recovery MCO.

Only students involved in major examinations would be allowed to attend physical classes at secondary schools nationwide from Jan 20.

The major examinations are Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia, Sijil Vokasional Malaysia, Sijil Tinggi Agama Malaysia, Sijil Kemahiran Malaysia, Sijil Tinggi Persekolahan Malaysia, Diploma Vokasional Malaysia and other international-level exams certified by the ministry.