

Tackling bullying from the classroom

EDUCATIONAL institutions have the biggest role to play if the Anti-Bullying Act 2026 is to be enforced effectively, experts say.

These institutions need to build strong bonds and trust between students and educators, the stakeholders stress.

Their views come amid persistent concern over bullying in schools.

Education Minister Fadhlina Sidek told the Dewan Rakyat on Feb 12 that almost 3,000 bullying cases were recorded in government schools last year, with 2,149 involving secondary schools and 740 in primary schools.

The issue remains pressing, with data from the Education Ministry's Student Self-Personality System showing that as of last December, an average of over 14,000 bullying cases had been reported annually in primary and secondary schools since 2019.

Passed by Parliament on Dec 3 last year and signed by His Majesty Sultan Ibrahim, King of Malaysia, on Jan 10, the Anti-Bullying Act aims to establish a specific mechanism (*see infographic*) to address bullying cases involving all victims as defined under the law.

According to Prof Dr Roziah Mohd Rasdi from the Universiti Putra Malaysia Faculty of Educational Studies, research consistently shows that bullying thrives in environments where students feel disconnected from teachers and institutions.

She urged schools to prioritise initiatives that strengthen relationships between students, teachers and administrators.

"Schools can introduce a positive school climate, which includes conducting regular dialogue sessions and having an advisory system where teachers mentor students.

"Students' self-esteem would increase, and they would feel respected and supported. So, the likelihood of aggressive behaviour would decrease significantly," she told *StarEdu*.

She also recommended that

School culture and preventive strategies must complement new Anti-Bullying Act, say stakeholders

schools integrate social and emotional learning into the curriculum to help students develop empathy, emotional regulation and conflict resolution skills – competencies that, she said, are essential to reducing bullying behaviour.

Prof Roziah added that educational institutions should implement programmes that empower students to safely support victims and report harmful behaviour – a measure listed in the Anti-Bullying Act.

Supportive steps

Agreeing, Unitar International University Faculty of Education and Humanities executive dean Prof Dr Mallika Govindarajoo said schools should implement preventive, relational and cultural interventions.

These would include reinforcing values like empathy, respect and responsibility through a whole-school positive behaviour programme.

At the same time, she said conducting anonymous student surveys can help identify hidden issues and track progress.

"Student ambassadors, buddy systems and peer mentoring support can reduce isolation," she added.

A former teacher herself, Prof Mallika said educators need training in early detection, including skills to identify subtle bullying such as relational or psychological bullying.

"Schools need to strengthen supervision at hotspots, as bullying often occurs in corridors,

toilets, canteens, and during transition times," she added.

She also said that accountability, dialogue and reconciliation, where appropriate, need to be encouraged among members of the school community.

"These strategies complement the Act's legal and procedural framework by addressing school culture, which is where lasting change occurs," she said.

On the steps required under the Act, Prof

Mallika noted that while they are achievable, scaling them quickly requires adequate training for teachers and administrators, consistent leadership support, clear standard operating procedures from the Education Ministry, and sufficient resources for monitoring, reporting and documentation.

"Schools already operate within a culture of committees and reporting mechanisms.

"Thus, the Act aligns with existing practices, but the speed of implementation will vary based on staffing capacity, school culture and infrastructure," she said.

Way forward

National Union of the Teaching Profession secretary-general Fouzi Singon stressed that schools are responsible for ensuring a safe and conducive learning environment.

"Teachers, especially discipline teachers, have been given sufficient briefings and training on the implementation of this new Act, so that it is practised according to the correct proce-

dures without causing repercussions for teachers who enforce the rules," he said.

He added that the Act is not merely about punishment but aims to create a comprehensive system of prevention, intervention and rehabilitation to ensure that schools remain safe, harmonious and conducive learning environments.

Weighing in, Prof Roziah said the Act is a clear signal that the government is no longer treating bullying, in its various forms, as just a disciplinary or criminal matter.

"We can see that prior to the enactment of the Act, bullying incidents in Malaysia were addressed through a fragmented legal and administrative framework under the Education Act 1996.

"Bullying was treated indirectly as assault, harassment or disciplinary misconduct, depending on the circumstances.

"So, educational institutions relied primarily on disciplinary provisions and school regulations to manage students' misconduct," she said.

She added that while these mechanisms provided schools with some authority to respond to misconduct, the approach was largely administrative and reactive, rather than guided by a comprehensive legal framework.

Among the many facets of the Act, Prof Roziah pointed out that one notable aspect is its emphasis on child-centred procedures and restorative justice principles.

"They are designed to be informal and child-friendly, while prioritising mediation and rehabilitation where appropriate," she concluded.



Prof Mallika



Prof Roziah



Fouzi