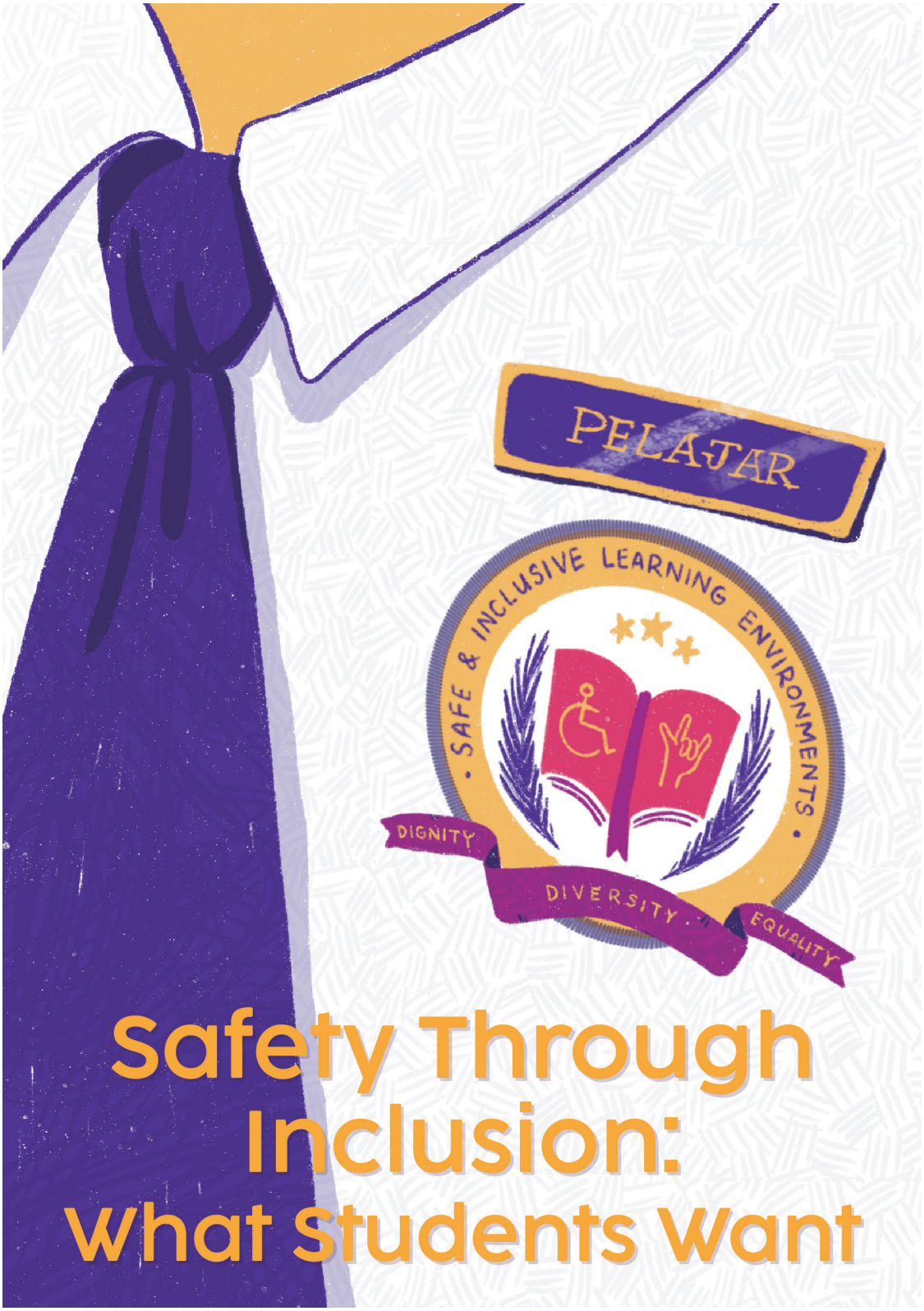

Safety Through Inclusion: What Students Want

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Safety is often reduced to rules, walls, and surveillance, but safety is also emotional, social, and relational – KRYSS Network

A safe and inclusive learning environment is not merely a physical space that ensures students are protected from physical threats and harm, but it should also be an environment that upholds human dignity and supports students' emotional and mental well-being. It is an environment that makes every effort to equally enable each student to feel secure and comfortable in order for them to reach their full potential.[1]



[1] *Definition derived from Malaysian public school teachers' and students' perspectives in KRYSS Network, What Works, What Fails, What's Needed: Best Practices and Persistent Challenges in Creating Safe and Inclusive Malaysian Public Schools (Kuala Lumpur: KRYSS Network, forthcoming 2026), 5.*

"Malaysia's greatest strength lies in its multicultural and multilingual identity, and the classroom should reflect this reality. Inclusion in education is not limited to policy initiatives such as the Zero Rejection Policy (2019); it must also extend to everyday teaching practices that respect and accommodate learners of all backgrounds and abilities.

In my own classroom experiences, the most effective teachers were those who employed varied methods—such as visual aids, collaborative learning, and differentiated instruction—to ensure that every pupil could participate meaningfully.

These inclusive practices not only enhance learning outcomes but also cultivate empathy and intercultural understanding among students. In such environments, pupils learn one of life's most valuable lessons: to appreciate and respect those who are different from themselves."

– Muhammad Hafiz Izlan bin Ruslan (male)



"To me, a safe and inclusive learning environment is one that prioritises human dignity above all else. . . .

Inclusivity must go beyond accepting differences in race, language, or religion; it must also recognise diverse learning styles, backgrounds, and personal struggles. Every student, whether from an elite urban school or a rural community, deserves to learn without fear. Inclusivity must be embedded into the culture of learning itself.

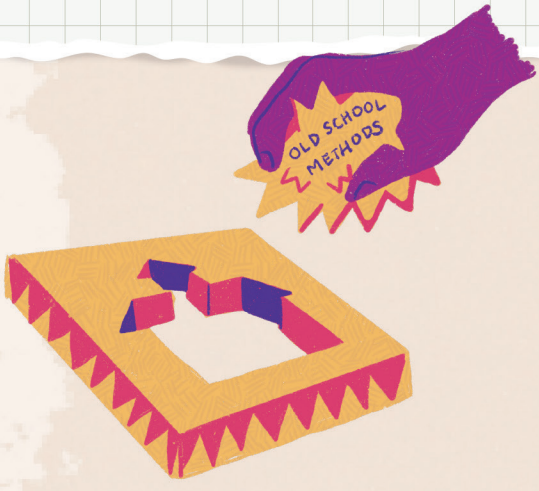
This means revising curricula to include lessons on empathy, respect, and diversity from an early age. It means creating environments that are genuinely accessible for students with disabilities—both physically and socially. Above all, it means encouraging dialogue rather than division."

– Muhammad Faedz Ammar bin Muhammad Faidzal (male)



Safety without inclusivity and without the acceptance of diversity is not safety.
– KRYSS Network

"A safe and inclusive learning environment should go beyond issues of physical safety and interrogate what facilitates abusive school environments under the name of tradition and culture."[2]



[2] KRYSS Network, What Works, What Fails, What's Needed: Best Practices and Persistent Challenges in Creating Safe and Inclusive Malaysian Public Schools (Kuala Lumpur: KRYSS Network, forthcoming 2026), 5.

"Students who learn in a safe and inclusive environment experience greater benefits than those who do not. For instance, a supportive environment helps students build confidence, which enables them to perform better in school projects, presentations, and other activities. Students also tend to feel more curious and excited to learn, which helps improve their critical thinking and problem-solving skills. It is equally important for children to learn how to express their feelings when challenges arise."

– Ng Dana (female, 13)



"These inclusive practices not only enhance learning outcomes but also cultivate empathy and intercultural understanding among students."

– Muhammad Hafiz Izlan bin Ruslan (male)



Topic: Safety Requires Inclusivity

"A safe and inclusive learning environment should be one where students feel comfortable regardless of their academic level or pace of learning. Teachers should lead with empathy, guiding students to understand that acknowledging mistakes will not lead to embarrassment or humiliation, but growth." – Wong Foo Meng (male)



"Inclusivity is not merely about representation; it is about cultivating a school culture in which every student feels valued, understood, and respected. By equipping teachers, administrators, and student leaders with empathy and awareness, classrooms can become spaces that embrace diversity, reduce discrimination, and empower every learner to thrive."
– Cheyanne Oh (female)

Discipline in practice should enhance students' agency and self-determination. — KRYSS Network

"There is a pervasive conflation of discipline and moral policing, normalising the policing of students' identities and behaviours. . . . Behaviour that deviates from moral norms is punished alongside harmful or criminal behaviours."[3]

"Six students perceived discomfort and feeling unsafe directly from school rules and teacher actions, including dress policing and sexuality-based discrimination."[4]



"Far from being a benign force for good, moral policing creates a climate of fear and self-censorship. . . . Moral policing suppresses individuality, diversity, and pluralism, with non-conformity resulting in sanctions such as shaming, punishment, and social ostracisation."[5]

[3] Justice for Sisters, KRYSS Network, and SIS Forum, Behind Classroom Walls: Unpacking Moral Policing in Malaysian Public Schools (Petaling Jaya: Justice for Sisters, 2025), 13.
[4] KRYSS Network, What Works, What Fails, What's Needed: Best Practices and Persistent Challenges in Creating Safe and Inclusive Malaysian Public Schools (Kuala Lumpur: KRYSS Network, forthcoming 2026), 14.
[5] Justice for Sisters, KRYSS Network, and SIS Forum, , op cit, 12, 29.

Building trust and mutual respect are key foundations for order and structure in schools
– KRYSS Network

"Safety must mean more than surveillance, cameras and locked gates—it must be rooted in trust.

– Muhammad Faedz Ammar bin Muhammad Faidzal (male)



"Moral policing infringes on bodily autonomy and personal expression. . . . Dress codes reinforce rigid gender norms and act as a form of social control over students' bodies."[6]

"Students identified lack of privacy as a key reason they feel unsafe in school."[7]

"Some teachers follow students on social media or post students' images without consent, violating MOE guidelines."[8]



[6] Justice for Sisters, KRYSS Network, and SIS Forum, Behind Classroom Walls: Unpacking Moral Policing in Malaysian Public Schools (Petaling Jaya: Justice for Sisters, 2025), 31, 33.
[7] KRYSS Network, What Works, What Fails, What's Needed: Best Practices and Persistent Challenges in Creating Safe and Inclusive Malaysian Public Schools (Kuala Lumpur: KRYSS Network, forthcoming 2026), 14.
[8] Ibid, 18.

"Corporal punishment remains a common disciplinary practice, including caning and slapping." – KRYSS Network

"90.7% of 391 students surveyed reported feeling unsafe at school at some point."[9]

WAKIL DIPILIH OLEH PELAJAR

"Bullying (290 of 391 students) and sexual harassment or assault (246 of 391 students) were the most commonly reported reasons for feeling unsafe."[10]

[9] KRYSS Network, What Works, What Fails, What's Needed: Best Practices and Persistent Challenges in Creating Safe and Inclusive Malaysian Public Schools (Kuala Lumpur: KRYSS Network, forthcoming 2026), 13.
[10] Ibid, 15.



"Every female student's report of verbal or sexual harassment must be addressed with urgency and respect, rather than being dismissed as overreacting or brushed aside with the harmful 'boys will be boys' narrative. Schools should be spaces where young people feel protected, believed, and empowered to speak without fear."

– Tracy Goh Xiao Wei (female, 21)

"My schooling experience has been a mixture of light and shadow. I have been blessed with teachers who nurtured kindness and respect, but I have also witnessed how students can be broken by bullying, unfair treatment, and social exclusion. I remember a quiet boy in my class who often sat alone because of how he spoke. His accent was slightly different, his English stronger than his Malay, and some classmates mocked him as a 'show off' . Over time, he stopped speaking altogether. The silence of that boy still echoes within me today. It taught me that an unsafe environment does not always involve fists or weapons; sometimes, it is built through words and laughter that cut deeply."

– Muhammad Faedz Ammar bin Muhammad Faidzal (male)

"Moral policing undermines a sense of self and agency, perpetuating fear and silence among students. . . . Sanctions range from formal punishment to informal shaming and ostracisation. . . . The arbitrary nature of moral policing results in significantly varied sanctions against students who deviate from perceived societal moral standards."[11]

"At the moment, I do not feel excited about going to school—not for trivial reasons, but because of the people I am forced to be surrounded by. I did not feel safe. I was bullied and threatened by my classmates.

What made it worse was that this behaviour was often dismissed by teachers as 'just verbal', and therefore not serious enough. For me, the experience was terrifying and had a deeply damaging impact on my mental well-being. Reflecting on my upbringing, I now realise that this culture of intimidation is not isolated—it is something that continues to exist in many learning environments.



We must broaden our definition of bullying beyond physical abuse. Verbal and psychological aggression are just as harmful and destructive. If these behaviours are not addressed seriously and early, they will continue to escalate, leaving lasting consequences for those who are forced to endure them."

– Qaisarah Mudin (female)

[11] *Justice for Sisters, KRYSS Network, and SIS Forum, Behind Classroom Walls: Unpacking Moral Policing in Malaysian Public Schools (Petaling Jaya: Justice for Sisters, 2025), 14–15.*

"Policy effectiveness must be assessed based on student-reported outcomes rather than institutional compliance."
– KRYSS Network



"Curricula and learning resources must actively champion diverse representation, ensuring that a wide range of global perspectives, cultures, and lived experiences are included. This not only helps students feel seen and affirmed in their identities, but also expands their worldviews and strengthens perspective-taking skills.

Teaching methods must move away from ineffective rote memorisation for values education and towards practical, experiential learning. Activities such as community service, collaborative projects, and structured role-playing are far more effective in nurturing compassionate empathy—moving students beyond simply understanding emotions to being motivated to act with care and responsibility. For example, make it compulsory for students to visit orphanages or get involved in community activities holistically for all school students without exception, in order to cultivate compassion and love.

The daily functioning of schools should be grounded in a collaborative community that fosters trust and strong relationships among teachers, students, and families. This requires clear expectations and fair, consistent discipline that is positive in nature and focused on conflict resolution rather than punishment. When schools operate as supportive communities rather than rigid systems, they create environments that nurture not only academic success, but holistic student growth."



– Qaisarah Mudin (female)

"Moral policing is normalised through institutional practices that frame it as discipline, guidance, or moral education. . . . When moral policing is embedded within institutional cultures, students are discouraged from reporting harm."[12]

"I believe Parliament should invest in the creation of anonymous reporting platforms at the district or state level for students facing harassment or unsafe situations in schools.

Many students are afraid to speak up about their experiences. In response, calls for transparent reporting systems, CCTV monitoring, and confidential channels have increased in order to reduce under-reporting and fears of retaliation (Varnam Malaysia, 2025). By leveraging technology responsibly, schools can create safe and confidential channels for students to seek help without fear of exposure.

When used with care, technology becomes more than a tool—it becomes a lifeline that bridges silence with support and ensures that every student's voice is heard."

– Cheyanne Oh (female)

[12] Justice for Sisters, KRYSS Network, and SIS Forum, Behind Classroom Walls: Unpacking Moral Policing in Malaysian Public Schools (Petaling Jaya: Justice for Sisters, 2025), 15.

"Another important aspect of a safe and inclusive learning environment is open communication. Students should feel comfortable approaching teachers about their concerns or struggles, whether academic or personal. Teachers play a crucial role in creating a welcoming classroom atmosphere by listening actively, responding with patience, and establishing fair rules that protect the well-being of everyone. When communication is encouraged, conflicts are more easily resolved, and students feel that their voices are heard and valued. This is just as important as academic guidance, as students' emotional well-being directly affects their ability to focus, engage, and succeed in school.

Schools have a responsibility to educate students about inclusivity and respect. Lessons on diversity, mental health, and anti-bullying help students understand the importance of treating everyone fairly and with dignity. Such lessons contribute to building a supportive school community where differences are celebrated rather than ignored or avoided. For example, group activities that intentionally mix students from different backgrounds can foster teamwork, empathy, and mutual understanding, helping the classroom feel more connected and welcoming.

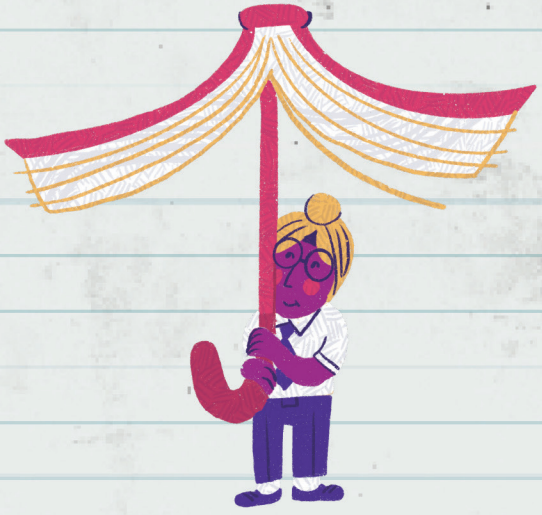
Schools should also take safeguarding seriously by responding appropriately when students engage in bullying or disruptive behaviour. Clear warnings, restorative measures, or proportionate consequences can help reinforce respectful conduct and maintain a safe learning environment."

– Phang Shayne (female, 15)



"Schools must uphold dignity, autonomy, and pluralism rather than enforce conformity."
— Justice for Sisters, KRYSS Network and SIS Forum

"To me, a safe and inclusive learning environment is a place where students feel respected, accepted, and motivated to pursue their dreams while maintaining a healthy social life. Such an environment does not only protect students from physical bullying, but also supports their emotional well-being—especially for children with special needs. Being able to express emotions helps students release built-up pressure. When stress becomes overwhelming and remains unaddressed, it can lead to serious mental health consequences. This is why proper emotional support within schools is so important.



Based on my experiences, teachers play a major role in students' educational growth. Without support from teachers, students may lose motivation and begin to believe that making mistakes is a sign of failure rather than part of learning. With encouragement, however, students develop a healthier mindset and are more willing to challenge themselves with difficult tasks.

At the same time, peer support is just as important. Students without healthy friendships often feel depressed, lost, stressed, and pressured to outperform others in order to be accepted. This unhealthy mentality can lead to anxiety, especially among students who are perceived as different—whether due to race, disability, or a lack of confidence. Such students are often judged or misunderstood and may struggle to form friendships or keep up in class. A truly inclusive environment recognises these challenges and ensures that no student is left feeling alone."

– Ng Dana (female, 13)





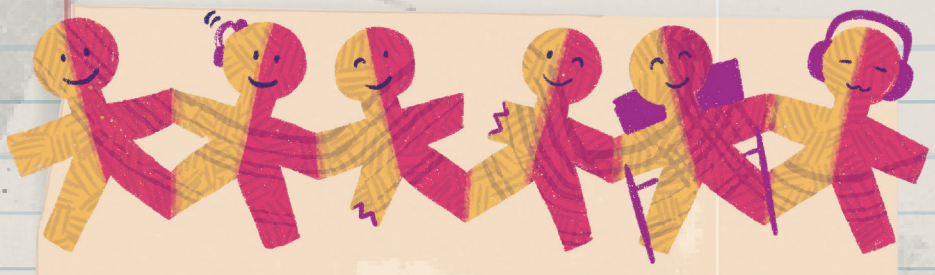
"I believe inclusivity begins with awareness. Educational institutions must prioritise compassion over competition and understanding over judgment. When schools become spaces where diversity is embraced rather than criticised, we raise a generation that sees differences as strengths, not flaws. Student-led initiatives, peer mentoring programmes, and intercultural exchanges can help bridge divides and cultivate empathy among learners from diverse backgrounds.

In Model United Nations, for instance, we see how dialogue and diplomacy can transform differences into understanding. Imagine applying that same spirit of cooperation in our schools—where every student, regardless of nationality or race, feels safe to speak, to lead, and to dream. True change begins when the next generation takes ownership of inclusion. We must advocate for systems that protect and empower every learner. Whether through student-led initiatives, inclusive curricula, or accessible mental health support programmes, every effort matters.

Ultimately, a safe and inclusive learning environment is not merely about preventing harm; it is about nurturing hope. It is about creating classrooms where no child grows up believing they must change who they are in order to be accepted. When every learner feels safe to be authentic, education fulfills its highest purpose—not only to cultivate intelligent minds, but to nurture compassionate hearts."

– Khoirul Aishah binti Hashan Sarker (female)





"Inclusivity is more than treating everyone equally; it involves recognizing and valuing differences to ensure that no one is left behind. I recall a boy in my class who had a stutter and found it difficult to communicate and present in front of others. Rather than dismissing his struggles, the teacher thoughtfully rearranged the classroom so that not all eyes were fixed on him, helping him calm his nerves and speak with fewer pauses. This small but meaningful adjustment fostered a sense of unity, transforming the classroom into a supportive environment where students looked out for one another. The experience taught me that inclusivity not only empowers individuals but also strengthens the learning experience as a whole."

– Liyana Fatima Majid Hussain (female, 17)



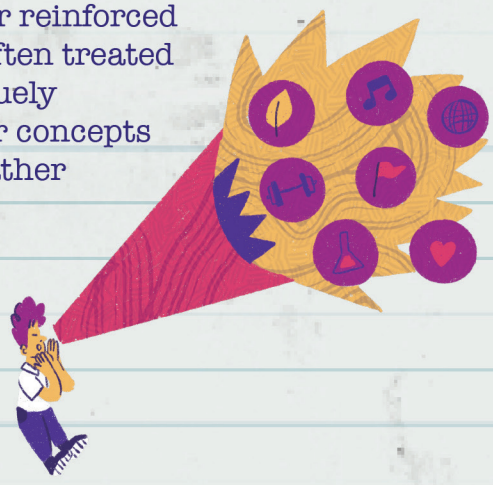
"During my schooling, an English teacher valued effort over perfection. Instead of offering harsh criticism, she acknowledged every attempt with encouragement. This simple yet powerful approach transformed our classroom atmosphere; we were no longer afraid to make mistakes, and our willingness to learn flourished. To me, this exemplifies what safety in education truly means: a nurturing space where students can express themselves, take intellectual risks, and learn without fear of ridicule or rejection."

– Muhammad Hafiz Izlan bin Ruslan (male)

Students should feel secure enough to raise their hands, express their needs, and ask for help without fear of ridicule, discrimination, or bullying. A culture of mutual respect and empathy must be intentionally cultivated so that every student feels part of the system and is valued for their uniqueness.

To make educational environments truly safe and inclusive, schools must move away from traditional, outdated models and towards approaches that are holistic, community-oriented, and explicit in developing emotional competencies. As long as education systems remain heavily exam-oriented, they will continue to prioritise the cognitive domain—memorising information for testing—while neglecting the equally important affective domain, which includes emotional development and the capacity for empathy.

This imbalance is further reinforced by the way empathy is often treated as an implicit value, vaguely embedded under broader concepts such as “compassion,” rather than being explicitly addressed within the formal curriculum.



As a result, teachers are left to navigate this complex responsibility on their own, and many lack the training needed to integrate emotional learning effectively. Addressing this gap meaningfully requires a fundamental shift in both curriculum design and school culture.

– Qaisarah Mudin (female)

"Students described safe and inclusive schools as environments where they feel mentally and emotionally supported."[13]



"Malaysia can take inspiration from Japan's inclusive education model, which integrates students with special needs into mainstream classrooms with the support of specialised teachers. True inclusivity is not about moulding every child into the same shape, but about reshaping the system to meet each child's needs—so they feel seen, supported, and valued."

— Tracy Goh Xiao Wei (female, 21)

[13] KRYSS Network, What Works, What Fails, What's Needed: Best Practices and Persistent Challenges in Creating Safe and Inclusive Malaysian Public Schools (Petaling Jaya: KRYSS Network, forthcoming 2026), 36.

"Students should be given greater opportunities to speak up and have their voices heard. This can be done through anonymous feedback sessions and active student councils that allow students to contribute to improving their schools based on their lived experiences, rather than decisions being shaped solely by senior leadership teams. Anonymous feedback sessions, in particular, can encourage wider participation, as students are more likely to share honest opinions when their identities are protected. Such platforms provide privacy and the freedom to express concerns, suggestions, and ideas without fear of judgment or consequences. In addition, lesson structures that encourage collaboration among students can positively shift mindsets. Collaborative learning helps build teamwork and communication skills that are valuable beyond the classroom. It also exposes students to diverse ideas and perspectives, allowing them to better understand one another and learn through dialogue."



– Dain Kim (female)

Dear Member of Parliament,

I urge you to prioritise policies that strengthen emotional well-being, mental and physical health, and digital safety within learning institutions. Schools today are often overly focused on academic excellence, while students' mental health and emotional well-being are sidelined.



A truly safe and inclusive learning environment must protect students not only from physical harm, but also from discrimination, social exclusion, and emotional distress. I propose the implementation of comprehensive inclusivity and sensitivity training for teachers, administrators, and student leaders. Teachers are not only educators but also role models who shape the classroom climate. As such, they should be equipped to address issues of gender bias, racial discrimination, and disability awareness with empathy and fairness.



The FS4A Inclusivity Scale-Up Programme in Malaysia has already trained over 150 teachers from 134 inclusive schools since July 2024, benefiting more than 10,000 students with disabilities (RiseMalaysia, 2025). While this is a promising start, its reach remains limited in comparison to the number of schools nationwide. Expanding such initiatives to include gender sensitivity, anti-bullying awareness, and emotional safety would help foster more inclusive and respectful learning environments.

Workshops, refresher courses, and practical resource toolkits should be made available to both staff and student leaders to ensure that these principles are translated into everyday practice. For instance, the YTL Foundation's Teachers for Educational Equity programme offers courses on inclusion, equity, and transformation for Malaysian educators (YTL Foundation, 2023)."



Sincerely, Cheyanne Oh (female)

Dear Member of Parliament,

"I advocate for improving learning environments by introducing a compulsory study skills subject for students in all schools and universities. This subject would equip students with strategies to cope with academic demands, identify effective study methods, and develop healthy learning habits while maintaining a balanced work-life routine.

I suggest that each class be assigned an academic advisor whom students can approach to discuss academic matters, discipline, personal challenges, and personal development. This system would help strengthen the relationship between students and educators by building trust, understanding, and consistent support.



Meaningful change can also come from empowering students themselves. Promoting student voice and choice—by giving students greater autonomy to express their opinions and speak freely—ensures that their concerns are heard and valued. Every educational institution should have a clear system of student representation, where designated representatives communicate students' concerns and ideas to school leadership. Such a structure would make communication more effective, inclusive, and progressive. Promoting student voice and choice—by giving students greater autonomy to express their opinions and speak freely—ensures that their concerns are heard and valued. Every educational institution should have a clear system of student representation, where designated representatives communicate students' concerns and ideas to school leadership. Such a structure would make communication more effective, inclusive, and progressive."

Sincerely, Arianna Ellysha Nazreen binti Abdul Muizz (female, 18)

Dear Member of Parliament,

I advocate for changes in how learning takes place within classrooms—specifically, how students absorb knowledge. This includes encouraging educators to conduct learning in varied environments rather than confining students to a single classroom from morning to afternoon.



Studies shared by Educating Adventures suggest that learning in different locations can be more interactive and significantly improve student engagement, particularly for those who struggle to participate in traditional classroom settings.

Ultimately, the goal of education is not simply to deliver content, but to help students engage meaningfully with what they are learning so they can explore their interests and understand the relevance of education in their lives. Too often, learning becomes about forcing information onto students and cramming content for examinations, without clearly communicating why that knowledge matters.

Communication, therefore, is a pivotal element of education—not only in how educators convey ideas, but also in how students come to understand the value of learning itself. This understanding is essential, as it shapes how students apply their knowledge and skills in whatever paths they choose to pursue in the future.

Sincerely, Sobry (male, 20)

Dear Member of Parliament,

I call for several urgent reforms. First, I advocate for mandatory training for teachers and school administrators in child psychology, gender sensitivity, and trauma-informed response. Many educators have good intentions but lack the tools to recognise emotional distress or intervene early. Equipping them with this knowledge can make schools safer from the inside out. Second, I push for an increased ratio of school counsellors to students, ensuring that mental health support is accessible, confidential, and free from stigma. Counselling should not be viewed as punishment, but as empowerment. Students must understand that seeking help is a sign of strength, not shame.



Sincerely, Muhammad Faedz Ammar bin Muhammad (male)

Dear Member of Parliament,

"I urge you to promote programmes that support students in expressing their individuality, such as self-development and reflection initiatives. These programmes could include workshops that help students explore their identities, build confidence, and express themselves authentically.





Schools should also provide access to certified counsellors to support students experiencing mental health challenges or those who simply need a safe space to unburden their thoughts. Mental well-being should not be treated as a side issue, but given the same level of importance as academic performance. Furthermore, I strongly recommend expanding programmes and support systems for students with disabilities. These students should be given additional assistance to help them grow and develop at a pace that suits their individual needs, rather than being compared to a narrow standard.



This requires increased funding for inclusive education training so that teachers can broaden their teaching methods and better accommodate diverse learning abilities. Education must be flexible enough to include students of all backgrounds and capabilities.

Lastly, true inclusivity requires embracing cultural diversity. Malaysia's multicultural society is one of its greatest strengths, yet many students still face insensitive remarks or are labelled based on harmful stereotypes. Schools should regularly organise workshops and activities that encourage students to learn about, understand, and appreciate different races, religions, genders, and cultures. Such initiatives can build empathy, reduce prejudice, and ensure that classrooms genuinely reflect harmony and mutual respect."

Sincerely, Liyana Fatima Majid Hussain (female, 17)





We can learn from others
– KRYSS Network

Dear Member of Parliament,

"A safe and inclusive learning environment is not something you measure through policies or posters on a wall. More than anything, it is something you feel. It is in the air when you walk into a room and know that you can speak, make mistakes, and still be valued for who you are. It lives in the people who make you believe that learning is not a race, but a space.



I realised this most clearly inside the surgical departments at Ziauddin University Hospital. The environment was intense: bright lights, the smell of disinfectant, the hum of monitors, and the quiet seriousness before every procedure. Yet beneath all that pressure was something deeply human. Doctors and nurses worked as one team, where everyone's voice mattered. When I asked questions—even those I thought were too simple—they never looked down on me. They answered with patience.



As one of the surgeons once said to me,

"No one learns by pretending to know. We grow when we're brave enough to admit what we don't."

That sentence changed the way I understood learning. I was no longer afraid of appearing unprepared; I became curious. Mistakes were not treated as failures, but as part of the process. The environment was demanding, but never discouraging. It taught me more than surgery or anatomy—it taught me humility, teamwork, and resilience.



That same feeling of being accepted, challenged, and inspired is what I wanted to bring to NexWise, a project we built in a small town where opportunities often felt miles away. NexWise began with a simple question: what if students had a space where learning felt less like pressure and more like possibility? We started with debate and public speaking workshops, gradually adding discussions on research, global affairs, and leadership. But what truly transformed the space was not the events themselves—it was the environment we built around them.

In our sessions, there was no hierarchy. A shy teenager could sit beside a confident speaker, and both would be heard equally. People were not afraid of being wrong; they were encouraged to explore. I watched students who could barely introduce themselves at the beginning later go on to lead full panels with confidence. That is what inclusion looks like—not perfection, but progress.

Working at both Ziauddin University Hospital and NexWise taught me that inclusion is not just about making room for others, but about helping them feel safe enough to use that room fully. It is about the unspoken trust that says, you belong here. The most shaping environments were not built on competition or pressure, but on compassion, curiosity, and community. Whether in a surgical theatre or a small-town workshop, I saw how the environment can make the difference between insecurity and growth, hesitation and purpose.

A safe and inclusive space does not just create better learners—it creates better humans. And in a world that too often rewards those who are the loudest or the fastest, perhaps what we need most are spaces that remind us to listen, to include, and to grow together."

— Ali Hassnain (male, 22)



Notes:

Notes:

Credits

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