

# CHANGING Malaysia



So how is the government  
doing, really?

SPECIAL REPORT



School head Kamaruddin Ibrahim giving out academic achievement awards to pupils.

# Rural school transformed

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**What has been the impact of the government's measures to narrow the gap between rural and urban students? CHOK SUAT LING visits a rural school and finds out these moves are beginning to show results**

SMK Batu Kikir is certainly not a cluster school; neither does it enjoy Smart or even premier status. It is not well known and many Malaysians would not have heard of it, or the sleepy hollow it is nestled within.

Batu Kikir is some 30km from bustling Kuala Pilah in Negri Sembilan. As its location is ideal for a school to serve children from several villages and Felda schemes nearby, SMK Batu Kikir has been designated a "Model Khas" (Special Model) school.

This means it is both a primary and secondary school, with hostel facilities for children who find it difficult to travel daily from home.

Most of its students are from around Batu Kikir, Serting Ulu, Serting Hilir, Jemapoh, Felda Pasoh and Paloh.

The Special Model School programme is the government's answer to the education woes of rural children. There are several such schools around the country, established in line with the Education Development Strategic Plan which aims to reduce the performance gap between rural and urban students.

The school, which was established in 2002, has certainly reaped benefits from not just the extra RM2.6 billion under the special rural education programme last year, but the initial

RM12.3 billion allotted under the Ninth Malaysia Plan to improve basic infrastructure, equipment and support programmes in schools.

It has a new computer lab, which will be operational soon, well-equipped laboratories, and comfortable classrooms, reading rooms, library, canteen and hostel. The school is surrounded by lush greenery and carefully tended gardens. It is certainly home away from home for the school's boarders.

Its principal, Kamaruddin Ibrahim, remembers the rather dilapidated condition of the school when he was first posted there.

There were leaky ceilings and termite infestation. The school field was muddy and waterlogged during rainy days.

Now, the science laboratory has shiny new tile flooring, some classroom doors have been replaced with sturdy wooden ones, and leaky ceilings have been

plugged — thanks to the ministry's generous allocation, said Kamaruddin.

"I have also upgraded the school field, library, hostel, warden's quarters and purchased additional teaching and learning equipment with the money," he added. The new computer lab has been completed and would be ready for use soon.

"We have also been given an allocation to provide meals for students from poor backgrounds during break time," he said. Each student is allocated RM1.80, sufficient for a nutritious meal prepared by the canteen.

Many motivational programmes have also been organised for teachers and students.

"I have brought teachers to Malacca and Port Dickson for motivational sessions to boost morale."

He has seen the academic achievement of students improve significantly with the better facili-

ties and environment:

"Teachers are also more motivated now and are giving their all to help enhance the academic achievement of students. When I tell them we should aim for a maximum number of As for all students, they no longer ask me whether I am crazy."

Last year, the school emerged as one of the top schools in the Primary School Assessment Test or UPSR in Negri Sembilan, when 11 of its 13 candidates scored 5As.

The other two candidates obtained 4As and 1B. In 2006, only one of its 14 pupils scored straight As.

"This proves that rural students can excel if they are guided in their studies. We also have spacious reading rooms for them to revise in, definitely more comfortable than in most homes."

The principal admits he was concerned with the dwindling number of students earlier, but not any more. "For this year's intake, the number of applications has gone up as a result of the improved examination results."

There are now 1,322 students in the school and 98 teachers. The teachers come from all over the country, with some now residing around Batu Kikir and even in Seremban, which is about an hour's drive away.

## MONEY FOR SCHOOLS

**RM2.6b**

for rural education programme last year

**RM12.3b**

under Ninth Malaysia Plan to improve school infrastructure

**RM500-RM1,500**

allowance for teachers posted to remote areas

**1,200**

housing projects for teachers in rural areas

"I would only like to request one other thing, that the school be provided a bus to transport students who do not stay in the hostel to and from home."

Anita Shaari has been teaching at SMK Batu Kikir for five years. She describes her years there as interesting and rewarding.

She has also observed various improvements in the school environment and administration.

"In the earlier years, the primary and secondary schools sometimes had to share teachers due to a shortage but this problem is now in the past."