

# Success rests

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**The Education Ministry needs to spell out the details of the blueprint, from “intentions to implementation”, or risk it being mere catchy slogans or platitudes.**

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**F**INISHING unfinished business – the pledge from the Education Ministry to improve the state of the country’s education system in its *National Education Blueprint 2006-2010* was loud and clear.

Continuing where his predecessors left off, Education Minister Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Tun Hussein detailed measures to level the playing field and provide access to education for all in the official masterplan.

But the Malaysian on the street needs to be forgiven for taking the statement with more

## NATIONAL EDUCATION BLUEPRINT

### Pioneering change: A national mission



#### Nation building

- ▶ Upgrade co-curricular activities under the Student Integration Programme for Unity (RIMUP) to foster better understanding between vernacular and national schools
- ▶ Develop an arts curriculum for all
- ▶ Build two new art schools



#### Developing human capital

- ▶ Review KBSR and KBSM curriculum for primary and secondary schools
- ▶ Upgrade ICT infrastructure in all schools
- ▶ Conduct activities across the curriculum like public speaking and debates to develop students' communication skills

than a dose of scepticism.

Masterplan, blueprint, roadmap – how many official documents have we seen come and go without the proper implementation, what more an assessment or audit of their effectiveness?

The 2001-2010 Education Development Masterplan launched five years ago by then education minister Tan Sri Musa Mohamad, for instance, seems to have been forgotten, together with proposals such as abolishing the *Penilaian Menengah Rendah*.

Then there are the *Smart School* project and *Making Schools Smart* initiative, the effectiveness of which are still being audited. And how can we forget the *Teaching of Mathematics and Science in English*, which was implemented in haste and has yet to show results?

Hence, it's no surprise that the prime concern among educationists and parents is the execution of this new blueprint. But Hishammuddin has promised to release a report card twice a year on its progress and implementation.

## Proper implementation crucial

Former Education director-general Tan Sri Murad Mohd Nor (1974-1985) has put teachers on top of the list of priorities.

"The most important part in the implementation of any plan is the teachers. However good the plan, it will be of no use if the teachers do not implement it well.

"For the blueprint to work, teachers need to understand it – what they have to do and how they have to do it. Only then can the ministry get the necessary commitment from them to carry out the plans successfully," he says.

The blueprint is very condensed, he admits, and the ministry needs to expand the platitudes into workable strategies.

"Take infrastructure, for example, we need to look at the type of infrastructure, what sort of upgrading is needed, and how much.

"The ministry needs to spell it out in detail from intention to implementation; the blueprint must not only be a source of catchy slogans. It must be put into effect, and teachers have to be in the forefront," he says.

Factors such as policy guidelines, timelines and deadlines, aims and objectives, and funding structure have to be explained to teachers, he adds, noting that the "explanation" should begin early with teacher trainees at the teacher training institutes.

Chief Inspector of Schools Alimuddin Mohd

Dom says the Schools Inspectorate will ensure each school has a copy of the blueprint.

"We want everyone, especially teachers, to know and understand what is in the blueprint as they are the ones who will be implementing it.

As an example, under the nation building thrust, inspectors would look at how schools organise activities.

"Schools can invite prominent leaders to give talks to the students. This doesn't mean schools in rural areas will be left out as each can invite a leader."

## Narrowing the gap

A main objective of the blueprint is to foster unity, which includes the strengthening of national schools.

Prof Emeritus Datuk Dr K.J. Ratnam, who headed a special inquiry panel on racial polarisation in schools in 2002, says making national schools more multiracial will help address the issue.

"Basically, there are not enough pupils of other races in national schools. Examination results show that national schools are academically up to the mark but the prevailing misconception is that they are inferior to Chinese schools," he says.

Although parent S.B. Teoh commends the ministry's strategies to strengthen national schools, he has nevertheless opted to send his eight-year-old son to a Chinese school.

"There is a general perception among parents that standards in national schools have deteriorated. There is also a feeling that national schools are not multiracial anymore and, in a sense, more Islamic," he says.

Admitting that Chinese schools aren't multiracial either, he nonetheless strongly believes that the academic track record of Chinese schools surpasses most national schools.

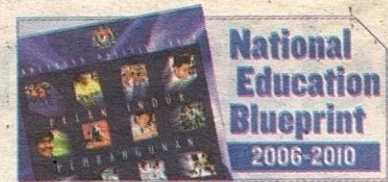
"Chinese schools have better discipline and the students are trained to be more hardworking.

"Look at how many non-Chinese parents send their kids to Chinese schools. Until national schools can prove that they are equal, if not better than Chinese schools, they will remain unattractive to non-Malay parents.

And like many parents, Teoh wants his son to be able to read and write Chinese, bearing in mind China's emergence as an economic superpower.

Under the blueprint, Chinese and Tamil classes will be introduced in 220 national

# on teachers



## NT 2006-2010 – Highlights



### Strengthening national schools

- Conduct Chinese and Tamil classes in 220 pilot national schools
- Develop a National Pre-school Curriculum for children above five years old
- Build more school buildings to have 90% of all primary schools and 70% of secondary schools as single session schools by 2010



### Bridging the rural/urban education gap

- Build 805 schools, 5,138 classrooms and 841 houses for teachers in rural areas
- Provide 24-hour electricity supply to 664 rural primary schools
- Supply water to 193 rural schools
- Increase the number of computers and computer labs in schools



### Improving the teaching profession

- Have a stringent selection process with a Malaysian Teachers Selection Test-MTeST, interview and English writing test for all applicants
- Increase the number of Super Teachers
- Fast-track promotion for deserving teachers



### Accelerating excellence at educational institutions

- Build niche schools - three new sports school, two more Special Education schools and introduce new skills courses for the hearing and learning impaired
- Select 300 best schools to participate in the centres of excellence initiative
- Select the best teachers and heads to lead cluster schools

»However good the plan, it will be of no use if the teachers do not implement it well«

MURAD MOHD NOR

schools in a pilot project this year. The Students' Integration Plan for Unity (Rimup) will be expanded to foster more activities such as competitions and gatherings between the different school streams.

Prof Emeritus Dr Ratnam feels that although these may be "small" measures, they will help to close the widening gulf between the races.

### A question of quality

SK St John 2 Parent-Teacher Association vice-president Mohd Rizal Hussim welcomes the ministry's plans to review the curriculum to make it more holistic for students.

"We need to find a balance between academic results and the non-academic development of children. Many students who score straight As in national examinations find it difficult to cope in university. Most Malaysian students are not exposed to the world outside and lack life skills, as all their time is filled with extra classes and tuition to prepare for exams," he says.

In today's world, he stresses, it is not enough to be book smart, as one needs to have the ability to think creatively and critically.

Highlighting English competency and communications skills as examples, Mohd Rizal believes that schools need to expose students to activities that can enhance independent thinking and communication skills.

"I visited a primary school in Britain and saw how students there were encouraged to ask questions. Here, we ask students to sit down at their desks and be quiet. This is mainly because teachers are under pressure to finish the syllabus.

"At the end of the day, results count and everyone – students and teachers – want to do their best because their performance is judged on that. So we really need to review our exam system."



From left: Nur Ashiqin Zainal Ariffin of SMK Putrajaya (2) holds the National Education Blueprint 2006-2010 while her friends Shobaya Nair Saseedharan, Nurul Ammirah Akmar, Aիրruddin and Yamuna Nagarajoo look at another at the launch in Putrajaya on Tuesday.

Alimuddin says the ministry recognises the importance of producing more well-rounded students; hence, one of the steps to be implemented is the incorporation of public speaking skills.

This has always been part of the KBSM curriculum but it has not been given much emphasis previously, he adds.

"The blueprint will help produce more well-rounded students who are confident and able to communicate effectively. This will help them when they pursue higher education as they can easily adapt to any new challenge."

### The root problem

It's time to get back to the basics, says Teoh.

"We need smaller classes. More importantly, we need to hire the right people to teach. The profession has to be made attractive; it shouldn't be something that people fall back on when their options become limited. And you must reward teachers who do a good job regardless

of their race. Promotions must reflect calibre and ability," he notes.

Echoing Teoh, Murad believes that a revolution is needed to boost the teaching profession.

"First of all, the selection needs to be more stringent. Teaching is the only profession where you are recruited before training or education. Maybe we need to review that to get those who are really committed," says the former DG.

He, however, feels that much has been done to improve the wellbeing of teachers, including better salary, opportunities for promotion and benefits.

"The workload has grown though. Schools are overcrowded and teachers are burdened by non-teaching duties and the support from the community has decreased."

Alimuddin says the creation of 8,000 posts for excellent teachers is a step in the right direction.

"We hope 2,000 will be filled this year alone," he adds.