

# Cluster school heads want link-up with community

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**KUALA LUMPUR:** Bowling and equestrian are some of the interesting niche areas cluster school heads have proposed for their schools.

The chairman of the Clusters of Excellence advisory board, Tan Sri Dr Abdul Rahman Arshad, said yesterday he was encouraged by the ideas proposed by school heads at their meetings.

He said this showed that the school heads were now clearer and "more definite" about the direction they would be taking.

"One of them said they wanted an equestrian focus, because they were close to a polo club," he said after a meeting between the board and the 11 cluster schools out of the 30 already announced by the ministry.

"And we thought 'Why not?' In this case, I think it is very good to encourage relationships with others in their community."

Cluster schools, which will number 300 by the end of the year, will be making history as they will be given autonomy to implement a host of changes for their schools' improvement.

In the move to make excellent schools less dependent on the rigid, centralised education system and push them to greater heights, the schools will develop their own niche and are expected to maintain high academic and co-curricular performance.

Rahman said some schools wanted a sports focus, while others wanted to boost their current strengths.

One school, for example, wanted to enrich its resource centre so that it could be a superior learning zone for its community.

Another plans to prepare its students for the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants certification.

The Schools Division, Rahman said, discussed the possibility of sending top-notch teachers to suit the school's aspirations.

The former education director-general said most schools had outlined two or three areas they wanted to focus on, and some had even pushed ahead on their own initiative.

"One school told us that with the help of its parent-teacher association, it had brought in sports coaches from outside. Some were even getting recognition from their states.

"I thought these were schools which were financially well-off, but even a school for natives in Sarawak had co-operated with parents to arrange transport for their students for competitions. So, this is not about money, but human resources."

Rahman said the board would visit these schools to check on what they required and make the recommendations to the ministry.

He also said he would propose to the ministry to extend the contracts of cluster school heads who were nearing retirement age, as they were vital to the mission of their schools.

He said it would be best for these leaders to leave only if there was an appropriate understudy to take over.

Rahman said some of the 30 school heads were expected to leave for a leadership training programme with King's College in Britain in September.

They will spend two months in a programme crafted especially for them.