

What Works, What Fails, What's Needed:

Best Practices
and Persistent Challenges
in Creating Safe and Inclusive
Malaysian Public Schools



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1.0 Background and Introduction to the Research

This research by KRYSS Network aims **to identify best practices that, from the perspectives of Malaysian public school teachers and students, would ensure safer and more inclusive learning environments** for all students, regardless of their race, religion, family background, etc. The research was designed to identify and strengthen good initiatives and practices adopted by public schools and teachers, in ensuring zero tolerance towards violence, stigma and discrimination. The research adopts the understanding that “best practices” should aim to uphold the human dignity of all students equally from a human rights perspective, including protecting their privacy and bodily autonomy. The research is not nationally representative, but is meant to draw out the lived realities and insights of both teachers and students of Malaysia’s public education system. The research takes the position that “single incidents” or “singular experiences” are not evidence of data being skewed, but are indications of what renders learning environments unsafe and non-inclusive. Furthermore, the research found that the responses of the teacher and student research respondents do give the assurance that there is a balanced view, in that there has been tremendous recognition of good initiatives while, simultaneously, shortfalls were identified. For example, while the issue of privacy may be taken seriously at some schools, the failure of one or more teachers to address invasion of privacy was also cited, and hence speaks to shortfalls within the Malaysian education system in ensuring that public schools are safe and inclusive.

The term “safe and inclusive learning environment” is relatively new, along with the study of it; but the concept should be fully understood by all. This research is conducted with the understanding that a safe and inclusive learning environment is not merely a physical space that ensures students are protected from physical threats and harm, but 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. Hence, this research attempts to achieve its aims by looking deeper into the issue of creating a safer learning environment for all students, going beyond issues of physical safety, and interrogating what facilitates abusive school environments along with their normalisation under the name of tradition and culture. This includes the ragging culture that is often seen as part and parcel of “growing up” or toughening up, and acts of invasion of privacy which are justified as necessary for policing students. There are additional issues—such as absentee teachers, period spot checks and bullying by teachers—that have been identified by students as causes of their trauma.¹ As a result, student activists and other organisations have begun to explore what constitutes safety for students in schools, beyond physical safety provided by fences, gates and security guards.



¹Alyaa Alhadjri, “Schoolgirls ‘Shamed, Groped and Violated’ in Period Spot Checks,” *Malaysiakini*, April 22, 2021,

<https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/571658>;

May Vin Ang, “A 16-Year-Old Died by Suicide After He Was Allegedly Bullied by His Teachers in School,” *SAYS*, February 7, 2020,

<https://says.com/my/news/a-16-year-old-died-by-suicide-after-he-was-allegedly-bullied-by-his-school-teachers>;

“Sabah Students Win Suit Against Teacher Who Was Absent from Class for Seven Months,” *The Straits Times*, November 18, 2024,

<https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/sabah-students-win-suit-against-teacher-who-was-absent-from-class-for-seven-months>.

Students spend most of their time in schools, making it a significant part of their lives for 11 years of their learning journey. When students spend some or most of that time feeling unsafe or excluded, that brings up many questions that need answers. This makes the research essential in identifying best practices by school teachers that are recognised by students, to ensure that schools are safe and inclusive for all students regardless of race, religion, gender, class, disability, family status and other grounds of discrimination. By highlighting existing good practices in public schools, school administrators and teachers will be able to more easily replicate and implement best practices in regards to ensuring safer and more inclusive learning environments, and to be provided the necessary means and budget to do so by the Ministry of Education (MOE).

Both the lived experiences and best practices shared by Malaysian students and teachers will be used to develop a policy brief to advocate with the MOE and its interagency partners to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 4, i.e., “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.”²

2.0 Research Methodology and Ethical Considerations

This research employs a mixed-method exploratory design, as depicted in figure 1. Primary data was collected via surveys and interviews with Malaysian public school teachers and students in Kuala Lumpur, Selangor, Penang, Perak, Melaka, Kelantan, Terengganu, Johor, Sabah and Sarawak. Secondary data was sourced from research papers and journals, as well as government reports. These, along with documents that highlight models of safer and inclusive learning environments, were used to complement background information and the collected responses.

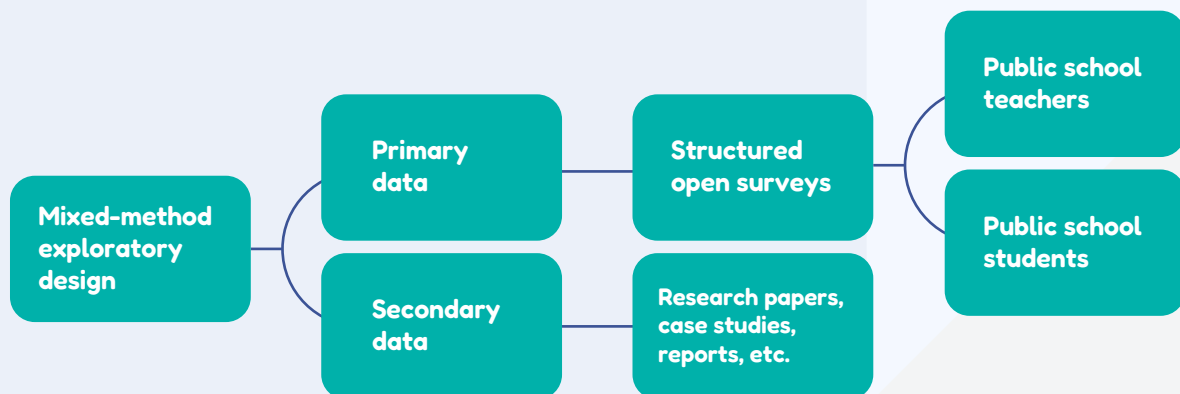


Figure 1: The mixed-method exploratory design of this research.

² “4: Quality Education,” The Global Goals, accessed January 4, 2026, <https://globalgoals.org/goals/4-quality-education>.

The analysis focuses on the following aspects:

1. Definitions of what a safe and inclusive school looks like to public school teachers and students.
2. Models of safe and inclusive learning environments.
3. Issues identified by Malaysian public school teachers and students.
4. Best or good practices identified by Malaysian public school teachers and students to ensure safe and inclusive learning environments.

Ethical considerations were made by ensuring that consent was given by research respondents to have their responses documented and analysed. They were also given the option to pull out from the research study within 14 days after completion of the survey, as well as the option to not be contacted for further clarifications. For research participants aged 18 and above, written consent was obtained via the survey introduction, which explained the research purpose and how the data would be used, thus ensuring the respondents' voluntary nature of participation. For research participants below the age of 18, we obtained participant assent with parental or guardian consent. Additionally, the survey was designed to keep the identities of research respondents anonymous, unless preference was expressed otherwise by them. Personal data of respondents were only accessible to the immediate research team members, and to the intermediaries who supported the dissemination of the survey.

The participating Malaysian public school teachers were primarily individuals connected to KRYSS Network through a previous collaboration focused on "Safe and Inclusive Learning Environments", with one exception—a Malaysian public school teacher from Selangor who responded to our survey via a social media post on the research and call for respondents. These surveys were carried out between January and July 2025, providing us with up-to-date insights into the efforts teachers are making to ensure a safer and more inclusive learning environment for all students, as well as the challenges they face. Although the small sample size of six interviewees may limit the depth of insights, the responses offer a valuable glimpse into existing best practices in Malaysian public schools.

Additionally, in collaboration with a student-led youth initiative documenting and amplifying marginalised lived experiences in Malaysian public education spaces, KRYSS Network was able to distribute the survey through a trusted student network that reached 391 young respondents aged 15 to 21. This included both current students and public school leavers who offered reflections based on their recent schooling experiences. The survey combined closed-ended questions (e.g., demographic information, checklists of safety concerns and school initiatives) with open-ended questions exploring students' experiences and their suggestions on ways to make learning environments safer and more inclusive. Snowball sampling was employed with student respondents sharing the survey further with their peers. The research used an inductive analysis approach, drawing themes from patterns in the data collected.



3.0 Research Participants and Demographic Breakdown

A total of six public school teachers participated in the research (see annex 1). These were from Perak, Sabah, Selangor, and another state which is not disclosed, as requested by the teacher.

A total of 391 Malaysian public school students aged 15 to 21 participated in the survey. Out of the 391 research respondents, 43 elaborated on their responses in more detail and were interviewed. These interviews provided greater insights for data analysis, highlighting key issues and associated best or good practices. As indicated in annex 2, the responses of the 43 are categorised into two groups: current school-goers and school leavers. The 43 student respondents were from Johor, Perak, Selangor, Penang, Negeri Sembilan, Melaka, Terengganu and Wilayah Persekutuan. The remaining 348 student research respondents requested not to be contacted again for follow-up questions to further elaborate on their responses.

4.0 Limitations of Research Study

KRYSS Network found that many Malaysian public school teachers were reluctant to participate in the research without formal approval from the MOE. This suggested a fear of reprisal if their views were found to not align with the perspective publicly promoted by the MOE. As for current public school goers, a general observation showed that many of them had yet to identify some of the practices in their schools as unsafe; hence, they were unable to provide the insights needed for the research. For example, students might not have been aware that teachers should not be taking their photographs and sharing these online without consent from them (if aged 18 and above) or their parents, or that teachers are not supposed to follow students on their social media accounts. Other limitations include a reliance on the use of technology for the administration of the survey and the collection of the data; therefore, the research possibly over-represents urban, digitally-connected students who may or may not already be followers of the social media accounts of Pride in Research and KRYSS Network. Students of remote schools and with poor Internet access may be under-represented in the research findings. Under-representation also possibly includes public schools with poor access to funds, Internet access and other resources. However, at the same time, it is important to consider that the survey dissemination method does not necessarily fully determine demographic diversity. Students with disabilities, from low-income households, or in geographically-isolated areas may still have participated through mobile devices or shared connectivity. These methodological limitations should not be used to dismiss the intersectionality of respondents' identities and experiences. The research findings reflect students reachable through these channels, while acknowledging that perspectives from entirely offline populations remain unrepresented.



5.0 Findings of the Research

The findings from this research highlight several existing best practices in Malaysian public schools aimed at addressing long-standing issues faced by students. Some public school teachers have been proactive, taking their own initiative to create safer and more inclusive learning environments. Based on the survey, these best practices include the implementation of anti-bullying campaigns, which were reported as a common practice across many schools, indicating an existing awareness of bullying and its impact. Other practices include collaborative efforts among teachers, parents, students and external stakeholders (e.g., the police) to address serious issues. These include cases of sexual assault; adherence to guidelines provided by the MOE to protect student privacy, particularly in digital spaces; the use of diversified teaching methods; the celebration of various cultural and religious festivals; the discontinuation of corporal punishment; and the promotion of respect for students' privacy.

5.1 The Malaysian Context and Definitions of Bullying

Referring to *Surat Pekeliling Ikhtisas Bilangan 8 Tahun 2011* on the Management of Pupils' Safety in School, the MOE describes a "safe school" as a place that is safe and free from criminal activities, bullying and drug use.³ It is also in adequate physical condition and is equipped with appropriate facilities, effective enforcement of school activities, strict security control, and sufficient regulations governing the entry and exit of outsiders on school premises. Although several factors play into how safe a school is, in the later sections of this research, it shall be seen that bullying is among the more significant issues that have a severe negative impact on students' sense of safety.

Referring to the MOE's *Garis Panduan Pengurusan Salah Laku Buli di Institusi Pendidikan Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia* that was approved through the MOE Professional Meeting on 21 September 2023, bullying is categorised as follows:⁴

- **Physical Bullying:** A form of physical violence or aggression against the victim's body and property, such as hitting, biting, kicking, pinching, spitting, kicking, punching, slapping, stealing, hiding or damaging the victim's property, or forcing the victim to do unwanted things.
- **Verbal Bullying:** A form of bullying committed through speech such as mocking, teasing, insulting, threatening, cursing, humiliating, spreading rumors or slander, and making fun of the victim's body size (i.e., bodyshaming), appearance, skin colour, ancestry, race or disability. In addition, verbal bullying also involves verbal statements, name-calling or titles that are designed to do the same.
- **Non-verbal Bullying:** A form of bullying that is done through gestures, body language or facial expressions, such as squinting, smirking, pouting, sticking out the tongue, obscene gestures and other non-verbal actions. This type of bullying can also take the form of a psychological attack, such as through actions like boycotting and isolation.
- **Cyberbullying:** A form of intimidating, angering or embarrassing someone via communication facilities available through technology, such as text messages, online chats, email, social networking sites, mobile phones and online games.

³Ministry of Education Malaysia, *Surat Pekeliling Ikhtisas Bilangan 8 Tahun 2011: Pengurusan Keselamatan Murid di Sekolah*, SPI:KP(BPSH-SPDK)201/005/01/Jld. 4(11), circular letter, Putrajaya: Federal Government Administrative Centre, 2011, <https://online.fliphtml5.com/ubcth/xttv/#p=1> (accessed January 4, 2026).

⁴Ministry of Education Malaysia, *Garis Panduan Pengurusan Salah Laku Buli di Institusi Pendidikan Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia*, by Abdul Rahim bin Mohidin et al., eds., KPM. 100-1/3/1 Jld. 9(18), Ministry guidelines, Putrajaya: Federal Government Administrative Centre, 2023, <https://aduanbuli.moe.gov.my/menu-docman/17-spi-kpm-bilangan-12-tahun-2023-pelaksanaan-garis-panduan-pengurusan-salah-laku-buli-di-institusi-pendidikan-bawah-kementerian-pendidikan-malaysia/file> (accessed January 4, 2026).

In a meeting with KRYSS Network team members in November 2024, officials from the MOE insisted that they had addressed bullying in public schools effectively. However, a rise of 28.5% in the number of reported bullying cases—a jump from 3,887 cases in 2022 to 4,994 cases in October 2023—had been mentioned by the then Deputy Education Minister Lim Hui Ying in Parliament.⁵ This figure is likely higher considering that not all bullying cases are reported due to fear of repercussion. In 2020, the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) indicated that Malaysia also ranked second in Asia for cyberbullying among youths as social media platforms become a primary form of communication.⁶

The MOE’s official position that bullying has been addressed in public schools speaks, to a certain extent, to the normalisation and acceptance of bullying. Such a position also appears to ask the public to accept that bullying naturally manifests at institutions of higher learning. It took the case of Zara Qairina binti Mahathir, a Form One student who was found dead within her school compound in Sabah in 2025, to ignite enough public discourse around bullying and the persistent harmful culture of ragging in schools, for authorities to move to take more concrete actions.⁷ This incident highlighted what many already knew: such practices are not isolated but are often an open secret, especially in boarding school environments. Khairy Jamaluddin, the former Minister of Health, also mentioned in his podcast show, *Keluar Sekejap*, how ragging was a normalised part of his own boarding school experience, highlighting the systemic nature of this harmful culture that is often justified as a means of building resilience among students.⁸



⁵ Nora Mahpar, “4,994 School Bullying Cases in 2023, Says Deputy Minister,” *Free Malaysia Today*, November 1, 2023, <https://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/nation/2023/11/01/4994-school-bullying-cases-in-2023-says-deputy-minister>.

⁶ Bernama, “Malaysia Is 2nd in Asia for Youth Cyberbullying,” *AWANI International*, January 14, 2022, <https://international.astroawani.com/malaysia-news/malaysia-2nd-asia-youth-cyberbullying-341583>.

⁷ Julia Chan, “Zara Qairina Inquest: What We Know So Far,” *The Malay Mail*, September 13, 2025, <https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2025/09/13/zara-qairina-inquest-what-we-know-so-far/190957>.

⁸ Keluar Sekejap, “EP167 | Justice for Zara, ASEAN AI Malaysia Summit 2025, Isu Bendera Terbalik,” podcast video, August 14, 2025, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5hRfyHB_tcM.

5.2 Literature Review

The extent and amount of research on the topic show that the issue of unsafe and non-inclusive learning environments has been a prominent and consistent problem. Many have found existing school environments to be flawed, which therefore limits children from reaching their full potential. This is largely due to school and pedagogical practices that are not inclusive, thereby making school environments unsafe for children with different needs. This is explored in Sautner's research on "Inclusive, Safe and Caring Schools".⁹

Sautner's research focuses primarily on integrating children with disabilities into regular classrooms and social circles, in order to prevent alienation which often leads to bullying. The research, which looked into the connection between inclusive education and violence prevention in schools, emphasises that safety cannot exist without inclusivity. Similarly, Towl and Hemphill's book explores creating *Safe, Supportive and Inclusive Learning Environments for Young People in Crisis and Trauma*, and has acknowledged the profound impact that lived experiences can have, especially on children.¹⁰

According to the *Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2022 Results*, a section examining students' sense of belonging at school (see figure 2) revealed that they felt like outsiders (18%), awkward and out of place (21%), and lonely (22%).¹¹ While the report does not specify the root causes behind these feelings, it highlights the importance of examining how school environments may contribute to students feeling a lack of belonging at school.

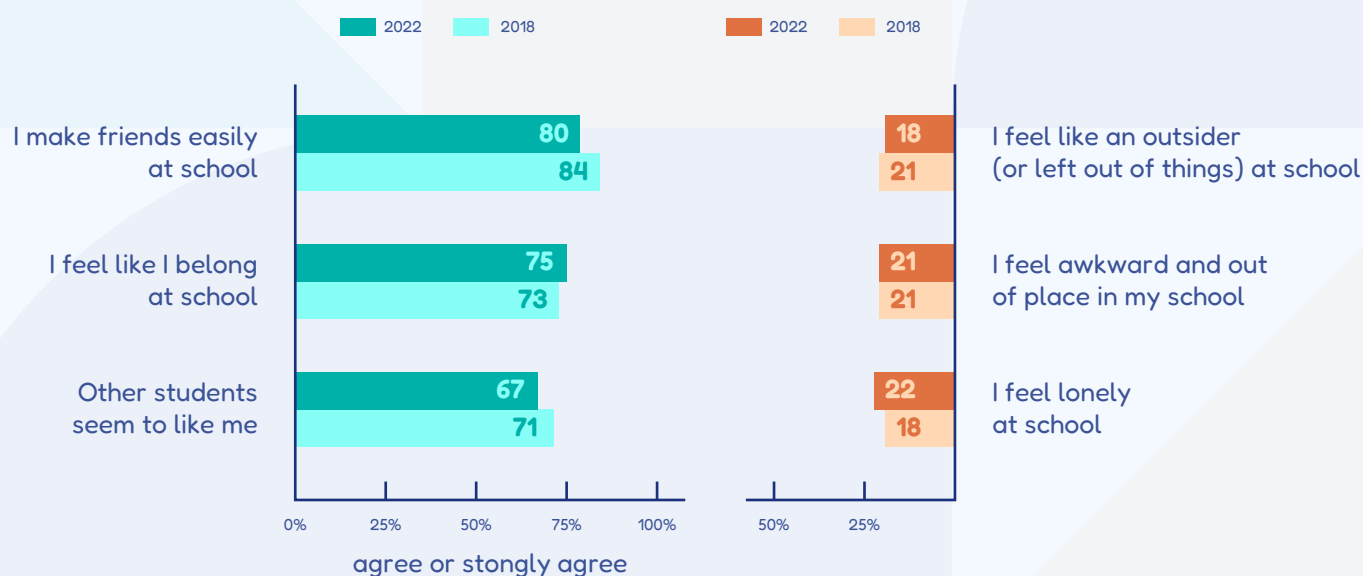


Figure 2: Malaysian students' sense of belonging at school. (Source: OECD, *PISA 2022 Database*, Table II.B1.1.4.)

⁹Brenda Sautner, "Inclusive, Safe and Caring Schools: Connecting Factors," *Developmental Disabilities Bulletin* 36, no. 1-2 (2008): 135-67, <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ828951.pdf>.

¹⁰Patty Towl and Sheryl A. Hemphill, *Safe, Supportive, and Inclusive Learning Environments for Young People in Crisis and Trauma: Plaiting the Rope* (United Kingdom: Routledge, 2020), <https://books.google.com.my/books?hl=en&lr=&id=7AfpDwAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PT5&dq=safe+and+inclusive+learning+environment&ots=TsuSuo8mAm&sig=00ipbZpnQhaO-XLsaUBtA45imzA#v=onepage&q=safe%20and%20inclusive%20learning%20environment&f=false>.

¹¹*PISA 2022 Results (Volume I and II) - Country Notes: Malaysia*, OECD, 2023, https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/pisa-2022-results-volume-i-and-ii-country-notes_ed6fbcc5-en/malaysia_1dbe2061-en.html.



There is a gap in the collaboration in decision making between the MOE, schools and parents in creating a safer and more inclusive learning environment for all students—particularly in public schools in Malaysia. In Malaysia, the communication model between policymakers, the MOE, states, schools and teachers follows a top-down approach, which presents several limitations.¹² After passing through multiple stages, the messages received by teachers often differ from the original intentions of policymakers. Research by Bush et al. on “School Leadership Theories and the Malaysia Education Blueprint” highlights that many teachers have not thoroughly reviewed the Education Blueprint, relying instead on interpretations from district officials and principals, who themselves may not have examined it in detail.¹³ This unclear, indirect communication, combined with the lack of involvement of practitioners in decision-making discussions, contributes to the persistence of this gap.

The previously-mentioned research by Sautner has looked into the connection between inclusive education and violence prevention in schools, concluding that safety cannot exist without inclusion, and that these are not two separate issues.¹⁴ The term “inclusion” emerged in the 1990s, emphasising that students with disabilities, regardless of severity, should be included into the same educational and social life as their non-disabled peers to prevent alienation. However, there are various interpretations of what “inclusion” means, and it is not as simple as placing students with special needs in regular classrooms, as this would then make it a challenge for school staff to address diverse learning needs within the limited time provided for classroom lessons.

¹² Tony Bush et al., *Educational Policy in Malaysia: Implementation Challenges and Policy Proposals*, policy brief (Singapore: The Head Foundation, 2019), <https://www.nottingham.edu.my/Education/documents/education-leadership-conference/The-HEAD-Foundation-Policy-Brief-No.-7-Educational-Policy-in-Malaysia-Implementation-Challenges-and-Policy-Proposals-Feb.pdf>.

¹³ Tony Bush et al., “School Leadership Theories and the Malaysia Education Blueprint: Findings from a Systematic Literature Review,” *International Journal of Educational Management* 32, no. 7 (2018): 1245–65, <https://nottingham-repository.worktribe.com/output/901776>.

¹⁴ Sautner, “Inclusive, Safe and Caring Schools: Connecting Factors.”

It is also important to distinguish between the school as a physical location, where aspects of infrastructure and facilities are considered, and the school as a system that perpetuates practices that aggravate or alleviate the challenges students face. The latter includes the types of support available in schools to help victims of bullying, especially when unequal power dynamics are involved and violence (e.g., threats, intimidation and physical force) is used. This distinction between: a) the physical aspects of safety in learning environments; and b) the systemic issues and practices that violate children's rights; helps to better identify the root causes that make school environments unsafe for all children.¹⁵

It is only possible for all children to have access to education and meaningful participation if inclusivity is promoted in classrooms, so that all children feel safe to learn despite differences in social and cultural backgrounds, especially for those who have gone through crisis and trauma.¹⁶ It is crucial for teachers to recognise and address signs, behaviours and attitudes that reflect bias, as this helps create a safe and inclusive learning environment. If left unchecked, certain biases may be normalised and lead to a "negative or exclusionary mindset", as quoted from Towl and Hemphill's book.¹⁷ For example, children with trauma may have different styles of learning or be less vocal in class. Teachers must not possess any negative assumptions about these behaviours, and be open to challenge their individual everyday practices to adapt to such students. Otherwise, this could create "a power hierarchy that privileges some groups and disadvantages others", where students who conform to the "normal" learning style are favoured over those who do not.

One way to avoid this is by actively engaging teachers in professional learning and development, equipping them with the necessary additional knowledge, skills and teaching strategies to accommodate all students. To assess this approach, the *Index for Inclusion* by Booth and Ainscow is used.¹⁸ Booth and Ainscow suggest a set of materials to help monitor the effectiveness of the school ecosystem, from its activities in playgrounds, staff rooms and classrooms, to the learning environment itself. With the involvement of all parties including staff, teachers, students, and parents or carers, a safer and more inclusive environment for all children can be actively created.

To conclude, the literature review highlights some examples of practices that contribute to an unsafe learning environment as follows:

- Abusive culture and traditions;
- Lack of inclusivity for students with different needs (from physical disabilities to learning and well-being needs, including privacy); and
- Poor top-down communication model between decision makers (i.e., the Minister and other officials, school principals, etc.) and practitioners (i.e., teachers).

I N C L U S I O N

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Towl and Hemphill, *Safe, Supportive, and Inclusive Learning Environments for Young People in Crisis and Trauma: Plaiting the Rope*.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Tony Booth and Mel Ainscow, *Index for Inclusion: Developing Learning and Participation in Schools*, 3rd ed. (United Kingdom: Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education, CSIE), <https://prsinstitute.org/downloads/related/education/IndexforInclusion.pdf>.

5.3 Analysis of Issues (as Identified by Teachers' and Students' Survey Responses)

Of the 391 students who shared their responses, 382 knew of initiatives in their schools to ensure safety and inclusivity, while four said that there had been no initiatives, and the remaining five were unsure.

Of the 391 students surveyed, it is evident from their responses that, as students, they can feel unsafe even when there are times that they feel the school is safe. Students indicated various reasons for feeling unsafe, accounting for as high as 90.7% of the opinions expressed vis-à-vis 9.3% for the expressed feeling of safety in school (see figure 3). Reasons given for feeling physically unsafe include issues of sexual harassment and assault, bullying, and a lack of security presence. These account for 26.6% of expressed reasons. Aside from physical safety, students felt discriminated against in one way or another, accounting for 39.9% of expressed reasons on why they felt unsafe at school. Relational issues like peer pressure and poor teacher-student relationship accounted for 16.5%. Only 15.9% of expressed reasons for feeling unsafe were academic in nature. From the reasons provided by students for why they felt unsafe in school, all reasons would negatively affect students' well-being emotionally and psychologically. These expressed reasons of feeling unsafe in school vis-à-vis feeling safe show that feeling unsafe weighs significantly on students who are negatively impacted. Schools, the MOE and other relevant stakeholders should therefore give the necessary attention and priority required to act and ensure redress, even if incidents are singular in nature, and irrespective of the incidents' perceived severity (e.g., rape, killing, suicide as a result of bullying, etc.).



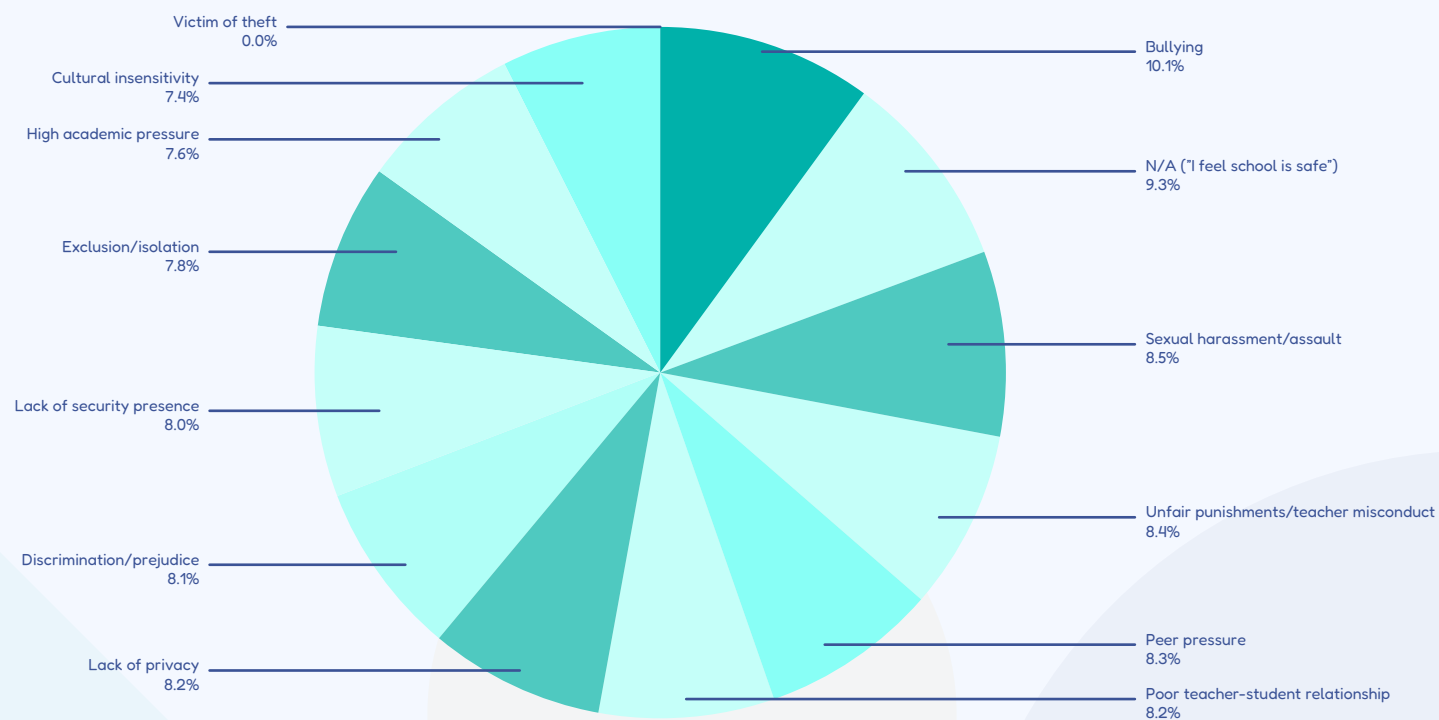


Figure 3: Reasons expressed by students on why they feel unsafe in school (based on data recorded in table 1, annex 2).

Six out of 391 students experienced discomfort and felt unsafe directly from school rules and teacher actions. Of the six, three stated that their discomfort was caused by teachers' behaviours and speech patterns, dress policing of students, and sexuality-based discrimination.

Based on our survey with students, there are in fact many contributing factors to the creation of unsafe and non-inclusive learning environments. Of those cited by students, **bullying** came up as the most commonly-reported issue in public schools (cited by 290 out of 391 students). This finding aligns with data previously shared by the former Deputy Education Minister, which indicates a consistent yearly increase in reported bullying cases.¹⁹ Additionally, with the widespread use of social media platforms, bullying has also extended into digital spaces where students face risks such as being cancelled, doxxed or targeted in more severe ways. In some cases, female students have become victims of deepfake technology, where artificial intelligence (AI) tools and websites were used to manipulate their images to create pornographic content. One such incident was reported in a school in Johor, where a student was accused of using AI tools to create sexually-explicit images of his classmates.²⁰ This statement was verified by five students who took part in our survey, in which they mentioned that cyberbullying was a common occurrence and that their schools often involved parents to resolve the issue. However, it is uncertain if redress was effective for the surviving victim(s).

¹⁹ Mahpar, "4,994 School Bullying Cases in 2023, Says Deputy Minister."

²⁰ "Johor Student Accused of Creating Explicit AI-Generated Deepfakes of Classmates; Cops Investigating," *The Malay Mail*, April 9, 2025, <https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2025/04/09/johor-student-accused-of-creating-explicit-ai-generated-deepfakes-of-classmates-cops-investigating/172412>.

Sexual harassment and assault ranked as the second most common issue identified in public schools, with 246 out of 391 students listing it as an indicator of an unsafe school environment. One student shared their personal experience of being sexually assaulted twice by a senior. Despite reporting the incidents to the disciplinary teacher, no further action was taken, leaving the student vulnerable and unprotected because the school failed to take steps to ensure their safety. This highlights a serious lack of effective reporting mechanisms, hindering students from seeking justice and protection within the school system. This should be deemed unacceptable. Current Education Minister Fadhlina Sidek warned that any teacher or school staff member found to be sexually harassing students would be sacked.²¹ Although her statement does not directly address cases where students are the perpetrators, the same strict stance should be applied, considering the extent to which such actions can cause long-term trauma to the victims. Furthermore, reporting mechanisms for such cases should have long been established, especially after student Ain Husniza exposed a teacher's sick rape joke in a social media post that went viral in 2021, shining a light on rape culture in Malaysian public schools and gaining the MOE's attention with her campaign to make school a safer place.²²

Peer pressure ranked an equal second, where students mentioned instances of isolation occurring when they acted independently, such as by having different styles (e.g., in mannerisms, speech, gait, etc.).

The third highest common issue cited is **unfair punishment / teacher misconduct**, with 243 out of 391 students identifying it as what makes a school environment unsafe. This high incidence (representing 62% of all responses) is deeply concerning on multiple fronts. Overall, it illustrates the fact that educators themselves are also intimately responsible for creating unsafe schools. Educators—despite being authority figures that should be making schools safer—are nevertheless liable to perpetuate unsafe practices over multiple generations, to embolden student offenders, to ignore student whistleblower reports, and even to halt or prevent efforts towards safer schools. The high incidence of teacher misconduct is supported in other surveys, including the 2021 survey by the All Women's Action Society and Save the Schools MY, which showed that 41% of the perpetrators in sexual harassment reports were, in fact, teachers and school administrators.²³ Notably, in the public interest litigation of Sabahan teenagers against misconduct by MOE teachers, the High Court Judgment repeatedly cited a child psychologist report showing that such educators create intractable “structural violence”: *“It was in the nature of emotional and/or psychological injury and trauma.... from the aspect of psychology, it is called structural violence. Structural violence are social forces that harm certain groups of people, producing and perpetuating inequality in health and wellbeing.”*²⁴ The reality that many educators were identified as perpetrators will lead to impossible and/or unreliable implementation of reforms. This category may be more underreported than others because students who are trapped in a culture of fear created by their teachers may feel a heightened sense of fear in reporting the perpetrators. Worse yet, some students may have accepted this unethical educator behaviour as “normal”.

Another issue in schools is **poor teacher-student relationships**, identified by 237 students. The same student who reported being sexually assaulted twice by a senior also highlighted this problem, which implies that possible bias exists if teachers do not have mutually respectful relationships with all of their students equally. Other students mentioned instances where teachers embarrassed them or discussed students' personal matters publicly, despite those issues being shared in confidence, which also highlights the issue of the lack of privacy in public schools.

Students also identified several other issues that contributed to unsafe learning environments. These included **discrimination and prejudice, lack of security presence, high academic pressure, exclusion or isolation, and cultural insensitivity**. These issues were claimed to be based on students' race, appearance, socioeconomic background, and religion or beliefs.

²¹Ilyia Marsya Iskandar, “You Touch, You Go!: Fadhlina Warns Against Sexual Harassment in Schools,” *NST Online*, March 16, 2024, <https://nst.com.my/news/nation/2024/03/1026494/you-touch-you-go-fadhlina-warns-against-sexual-harassment-schools>.

²²“The 17-Year-Old Exposing Rape Culture in Malaysian Schools,” *Al Jazeera*, May 19, 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/5/19/the-17-year-old-exposing-rape-culture-in-malaysian-schools>.

²³All Women's Action Society and Save the Schools MY, *770 Testimonies of Sexual Harassment, Period Spot Checks, Bullying and Other Abuse in Schools* (Selangor: AWAM, n.d.), <https://awam.org.my/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/STS-Report-FULL-2021.pdf> (accessed January 30, 2026); Dhesegaan Bala Krishnan, “Period Spot Checks Underreported,” *NST Online*, December 9, 2021, <https://revamp.nst.com.my/news/nation/2021/12/752662/period-spot-checks-underreported>.

²⁴Rusiah Sabdarin & ORS v. Mohd Jainal Jamran & ORS, no. BKI-22NCvC-88-11-2020, CLJ JT (18), High Court Sabah & Sarawak, July 18, 2023, https://www.cjljlaw.com/ejt/jt_headnote.asp?web=1&jt=2023_18&id=120; “The 2020 High Court Judgment,” *Tiada.Guru*, December 30, 2024, <https://tiada.guru/updates/the-2020-high-court-judgment>.

The contradiction between the existence of initiatives in schools to counter bullying, sexual harassment and sexual assault, and the fact that these issues rank as the most significant for student respondents, suggests that the existence of initiatives cannot be deemed equivalent to their effectiveness. Effectiveness must be measured by student-reported safety outcomes; it is not enough for public schools to implement said initiatives merely to satisfy MOE requirements without genuine commitment to ensuring safety outcomes. These initiatives also require ongoing feedback from students in their design and improvement.

As for the survey conducted with six public school teachers, the major issue highlighted in their respective schools is the **lack of awareness among teachers** in how to address the pressing issues students face (see figure 4). This lack of awareness manifests in various ways, including incidents in which teachers were deliberately indifferent towards students who exhibited bullying behaviours, and ultimately allows a culture of bullying to go unaddressed. While it is encouraging that the MOE is taking these concerns seriously, it is equally important to ensure that teachers and school staff receive the proper training required to become more attuned to the school environment, as well as more empathetic towards students of different races, religions, genders, social classes, disability statuses, family statuses and other diverse backgrounds. As one teacher pointed out, some staff may unknowingly act in biased or discriminatory ways, which can bring further harm to vulnerable students.

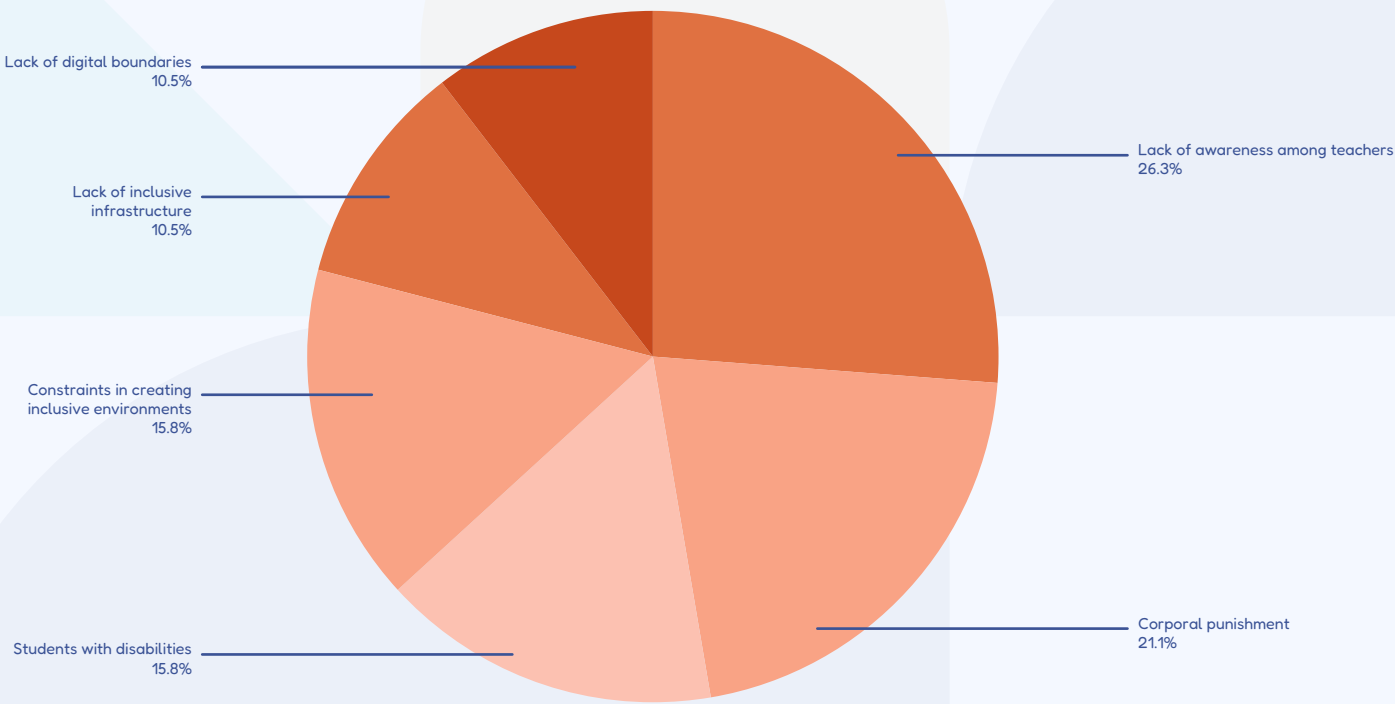


Figure 4: Issues identified by teachers in public schools.

Corporal punishment was identified as an ongoing issue by four teachers across their respective schools, where it remains a common disciplinary practice for addressing student misconduct such as smoking, truancy and possession of pornography. One teacher noted that corporal punishment is sometimes employed as a last resort for dealing with student absenteeism. Examples of corporal punishment, as cited by two teachers from different schools, include caning and slapping.

One of the issues faced by teachers themselves involves the **constraints on creating inclusive learning environments** in schools. Teachers stated that they often have to manage a large number of students in a classroom, causing a less conducive learning environment that further prevents teachers from starting initiatives to better support students of different needs, and who require different learning styles. Additionally, one teacher highlighted that schools are understaffed and in need of greater support, including more counsellors to help manage student issues. They also pointed to a shortage of trained teachers in inclusive education. This also goes hand in hand with another existing issue in school compounds where there is a **lack of support for students with disabilities**, or for those who have special needs. One teacher noted that teachers in her school exclude students who show symptoms of ADHD due to their own lack of awareness in recognising symptoms and providing support. The lack of basic facilities for students with disabilities is also an issue. Teachers highlighted, as examples, school buildings with no ramps, which limits wheelchair students' ease of access to school areas; and a lack of accessible toilets for the use of disabled or special-needs students, who may require more space and bar handles for ease of mobility.

Lastly, two teachers also pointed out the **lack of digital boundaries** shown by some teachers in their respective schools, where said teachers follow their students on social media platforms and post photos of students' faces without parental consent. These acts are against the MOE guidelines requiring teachers to obtain written consent from parents or guardians before recording and sharing on social media any images, videos or audio of students.²⁵



²⁵ Amirul Aiman Hamsuddin, "Fadhlin: Teachers Must Get Parental Consent Before Sharing Student Content [WATCH]," *NST Online*, September 24, 2024, <https://www.nst.com.my/news/nation/2024/09/1110097/fadhlin-teachers-must-get-parental-consent-sharing-student-content>.

5.4 Analysis of Good Practices (as Identified by Teachers' and Students' Survey Responses)

1. Public School Teachers

Provision of Accountable and External Expertise: Based on the survey conducted with six teachers, several best practices have been identified in Malaysian public schools. One notable example is the implementation of **anti-bullying campaigns** that go beyond slogans or occasional reminders during assemblies. In a school in Sabah, for instance, concrete action was taken through the placement of police officers, known as *Pegawai Perhubungan Sekolah*, who directly assist in handling cases involving student violence. This initiative is especially valuable, as some bullying cases extend beyond what teachers can manage—not necessarily due to a lack of capability, but often because they are understaffed or overburdened. This measure points to the recognition that teachers should not have to play multiple roles requiring different skillsets or expertise that may lie beyond their scope of work and responsibilities. Additional support becomes essential when the expertise lies in other professions, such as for addressing mental health issues or violent behaviour (e.g., gangsterism among students).

Collaborative Approach to Addressing Issues: Another teacher highlighted that anti-bullying policies are actively enforced, with the disciplinary unit and teachers working together to address cases of bullying and sexual harassment. This reflects effective collaboration between teaching staff and a dedicated unit to tackle serious issues in schools.

Clear and Effective Communication Protocols that Uphold Integrity and Students' Privacy and Safety: In a different school in Selangor, a teacher shared that efforts are made to ensure that students feel comfortable communicating when they feel unsafe. While this is a commendable initiative, the teacher also noted the absence of clear guidelines on how to facilitate such communication, and that these efforts rely largely on individual teacher initiative or good teacher-student relationships.

The **collaborative effort to manage students** is emphasised by the fact that both teachers and students said that parents are frequently involved in student concerns, including bullying incidents. For instance, parents are called to school to discuss issues like racism and discrimination. However, it was not made clear what the topic of discussion or the next steps would be. A teacher at a school in Perak mentioned that there is collaboration between their school's *Persatuan Ibubapa dan Guru* (a.k.a. PIBG, a parent-teacher association consisting of teachers, the counsellor and parents) and students through a "Safe School Team" to address and solve disciplinary matters. This highlights the school's emphasis on teamwork, particularly in the planning of programmes for students. Parents and teachers unite to develop activities that benefit the students, and students are encouraged to submit proposals to the school administration for relevant programmes.

Ensure Fully-Informed Consent: Additionally, in regards to **students' digital safety**, three teachers mentioned that their schools adhere to obtaining parental consent regarding all matters related to students' exposure, including photography rights in accordance with MOE guidelines for parental consent. A teacher from Perak in an all-Orang Asli school stated that the headmaster would advise other teachers to be cautious with their social media activity, specifically regarding the posting of photos or videos of students. This aligns with MOE guidelines, which mention that parental consent is required before sharing or utilising students' images, and is deemed a good practice as it emphasises the importance of protecting children online and digitally. In this way, students are not just protected in safe physical environments (e.g., school compounds), but also from cyberbullying and other possible risks such as inappropriate content, data breaches and online predators.

Diversify Pedagogical Approaches, and Educational Materials and Tools, Based on Students' Learning Needs:

A teacher from the same Orang Asli school in Perak also mentioned that she has **initiated her own teaching approaches** for students who require different teaching styles, something that she wishes would be standardised across her school because this helps students to catch up with their peers. More attention is likely to be required by students with special needs beyond teaching styles, including (but not limited to) diversified materials or worksheets, and teaching assistants to further aid special needs students. While one teacher highlighted that the special needs students at their school are not segregated from the rest of the school, giving both groups of students the opportunity to interact with one another without facing discrimination, another teacher mentioned that their own school separates classes for students with special needs as a best practice. Given that needs vary depending on a student's position on the spectrum, this sparks a fascinating discussion on the needs of students with disabilities or special needs. It may also suggest that schools may adopt a more integrated classroom approach when dedicated resources cannot be allocated for separate classes for students with special needs.

Diversity and Inclusivity: One teacher highlighted the celebration of various cultural festivals and events as a good practice within their school, noting that it provides students with opportunities to learn about different cultures and beliefs, hence promoting mutual understanding. Parents are also invited to participate in these celebrations, reflecting a collective effort by the school to promote diversity and inclusivity. Another teacher noted that their school encourages students to embrace differences and to respect one another. However, specific details on how these values are implemented in practice were not provided.

Abandoning Corporal Punishment as a Disciplinary Measure: Three teachers mentioned that their respective **schools do not practice corporal punishment**. This shows that there is already a practice in hand by a number of schools to eschew reliance on corporal punishment as a means to handle disciplinary cases. The teachers also mentioned that corporal punishment appeared ineffective in addressing problematic behaviour among students.

Lastly, one teacher emphasised the importance of **respecting students' privacy**, and that although students' mobile phones may be confiscated, staff members and other teachers should refrain from going through the phones as doing so would be considered inappropriate and a violation of the students' right to privacy.

To summarise, the identified best practices in the six respective schools are as follows:

- Implementation of anti-bullying campaigns in schools that go beyond slogans, focusing instead on firm actions to create safe learning environments for all students.
- Collaborative and collective effort between teachers, parents and students to manage students' disciplinary matters.
- Following MOE guidelines in managing students' digital safety, including students' unconsented digital footprint.
- Diversifying pedagogical approaches, and educational materials and tools, based on students' learning needs.
- Promoting diversity and inclusivity through the celebration of different cultures and festivals, to help participants embrace differences.
- Abandoning corporal punishment as a disciplinary measure.
- Respecting and ensuring students' privacy.

2. Public School Students

Of the 391 students surveyed, only 26% stated that anti-bullying programmes had been implemented in their schools (see figure 5). The implementation of peer mentoring and school campaigns also had similarly low percentages. Moreover, the implementation of different learning methods was only cited by 11.7% of the students, and 0.3% stated that there were almost no initiatives at all.

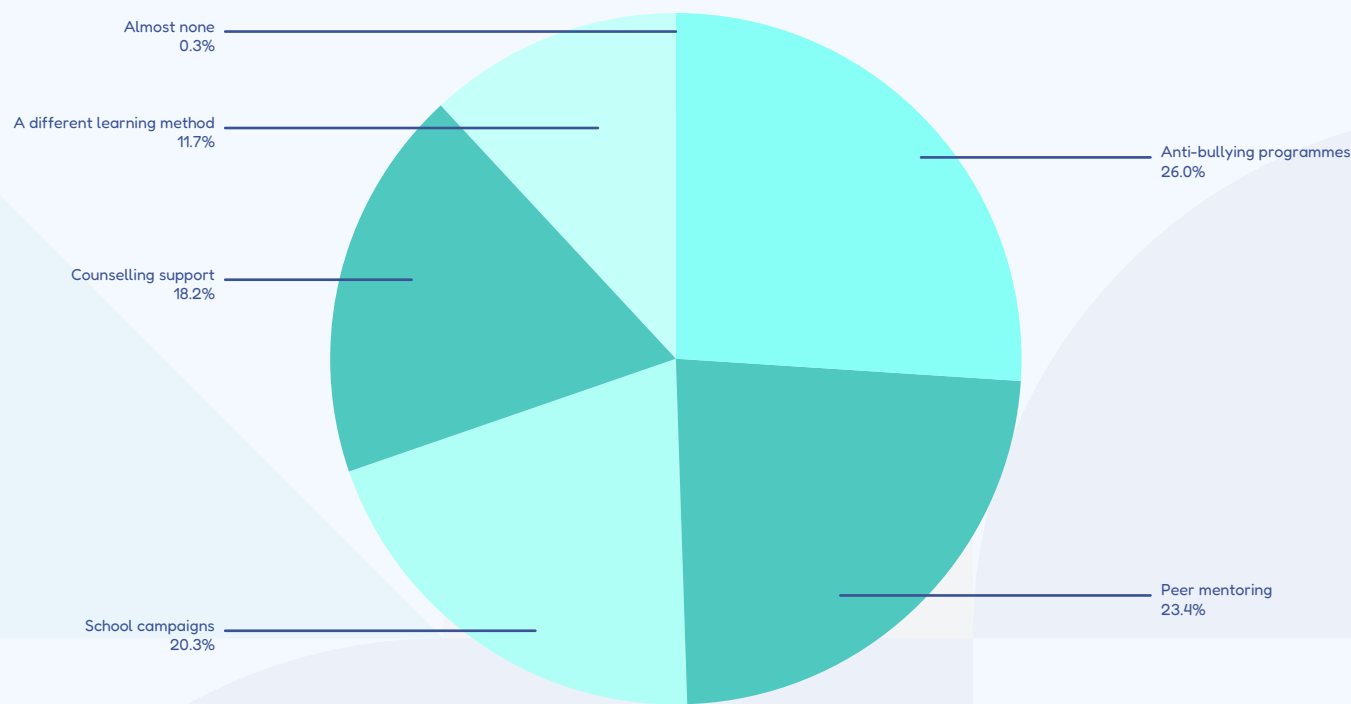


Figure 5: Distribution of school initiatives cited by students for safety and inclusion (based on data recorded in table 2, annex 2).

This indicates inconsistent implementation of good initiatives across schools to ensure safe and inclusive learning environments. From the interviews with 43 students, it became clear that although best practices exist, they are implemented sporadically across public schools—that is, if they are well-implemented at all.

Anti-Bullying Campaigns and Initiatives: From the survey conducted, 25 out of the 43 students interviewed reported that their schools implement anti-bullying campaigns and initiatives aimed at preventing bullying and cyberbullying as well as promoting tolerance, diversity and inclusivity. These campaigns and initiatives differ from one school to another. For example, one student noted that their school conducted sensitivity training following an incident where a student was mocked for their physical appearance. Another student shared that their school organised programmes addressing issues such as colourism and racism—challenges that, unfortunately, remain prevalent in Malaysia. Additionally, one student mentioned that their school held interfaith talks as part of efforts to promote inclusivity. These are a few examples that stood out, while other students noted that their schools conducted anti-bullying campaigns without further elaboration.

Students also highlighted individual efforts by teachers to promote a safe learning environment, implementing their own initiatives to address issues on a one-to-one basis. For example, one student shared that their coach initiated a conversation with the sports team after observing a student being excluded. Another student mentioned that their teachers engaged them in discussions about inclusivity, though no further details were provided. In cases involving cyberbullying, two students stated that the school involved parents in addressing the situation. While they did not elaborate on what happened next, this is considered a good and practical response because it reflects the school's recognition of cyberbullying as a serious issue that warrants parental awareness and cooperation. Additionally, the 43 interviewed students mentioned that, as a further step to ensure that students feel supported in their learning environments, their schools also provide counselling for students who are affected by any form of bullying, or who just need a support system. Overall, it can be concluded that most public schools are becoming more aware of harmful bullying cultures and their different forms, and are actively taking actions to address these issues.

Respecting students and their personal boundaries appears to be a practice in some public schools. Twelve of the students who were interviewed mentioned that school staff respect their boundaries, and that personal matters are discussed privately. One student noted that students in their school trust the staff with personal issues, indicating that respect and trust are well-established values within the school.

Peer mentoring, which involves a person (the mentor) supporting someone who has less experience in any given area, or who requires guidance and support (the mentee), was also identified as a good practice within the schools of eight of the student research respondents. Although the specific implementation of these practices was not explained, they appear to be effective, with one student expressing a need for more peer mentoring to promote school safety and a more welcoming environment for students.

Another good practice identified by three students in their respective schools is the option to have a **different learning method**, an approach that promotes inclusivity for students with different learning abilities. Lastly, a student also mentioned that it is helpful to have a **supportive learning environment** where the school cares for the students' and their families' well-being. The student gave an example where, in the event that a family member of a student or school member passes away, or is in need of emergency surgery, there would be fundraising efforts in their school to help ease the burden.

By comparing student-validated effective practices against ineffective ones, the research reveals common success factors:

- **Specificity over Generality:** Effective practices to respond to actual incidents (e.g., sensitivity training after a student is mocked) rather than deploying generic messaging that "bullying is bad".
- **Action, Not Just Awareness:** Student-validated practices that create tangible change (e.g., perpetrator consequences, victim support, policy changes, etc.).
- **Active and Genuine Student Participation:** Practices that incorporate students' input in a genuine manner.
- **Teacher Buy-In:** Practices failed when teachers were not genuinely committed to bringing about "safer and more inclusive learning environments", regardless of the MOE's official policy.
- **Tackle the Root of the Problem, Not the Symptoms:** Programmes tackling underlying prejudice (e.g., colourism awareness and racism workshops) prevented future incidents while purely punitive responses did not.

To conclude, it should be noted that some of the best practices identified in some public schools were also observed to be lacking in others, indicating that the core problem lies in the lack of standardisation of these best practices across all public schools. This standardisation should be monitored by the MOE to ensure effective implementation for the creation of safe and inclusive learning environments for all students, and not merely be a rollout of initiatives.

6.0 Existing Policies by the Ministry of Education and Existing Gaps

In 2013, the MOE introduced the “Concept of Unity” as a key instrument in fostering inclusivity in schools, with the aim to achieve an accepting environment: *“The Ministry is promoting greater unity among students by encouraging more interaction between students from a range of socioeconomic, religious, and ethnic backgrounds, thus giving them the opportunity to learn to understand, accept and embrace differences. The Ministry is also focused on developing a better understanding of the current levels of unity, which will then enable the Ministry to identify key support areas to deploy appropriate interventions.”*²⁶

In other words, unity is a key instrument in achieving a truly **inclusive** learning environment. This instrument consists of three areas, namely “Accepting Diversity”, “Respecting Diversity” and “Managing Diversity”. The instrument also includes ten values, which are tolerance, openness, cooperation, trust, politeness, appreciation, care (for others), fairness, trustworthiness and rationality. For the MOE, assessing levels or the extent of unity among students and teachers is crucial in identifying how they accept, respect and manage differences among each other. Unity can be categorised as an indicator of inclusivity in schools, particularly considering Malaysia’s multicultural constructs. The following chart in figure 6 explains the Concept of Unity as identified by the MOE in accepting, respecting and managing diversity:



²⁶Ministry of Education Malaysia, *Malaysia Education Blueprint: Annual Report 2013*, government report, Putrajaya: Federal Government Administrative Centre, 2014, <https://www.moe.gov.my/storage/files/shares/Dasar/PPPM/MEB%20Annual%20Report%202013.pdf> (accessed January 21, 2026).



Figure 6: How accepting, respecting and managing diversity play a role in the concept of unity.
 (Source: Education Planning and Research Division, 2013.
 Reproduced from *Malaysia Education Blueprint: Annual Report 2013*.)

To measure the level of unity among teachers and students, the Unity Index Measurement Survey was introduced in 2014.²⁷ The baseline for this survey was derived from a pilot study of the Concept of Unity instrument, which studied 136 primary schools as well as 175 secondary schools, including 4,467 teachers and 4,639 students. From this baseline study, it was found that unity was at a **medium** level across all ten values (classified according to figure 7 below). From the findings for students, the highest level of unity was on Respecting Diversity, while the lowest level was on Accepting Diversity. The findings for teachers, on the other hand, indicated that the highest level of unity is in the area of Managing Diversity, with the lowest level being in the area of Accepting Diversity. For both teachers and students, Accepting Diversity appears to be a challenge, and yet, based on the chart by the MOE (see figure 6), it is the essential first step to respecting and managing diversity. To further interrogate the inconsistency in these levels of unity among students and teachers, it is necessary to get the details of the survey based on the ten values (which were not made available with the findings released) as the inconsistency suggests that the highest level of unity among teachers in the area of Managing Diversity may not necessarily be about acceptance, but about conformity or assimilation. Similarly for students, politeness and appreciation under Respecting Diversity need not necessarily translate to care for and trust in others who are different.

²⁷ Ministry of Education Malaysia, *Malaysia Education Blueprint: Annual Report 2014*, government report, Putrajaya: Federal Government Administrative Centre, 2015, <https://www.moe.gov.my/storage/files/shares/Dasar/PPPM/MEB%20Annual%20Report%202014.pdf> (accessed January 4, 2026).

Index	Level of Unity
0.00 - 2.50	Low
2.51 - 5.00	Low - Medium
5.01 - 7.50	Medium - High
7.51 - 10.00	High

Figure 7: Unity Index classification according to ten values
(reproduced from *Malaysia Education Blueprint: Annual Report 2014.*)

In 2023, the Ministry of Education released a decade-long comparison of the results from the Unity Index Measurement Survey, conducted between 2014 and 2023.²⁸ The results indicated that there was a drop in the Unity Index score from 2014 (6.8) to 2018 (5.4), but this has then been on an increasing trend from 6.2 in 2020 to 7.1 in 2022, reaching a new high of 7.5 in 2023 (see figure 8). This shows an improvement in unity levels among teachers and students. However, again, these results were not further broken down according to the ten values mentioned earlier. With regards to the comparative Unity Index between primary and secondary school teachers and students, it is seen that secondary school teachers recorded the highest level of unity (8.28), followed by primary school teachers (8.24). Students at both levels of schooling performed significantly lower with secondary school students scoring a 6.96 out of 10 in unity, and the lowest being primary school students with a unity score of 6.56 (see figure 9). The incongruence in data between figures 8 and 9 raises the question of whether or not the unity measurements for teachers are only measured among teachers, and similarly for students—thus, neglecting the measurement of teachers’ acceptance, respect and/or management of students’ diversity and vice versa. There is also the possibility that the teachers and students surveyed were largely from one ethnicity. If such is the case, it raises another question: had these figures been adjusted to properly reflect the fact? Without adjustment, the unity measurement would skew the Unity Index to show improvement that would not be reflected when the data is disaggregated.

²⁸Ministry of Education Malaysia, *Malaysia Education Blueprint: Annual Report 2023*, government report, Putrajaya: Federal Government Administrative Centre, 2024, <https://www.moe.gov.my/storage/files/shares/Dasar/PPPM/PPPM%20Laporan%20Tahunan%202023%20%28BI%29.pdf> (accessed January 21, 2026).

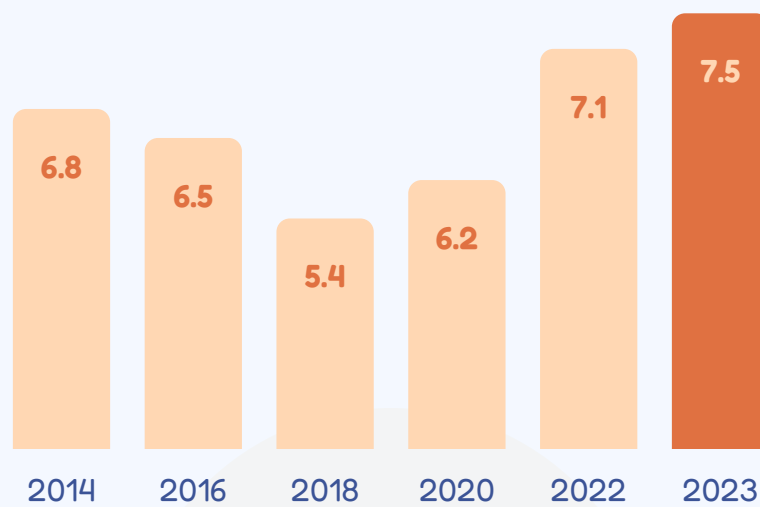


Figure 8: Unity Index trend in MOE schools, 2014-2023.
(Source: Education Policy Planning and Research Division.
Reproduced from *Malaysia Education Blueprint: Annual Report 2023*.)

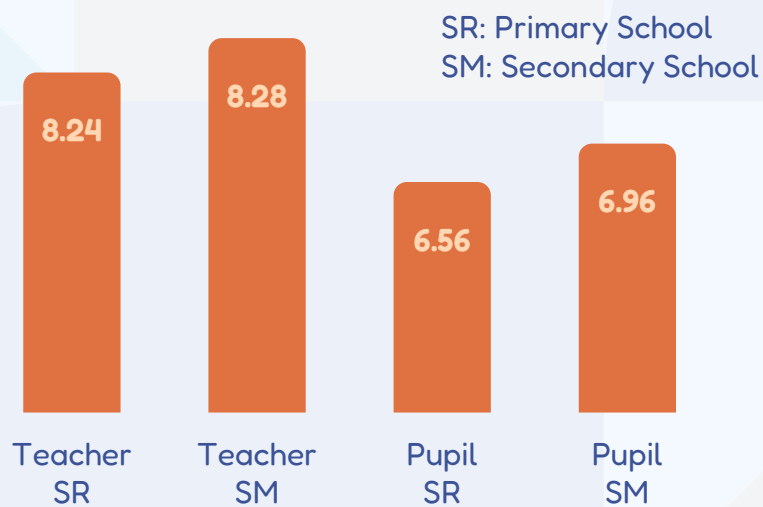


Figure 9: Unity Index levels of teachers and pupils according to school levels.
(Source: Education Policy Planning and Research Division.
Reproduced from *Malaysia Education Blueprint: Annual Report 2023*.)

The above findings correspond to what the 391 students from the survey conducted by KRYSS Network (see section 5.0) say contribute to their feeling left out (i.e., isolated and/or alienated) or different (see figure 10). As high as 50.4% of the students surveyed felt socially excluded and suffered from friendship issues, and 13.4% cited language or cultural barriers while another 6.4% cited economic or material differences. This suggests that, among students, the manifestation of feelings of being unsafe is largely rooted in the lack of acceptance of diversity.

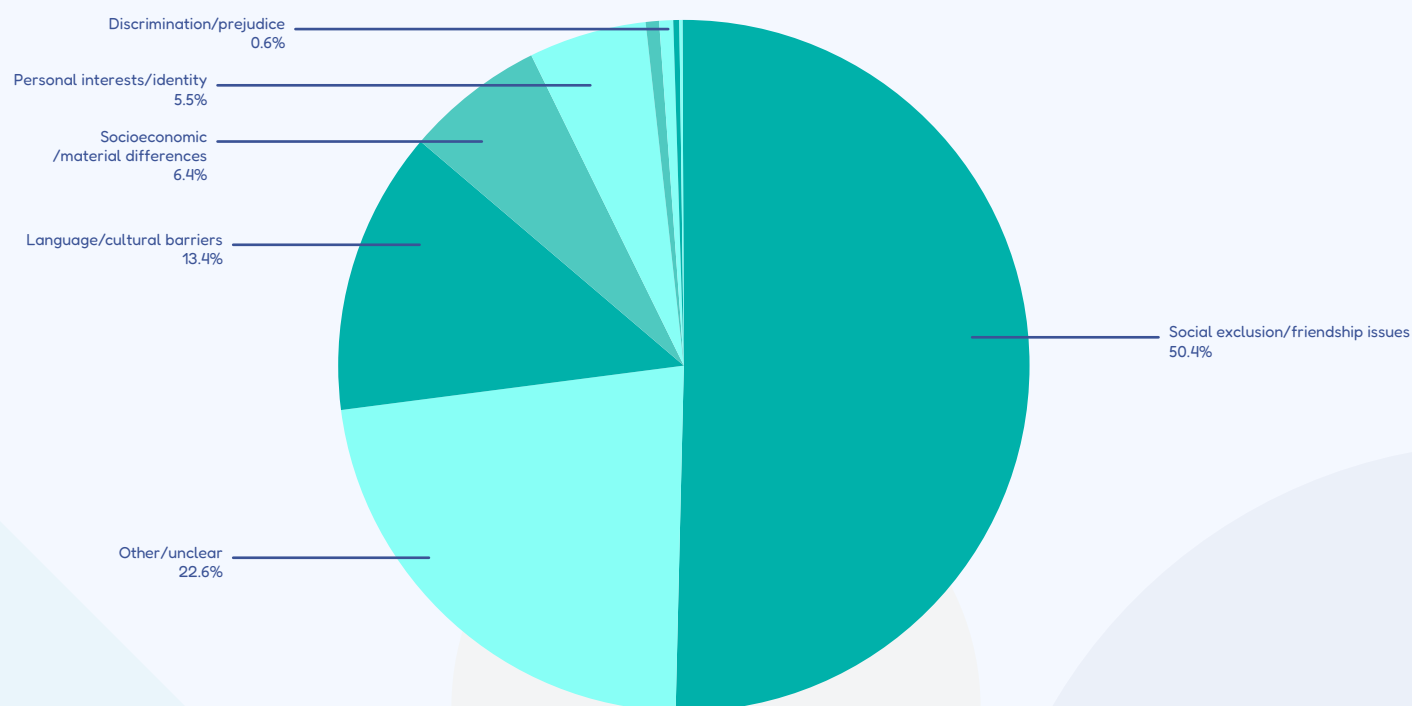


Figure 10: Reasons that students gave for feeling left out or different (based on data recorded in table 3, annex 2).

These results may indicate the need for more intensive programmes, such as the *Rancangan Integrasi Murid untuk Perpaduan* (RIMUP), to be conducted more frequently in order to prevent the further deterioration of unity levels among students, while also nurturing unity in such a way that even students from primary school levels are able to fully appreciate and accept diversity and, consequently, inclusivity as a whole. However, there have also been concerns regarding the RIMUP programme's implementation, such as implementation periods that are too short and a lack of commitment in implementation, which therefore calls for such programmes to be run in a more targeted, effective way that is tailored to better develop a sense of unity and inclusivity within the education ecosystem.²⁹

I N C L U S I O N

²⁹ Faida Rahim, "RIMUP Gagal Tepati Tujuan Asal—Dr Anuar," *Astro Awani*, June 28, 2023, <https://www.astroawani.com/berita-malaysia/rimup-gagal-tepati-tujuan-asal-dr-anuar-425793>.

7.0 International Best Practices and Policies to Promote Safe and Inclusive Learning Environments

Safe and inclusive learning environments are a concern in schools all around the world. Below are some examples of school best practices and government policies from various countries. It is noted that there is a lack of details and follow-up on these practices, and that the information is very generic. This shows that, on the topic of best practices in schools, there is an obvious lack of research and focus on the angles that have been examined in earlier sections. Most research still envisions a safe school from a physical viewpoint (e.g., security guards, gates, accessibility, etc.) without much emphasis on other aspects such as students' emotional well-being.

Country	Models/Practices	Focus Area
United Kingdom	The local authority of the London Borough of Newham states that they are committed to inclusive education, a principle that is communicated clearly to all school staff, parents, carers and children enrolled at the Cleves Primary School.³⁰ Despite challenges such as having 82% of its pupils coming from various ethnic minority communities and not speaking English as their first language, Cleves remains dedicated to providing education for all. All policies and procedures are designed to accommodate the school's diverse student body. This is reflected in the school's structure, curriculum and learning environment. The school's architecture is unconventional, including a unique building design with four open-plan wings—one each for nursery and reception groups, Year 1 and Year 2, Year 3 and Year 4, and Year 5 and Year 6. Each wing has access to the physical education (PE) hall for a whole day, where children can learn self-help skills throughout the day. Lunchtime is integrated into the curriculum, with children having lunch with adults who also conduct sessions on specific subjects, allowing the children to move to dedicated areas for each subject. The flexible staffing system is also different from the established UK system where one teacher is normally in charge of 30 children. At Cleves, Assistant Head Teachers lead multi-disciplinary teams of teachers, nursery nurses and teaching assistants to collaboratively plan and deliver a diversified curriculum that benefits all children.	Inclusive education for children from various ethnic minority communities, who do not speak the main language of instruction / majority language

³⁰ Ingrid Körner et al., *Towards Inclusive Education: Examples of Good Practices of Inclusive Education* (Belgium: Inclusion Europe, n.d.), https://www.inclusion-europe.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Best-Practice-Education_EN-FINALWEB.pdf (accessed January 4, 2026).

Country	Models/Practices	Focus Area
Austria	The “<i>Mehrstuufenklasse</i>” project at the Practice Centre of Pedagogical Training School in Vienna was developed as an experimental initiative within the public education system, putting all students aged 10 to 16 years old, including those with disabilities, into one classroom. Each classroom consists of only 18 to 22 students, and a group of eight to nine teachers are in charge of working with the students.³¹ In this approach, teachers act as facilitators in the classroom, allowing students to take more responsibility for their own education. Some of the key objectives of this module include providing individualised remedial teaching for diverse learners, promoting their self-image and belief in themselves, and promoting individual learning achievements. Students are given the freedom to learn at their own pace, with the syllabus mostly arranged in topic-based modules. Students get to design their own timetables; however, at the start of each class, teachers will usually take the lead before allowing students to proceed with their tasks at individual learning levels. This system, called a “flow chart”, allows flexibility in learning, even for disabled students. The objectives are to ensure students get to digest new knowledge at their own pace, promote self-organised learning by allowing students to choose materials and methods that suit them best, and encourage students to reflect on their personal learning achievements.	Inclusive education through peer learning and listening to young people
Japan	Bullying, also known as “<i>ijime</i>” in Japanese, has always been a major issue in Japan, with a record as high as 414,378 in the academic year in 2018.³² The government has an Act for the Promotion of Measures to Prevent Bullying. These measures include understanding the meaning of prevention of bullying, early detection of bullying, and responding to bullying. The national and local government, schools (including operators, teachers and other staff) and guardians are also listed as parties that should bear the shared responsibilities of preventing bullying and helping victims.³³ Under Chapter 3 of the law, a list of basic initiatives included in the the Act are as follows: Article 15: Prevention of Bullying in Schools Schools and school operators must promote moral education and experiential learning to foster empathy and social bonds among students. They should also support student-led initiatives against bullying and conduct awareness campaigns involving students, guardians, teachers and local communities.	Collaborative and multi-level effort between all relevant parties to address bullying cases in schools

³¹Ibid.

³² Julian Ryall, “Why Is Bullying So Vicious in Japanese Schools?,” *Deutsche Welle*, October 29, 2018, <https://www.dw.com/en/why-is-bullying-so-vicious-in-japanese-schools/a-46074534>.

³³ Ministry of Justice, Japan, *Act for the Promotion of Measures to Prevent Bullying*, Act No. 71 of 2013, Japanese Law Translation Database System, accessed January 4, 2026, https://www.japaneselawtranslation.go.jp/en/laws/view/3748/en#je_s1.

Country	Models/Practices	Focus Area
	Article 16: Early Bullying Detection Regular surveys and monitoring are required to identify bullying at an early stage. National and local governments must establish systems for receiving reports and offering consultations, ensuring that children, families and school staff can access support while safeguarding students' rights. Article 17: Collaboration with Relevant Organisations Governments must promote cooperation among ministries, schools, families, communities and private organisations in supporting victims and guiding those who bully, thus ensuring comprehensive, community-based responses. Article 18: Personnel Training and Support To improve the effectiveness of anti-bullying efforts, governments are tasked with training and deploying qualified teachers and professionals (e.g., experts in psychology and welfare). Schools must also provide systematic staff training on bullying prevention. Article 19: Cyberbullying Measures Recognising the unique challenges of cyberbullying, schools must educate students and guardians about its risks and the required responses. Governments should support monitoring systems and assist victims in deleting harmful content or identifying perpetrators through legal channels. Article 20: Research and Evaluation Governments must conduct studies to assess and improve bullying prevention and response strategies, including the support of victims and the handling of cyberbullying. Findings should be publicly disseminated. Article 21: Public Awareness Efforts must be made to inform the public about the psychological and physical impact of bullying, the importance of prevention, and available support systems. Article 22: School-Based Anti-Bullying Committees Schools must establish dedicated anti-bullying organisations comprising multiple teachers, staff, professionals (e.g., psychologists, welfare workers) and other relevant parties to coordinate and implement bullying prevention and response efforts. Article 23: Response Procedures for Bullying Cases • Reporting Obligations: Any adult (teachers, school staff, local officials, guardians, etc.) who receives a consultation from a child regarding bullying must report it to the relevant school or take appropriate steps. • School Action: Upon receiving a report or suspecting bullying, the school must promptly investigate and report its findings to the school operator. • Confirmed Bullying: If bullying is confirmed, the school must: ▪ Provide ongoing support to the victim and their guardians. ▪ Offer guidance or advice to the perpetrator and their guardians. ▪ Involve professionals in psychology and welfare to assist.	

Country	Models/Practices	Focus Area
	• Educational Safeguards: Schools should ensure a safe learning environment, which may include separating the victim and perpetrator (e.g., assigning the bullying child to a different space). • Parental Communication: Schools must keep both parties' guardians informed to prevent disputes. • Criminal Cases: If bullying constitutes a potential crime or poses serious danger, the school must notify and work with the police. Article 24: Role of School Operators Upon receiving reports of bullying, school operators must support the school, instruct it to take appropriate actions, or investigate the incident directly if necessary. Article 25: Disciplinary Action by Schools When deemed necessary, principals and teachers may impose disciplinary measures on students who bully, in accordance with the School Education Act. Article 26: School Suspension Municipal boards of education may suspend students involved in bullying, or take equivalent actions to ensure that the bullied student and others can study without stress. This is implemented under the provisions of the School Education Act. Article 27: Inter-School Collaboration Systems Local governments must build systems that facilitate cooperation between schools, enabling consistent support and guidance even when the victim and perpetrator are enrolled at different institutions.	
South Korea	South Korea is known for its bullying culture in schools. In some severe cases, suicide is involved, where victims are forced to take their own lives to end the abuse. One example is the case of 13-year-old Seung-min, who jumped out of his home's seventh-floor window after being bullied by his schoolmates, who burned him with lighters and tied electrical wire around his neck.³⁴ A new Comprehensive School Violence Eradication Plan has been adopted by the Korean government as a measure to protect students from all forms of school violence, and to promote a safe and nurturing learning environment. Under the new plan, strict disciplinary actions will be imposed, where records of students engaged in violence will be preserved in the Students' Life and Academic Record in High School for up to four years after graduation.³⁵ Victims of bullying will also be put in a different classroom to ensure their safety while legal proceedings are underway.	• Measures to ensure perpetrators are held accountable • Prioritising survivors' well-being

³⁴ Paula Hancocks, "South Korea Teenagers Bullied to Death," *CNN World*, July 26, 2012, <https://edition.cnn.com/2012/07/25/world/asia/south-korea-school-bully>.

³⁵ Ministry of Education South Korea, *School Violence Records to Be Preserved up to 4 Years, and Reflected in College Admissions*, press release, Office for Government Policy Coordination, 2023, <https://share.google/pHSpEpASMjppqTU3> (accessed January 4, 2026).

Country	Models/Practices	Focus Area
Italy	In June 2024, Italy enacted a law to prevent and fight against all forms of bullying and cyberbullying. The key measures under Law No. 71 include:³⁶ Expert Committee Formation: The Italian MOE must establish a technical committee comprising experts in psychology, pedagogy and digital communications to advise on bullying prevention strategies. Public Awareness Campaigns: The government is required to conduct regular national campaigns to raise awareness about bullying, cyberbullying and the use of parental control tools. Victim Support Hotline: A 24/7 toll-free public helpline (“Emergency Childhood 114”) is to be established, offering psychological and legal assistance to victims and their families. In serious cases, the service must coordinate with law enforcement. National Data Collection: The National Institute of Statistics will conduct biennial surveys to assess the prevalence of bullying and cyberbullying, and to identify groups who may be at risk. Regional Initiatives: Italian regions are encouraged to provide psychological support services within schools. This is to support students’ emotional development and prevent risky behaviours.	• Law to prevent bullying and cyberbullying

8.0 The Understanding of “Safe and Inclusive School” by Public School Teachers and Students

During interviews with the participants of KRYSS Network’s survey, we examined what teachers and students understood from the concept of a “safe and inclusive learning environment” in Malaysian public schools. The teachers conceptualised a safe and inclusive school as not merely a physical space that protects students from threats and harm, but also an environment that supports students’ emotional and mental well-being, hence enabling them to feel secure and comfortable in order to reach their full potential (see annex 1 for details). A teacher from Perak described such an environment as one where “students from all backgrounds and conditions are provided with the maximum potential for their learning”.

³⁶ Dante Figueroa, “Italy: Law to Prevent Bullying and Cyberbullying Enacted,” *Library of Congress*, July 15, 2024, <https://www.loc.gov/item/global-legal-monitor/2024-07-14/italy-law-to-prevent-bullying-and-cyberbullying-enacted>.

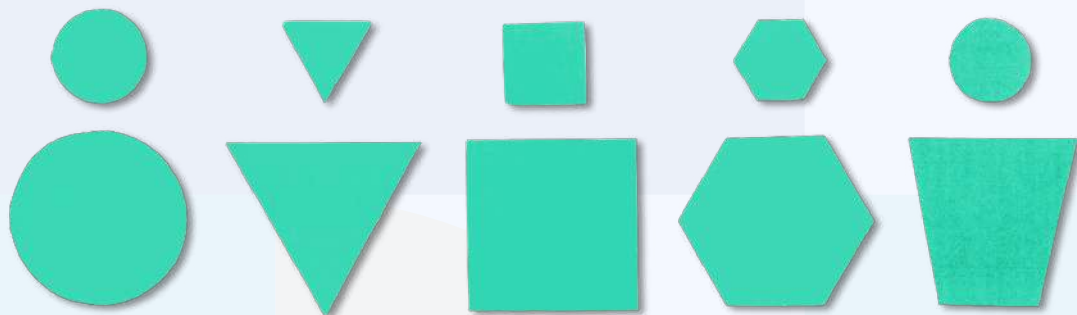
However, they noted that inclusivity, as currently defined by the MOE, tends to focus primarily on students with special needs. The importance of a holistic safe space that allows students to concentrate on their studies, develop social skills, and experience emotional growth was echoed by another teacher from Selangor. Another teacher from Perak, as well as a teacher from a public school in a rural area, mentioned that the MOE released the Inclusive Education Policy and the Malaysian Education Blueprint (a.k.a. PPPM, *Pelan Pembangunan Pendidikan Malaysia 2013-2025*), which emphasised on the placement of special education teachers, guidance and counselling units, inclusive education programmes, and professional training for teachers.³⁷ The teachers found these to be equally important factors in contributing to safe and inclusive learning environments.

Despite these understandings, two teachers in Sabah acknowledged that their vision of a safe and inclusive learning environment has yet to be fully realised or implemented in schools. Many of the efforts to create a sense of belonging among students were described as teacher-led initiatives, undertaken individually. This shows that the broader concept of safety and inclusion beyond the physical dimension is still not widely understood or embraced by many educators and school administrators.

The 43 interviewed students shared similar views on what a safe and inclusive learning environment is, generally describing it as a space where they feel mentally and emotionally supported, without excluding a more accessible and inclusive infrastructure for disabled students. Of these, 22 students expressed the need for greater support from their schools in various areas, such as acknowledging mental health through initiatives like celebrating Mental Health Day, promoting healthy peer interactions for better social inclusion, and supporting emotional learning and regulation. Some suggestions were given by three students on how to achieve this, such as by having more student workshops, talent shows, community engagement and other student-led social events. One existing example is the Interact Club, a club by Rotary International for 12- to 18-year-olds to develop leadership skills.³⁸ This reflects a high level of self-awareness, as many students are able to articulate the factors that contribute to their sense of safety and belonging at school. Additionally, four students specifically emphasised the need for more safe spaces in schools, such as safe and welcoming libraries, classrooms with safe entry and exit points for emergencies, and more outdoor seating as well as meditation sessions to relax.

Two students also highlighted a key aspect of what makes a school feel safe: improved teacher training and having more friendly teachers. They noted that when teachers are more supportive and open, students feel safer and more comfortable seeking help when facing problems in schools. This is particularly important, as one recurring issue raised by students in public schools is poor teacher-student relationships, which is described as a lack of understanding or mutual respect from teachers.

Lastly, other students also interpreted a safe school as a space where they can feel comfortable, and that this can be achieved by having a more flexible dress code and accessible clean drinking water.



³⁷ Ministry of Education Malaysia, *Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025 (Preschool to Post-Secondary Education)*, executive summary, Putrajaya: Federal Government Administrative Centre, 2012.
<https://www.pmo.gov.my/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Malaysia-Education-Blueprint-2013-2025.pdf> (accessed January 21, 2026).

³⁸ "Interact Clubs," Rotary International, accessed January 4, 2026.
<https://www.rotary.org/en/get-involved/interact-clubs>.

9.0 Recommendations

Drawing from both teachers and students' lived experiences of their learning environments, the following recommendations are made:

Improve Pre-Service and In-Service Training: Teachers must be well trained with the necessary skills to address and provide adequate responses to the overwhelming issues of bullying, sexual harassment and sexual assault in Malaysian public schools. Educators must go through a pre-service and in-service training in order to produce educators who are always sensitive, caring and professional in curbing serious issues such as sexual crimes among students.³⁹ Considering that there have been instances where teachers dismissed students' concerns or complaints (refer to annex 2), this is meant to ensure that teachers put the well-being of victims and survivors first, by having the sensitivity and understanding required to act firmly to protect children in their learning environments.

Establish Clear, Non-Arbitrary Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs): Responses from teachers indicate a lack of awareness among teachers on the MOE's guidelines and directives (e.g., demonstrated by their acts of following their students and posting pictures of them on social media without written consent). Especially in the era of social media, some teachers can be seen creating content with their students and gaining hundreds of thousands of views and engagement. This can expose students to numerous risks, such as online predators. The MOE has to set clear SOPs to handle cases in schools that create an unsafe school environment. The SOPs have to be detailed and well-communicated to all teachers and school staff, and not just released via a surat pekeliling without proper monitoring of its execution.

Make Background Checks Mandatory: There were some cases mentioned by students, as well as others that can be seen online, where teachers and school staff were outright racist, judgmental and—in worst-case scenarios—had behavioural tendencies towards children and criminal cases in their records.⁴⁰ This calls for a requirement for detailed background checks on teachers, sports coaches, volunteers, teaching assistants, guards, canteen workers and others during the hiring process, as suggested by the former Education Minister.⁴¹

EQUALITY

³⁹ Maszlee Malik, "Making Our Schools a Safer Place: a Proposal from an Ex-MoE," *The Malay Mail*, May 20, 2021, <https://www.malaymail.com/news/what-you-think/2021/05/20/making-our-schools-a-safer-place-a-proposal-from-an-ex-moe-maszlee-malik/1975557>.

⁴⁰ "The 17-Year-Old Exposing Rape Culture in Malaysian Schools." An example of such an online case was a post made on the Facebook account of Ain Husniza's school principal, calling her a "child of Satan".

⁴¹ Malik, "Making Our Schools a Safer Place: a Proposal from an Ex-MoE."

Establish Multi-Disciplinary Teams Within Schools: Teachers are already overwhelmed with many demands and do not necessarily have the skills, knowledge, experience or expertise to address all issues suffered by students that arise from bullying, sexual harassment and sexual assault. This includes teachers' own inability to check their biases and prejudices, which can result in harsh judgments that perpetuate a variety of harms towards students. Teachers need a team of professionals to support them in addressing some of the more severe issues of bullying, sexual harassment and sexual assault.

Decentralise Power and Decision-Making Within Local Multistakeholder and Multi-Disciplinary Teams: In order to provide a learning environment that suits each individual school better, including those with special needs, a decentralisation of power would seem ideal. This involves transferring decision-making power to the district and school levels, a practice that has been done by other countries such as the United Kingdom, Sweden, the Netherlands, Finland, Canada and Australia.⁴² The rationale behind decentralising power is that local stakeholders and schools understand the needs of local communities and students better, which makes them better at deciding how to allocate budget and resources to best benefit their students. In the context of Malaysia, the transfer of power can be done gradually, where training should be provided to school heads as they are already in charge of school management, and can thereby ensure the connection between teachers, parents and higher levels of the education system. This training is to ensure that the school heads are well-adapted to shoulder their expanded responsibilities with clear vision, framework and mechanisms in place. In order to ensure that this power is not abused and that transparency, integrity and accountability can be upheld, the best-practice approach of having a multi-disciplinary and multistakeholder team would be critical as a decision-making mechanism. This decentralisation of power, however, does not mean a reinforcement of power hierarchies. Its effective implementation hinges on the following critical questions:

- When parents are "called to school" to discuss student issues, who sets the agenda? Are parents genuinely partners, or are they summoned subordinates?
- Do students have actual decision-making power on "Safe School Teams", or are they token representatives?
- When schools involve parents in cyberbullying cases, whose perspective dominates?

True collaboration should be shared power, not merely a consultation or the provision of information, and those identified as stakeholders must have students' best interests at heart. A student-centred collaborative approach should be adopted in identifying stakeholders whom students trust to advocate for their rights. Students should be able to choose who sits at the table with them for cases of bullying, sexual harassment and sexual assault. These could be parents, but could also be counsellors, social workers, civil society organisational representatives, older siblings or community members. For general school governance (e.g., budgets, PIBG programme, etc.), parents can and should participate.

Accountability must be upheld if students' input is ignored, and students, in particular, should have veto power over decisions that can affect them negatively or add more harm.

Ensure Transparency in MOE Study Findings and Reporting of Bullying, Sexual Harassment and Sexual Assault: Too often, schools are accused of trying to cover up the issues and problems that arise.⁴³ Making study findings and reports public will help to increase public trust in both the MOE and the school concerned. Such transparency will help lay the foundation for conversations and encourage the political will to address the issues effectively.

⁴² OECD, "How Decentralised Are Education Systems, and What Does It Mean for Schools?," policy brief, *Education Indicators in Focus*, no. 64 (2018), https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2018/11/how-decentralised-are-education-systems-and-what-does-it-mean-for-schools_7c1806fc/e14575d5-en.pdf.

⁴³ "Don't Cover up Bullying, Schools Told," *The Star Online*, January 3, 2025, <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2025/01/03/dont-cover-up-bullying-schools-told>; Margarita Peredaryenko and Avyce Heng, "From Outrage to Action: Closing Malaysia's Loopholes on School Bullying," *Business Today*, August 16, 2025, <https://www.businesstoday.com.my/2025/08/16/from-outrage-to-action-closing-malaysias-loopholes-on-school-bullying>.

Adopt Student-Centric Pedagogical Approaches: Drawing from international examples, best-practice pedagogical approaches should promote students' positive self-image and belief in themselves, as well as individualised (yet guided) learning achievements. This will mean optimising existing resources and conducting audits to ensure that school budgets are expended based on students' needs.

Independent, Wide-Ranging Whistleblower Protection: The harassment of whistleblowers is a harsh reality in the public education sector. The threats against Ain Husniza, the three Sabahan teenagers that became High Court Plaintiffs and MOE whistleblower teacher Cikgu Nurhaizah Ejab, are just a few examples.⁴⁴ They remain stark reminders of the culture of intimidation within schools against whistleblowers. Multiple news reports show MOE officers threatening victims to halt testimony, and interference in internal investigations continue to take place.⁴⁵ Students, teachers and parents who report educator misconduct must be heard, accepted, and also provided critical physical protection and mental-emotional support. Because harassment can come from MOE officers, as MOE whistleblower Cikgu Nurhaizah bravely testified, this protection and support for whistleblowers must be provided by qualified independent external parties and not the MOE.⁴⁶ Disturbingly, the current MOE whistleblower protection policy excludes all disciplinary, civil and/or criminal witnesses from applying for whistleblower protection.⁴⁷ This creates an unreasonable catch-22 situation where school-based witnesses are forced to choose: to testify in any proceeding brought by survivors, or to maintain their whistleblower protection. Without whistleblowers feeling safe to even report cases, it will be impossible to determine the true reality on the ground.

Mainstream and Standardise Best Practices in All Schools: Both teachers and students have shared that some of the best practices they have identified were teacher-initiated. In fact, most best practices depend on exceptional individual teachers rather than systemic policy—for example, as seen in section 5.0, the Orang Asli school teacher who developed diversified pedagogy, the coach who addressed exclusion and the headmaster who reminded teaching staff about consent. While these are laudable, personality-driven initiatives only mean that ensuring safer and inclusive schools will depend a lot on what kind of teachers students have access to. Personality-driven initiatives are not sustainable as exceptional teachers can leave, transfer or burn out. The celebration of the “teacher hero” can also mask systemic failures within public schools, allowing the MOE to avoid addressing why best practices (despite being known) are yet to be standardised effectively. There must be institutional support so that all teachers can innovate towards ensuring safer and more inclusive learning environments.

Safe and inclusive learning environments are the right of all students equally. Therefore, the extent to which students get to enjoy safer and more inclusive learning environments should not be personality-driven, but quality-driven, and hence should be ensured by the MOE. This leads to the issue of funding for public schools. The MOE should conduct a resource audit to determine the following:

- What is the minimum staffing ratio needed for safe and inclusive education?
- What does comprehensive teacher training cost, considering the gaps in capabilities and attitudes identified by both teachers and students?
- What infrastructure investments are needed to address the accessibility issues identified by both students and teachers?
- How much would it cost to implement all best practices systemically and ensure that their effectiveness is measured by students' safety and inclusivity outcomes?

⁴⁴ Hadi Azmi, “Malaysian Teen Threatened for Revealing Her Teacher Joked About Rape,” *Benar News*, May 6, 2025, <https://www.benarnews.org/english/news/malaysian/my-teen-rape-threat-05062021170623.html>;

Jason Santos, “Students Who Sued Their Teacher for Skipping Classes to Get Day in Court,” *The Vibes*, September 2, 2022, <https://www.thevibes.com/articles/education/70330/students-who-sued-their-teacher-for-skipping-classes-to-get-day-in-court>;

Desmond Davidson, “TI-M Gesa KPM Lindungi Guru Pemberi Maklumat,” *The Malaysian Insight*, July 26, 2023, <https://www.themalaysianinsight.com/bahasa/s/454113>.

⁴⁵ “Ethics in Education,” *Tiada.Guru*, April 6, 2021, <https://tiada.guru/updates/ethics-in-education>.

⁴⁶ Cynthia D. Baga, “For Raising Issue of Teacher Not Attending Class for Months: Ex-Teacher Tells of Death Threats,” *The Daily Express*, November 25, 2022, <https://www.dailyexpress.com.my/news/203267/for-raising-issue-of-teacher-not-attending-class-for-months-ex-teacher-tells-of-death-threats>.

⁴⁷ Amirul Aiman, “Review Whistleblower Policy to Widen Protection, Education Ministry Told,” *Free Malaysia Today*, July 28, 2023, <https://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/nation/2023/07/28/review-whistleblower-policy-to-widen-protection-education-ministry-told>.

Establish an Enforcement-Capable Public Ombudsman in Schools: When the perpetrator is a public servant, the paths to safety and justice can be significantly altered. Severe cases of misconduct by educators and/or school authorities can include cover-ups, inaction on credible reports of misconduct, fabrication of key evidence, harassment of witnesses and more. Several cases have been documented by the Tiada.Guru Campaign (see annex 3) highlighting the severity of these issues that reek of non-accountability, along with the lack of transparency towards the Malaysian public. In such cases, it is therefore necessary for an independent investigative and enforcement body to intervene.

A Public Ombudsman can provide independent whistleblower protection, investigate cases of misconduct either by report or by its own initiative, and take disciplinary, punitive, restorative or even legal action against officers. Most importantly, to avoid real or perceived conflict of interest, the Public Ombudsman must disallow former public servants, politicians and their families as officers. Instead, it must be staffed by counsellors, child rights legal experts, social case workers and vetted community members. Its top officers should not be appointed by executive authority, such as the Prime Minister, but instead be elected by the people directly. To further firewall from executive interference, the Ombudsman's budget ought to be a direct percentage of the annual national budget. This will ensure that larger governments, which require commensurately wider and deeper oversight, would provide the Ombudsman sufficient resources to meet said requirements.

The proposed Public Ombudsman should contain a national unit for cases involving children and/or schools. This will allow each school to be directly monitored by stationed Ombudsman officers. Public Ombudsman officers at schools should not be school principals, teachers or officials from the MOE, as officers should be a primary contact for severe cases of educator misconduct. They can also serve as an independent ally to assist students in reporting alleged crimes directly to the police and/or the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC), without improper and illegal intervention by MOE officers.

The Public Ombudsman has the key benefit of being able to facilitate investigations (into misconduct or legal matters) to be conducted by independent experts, instead of the responsibility falling to educators whose core business is teaching.⁴⁸ The Public Ombudsman must be a Constitutional body outside the Executive Branch of the government, instead of within it. It should have transparent, regular reports of its actions, be subjected to strict deadlines to conclude investigations (to ensure severe cases do not languish), be able to enforce decisions on actions to be taken resulting from investigations, and be audited by a body outside of the government.

Unfortunately, the federal government's current proposal greatly weakens the Ombudsman by only allowing investigative powers.⁴⁹ Its proposed Ombudsman may only recommend corrective actions to schools, but not enforce them. Enforcement remains with Ministries, quasi-independent Commissions and/or schools themselves. The retention of enforcement powers within Government is a fatal flaw of the government's proposal, and will result in a conflict of interest for non-independent investigators, impunity of those involved in cover-ups, continued perpetration of educator misconduct, continued safety risks to students and ineffective redress for those harmed. Worse, it will reinforce a harmful culture of impunity and an "acceptance" of such a culture. To prevent this, it is imperative that a strong Public Ombudsman be established, in order to ensure investigations are carried out and cases are resolved thoroughly, transparently and effectively.

⁴⁸ "Parliament Must Establish an Ombudsman for Schools," Tiada.Guru, November 12, 2025, <https://tiada.guru/updates/parliament-must-establish-an-ombudsman-for-schools-external-and-independent-enforcement-emancipation-from-moe/>.
⁴⁹ "The Public Ombudsman, a Summary: Make Justice the Default," Tiada.Guru, May 31, 2023, <https://tiada.guru/updates/fixing-the-public-ombudsman-summary-make-justice-the-default>. See arguments for an independent Public Ombudsman.

⁴⁹ Azalina Othman Said (@AzalinaOthmanS), "Kenyataan Media: Penubuhan Ombudsman Malaysia," X, May 8, 2023, 12:42pm, <https://x.com/AzalinaOthmanS/status/1655432883467882497> (accessed January 5, 2026).

10.0 Conclusion

In conclusion, Malaysian public school teachers and students describe a safe school as a space where they feel physically, mentally and emotionally safe, with an emphasis on creating learning environments that are equally welcoming for all students. This includes ensuring flexibility in the design and delivery of their education, from student-centric pedagogical approaches to a flexible and individualised timetable.

Bullying is identified as the main issue in most Malaysian public schools, as nearly all students who participated in the survey reported experiencing or witnessing some form of bullying, harassment or assault, varying in type and severity. Teachers have highlighted their need for professional support as they find themselves unable to address the more severe cases of harm against students. The MOE should pay closer attention to school reports and not rely solely on school rankings, which often fail to reflect the actual conditions on the ground. These rankings can be misleading due to alleged cover-ups, chronic absenteeism and retaliatory behaviours within schools. In order to address the issue of bullying, harassment and assault more effectively, it is equally crucial to have transparency and accountability on cases, redress actions, studies and findings. The inconsistency in the achievement of unity levels among students and teachers suggests the need for closer examination, as understanding why diversity is difficult to accept is absolutely necessary in establishing longer-term safe and inclusive learning environments. The ensuing results and analyses should also be made public and used to further refine the pre- and in-service training of teachers.

Students also noted that many of the positive initiatives in their learning environment were self-initiated by the teachers, particularly in adapting teaching methods to suit students with diverse learning needs. While these efforts are seen as best practices, their impact could be greater if standardised at the school or MOE level. Given that most of these initiatives stem from the teachers themselves, there is a strong case for decentralisation to transfer more decision-making power to district and school levels, while ensuring that there is no reinforcement of power hierarchies that will compromise the genuine and active participation of students, student-designated trusted adults and parents as key stakeholders. This would allow for more responsive and context-specific policies that better serve the needs of local communities, but that are still subject to the necessary standards that would ensure all students have universal and equal access to safe and inclusive learning environments.

INCLUSION



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Annex 1: Teachers' Survey and Interview Results

Issues and best practices identified in **the interviewed teachers'** respective schools.

State	State District	Issues Identified	Focus Area
Perak	A 100% Orang Asli school in Gerik, Perak	- Lack of support for special needs students, and students are labeled as lazy, crazy or weird - For instance, teachers exclude students who show symptoms of ADHD because they lack awareness and/or the skills to help their students - Practice of corporal punishments such as caning and slapping, though this practice has been proven to not be effective as there is no change in behaviour - Lack of response mechanism when students report feeling unsafe	- Provided a student who has symptoms of ADHD with diversified learning. This strategy helped the student to engage in classroom activities. However, this was the teacher's own initiative and not a school practice. - The headmaster would remind teachers not to post any photos or videos of the students on social media platforms
Perak	A school in Kemar, Gerik	- Bullying culture that is not addressed immediately - Discriminatory attitudes among teachers or students - Lack of understanding of the special needs of students - Lack of basic facilities for the disabled - While teachers are trained in inclusive education, they are still constrained in what they can do to meet their students' needs - Insufficient basic funds to meet all needs, such as the construction of special facilities, the appointment of additional support staff, and a more comprehensive student well-being programme	- Collaboration between teachers, counsellor, parents (PIBG) and students through a "Safe School Team" to resolve disciplinary cases - Special needs students are not separated from the rest of the school, giving them the space to socialise without discrimination - Corporal punishment is not practiced in school

State	State District	Issues Identified	Focus Area
Sabah	District A, Suburban government school	- Teachers can be indifferent to students' tendency to bully others - Large number of students in a classroom, causing a less conducive learning environment	- Anti-bullying policy is enforced. Disciplinary unit and teachers are active in responding to bullying and sexual harassment cases. - There is a separate class for students with special needs - Students are sent to counselling and parents are involved/consulted for cases like racism and discrimination - Teachers respect students' privacy. For instance, when students' phones are confiscated, teachers do not go through the phones. - Corporal punishment is not a practice in the school
Sabah	District B, Rural area government school	- Teachers are involved with students on social media (posting pictures of students online or following them on social media platforms) - Practice of caning students for disciplinary breaches such as smoking and possessing pornography	- The placement of police in schools as "Pegawai Perhubungan Sekolah" to directly assist teachers with cases involving violence - The school celebrates all kinds of cultural festivals and often invites parents to school for the events, giving equal exposure to all cultures

State	State District	Issues Identified	Focus Area
			- Teachers and parents discuss programmes and academic goals for students. Students can be involved in planning activities for themselves too, by sending in proposals to the school administration. - School observes parental consent in everything related to the students' needs in school. This includes photography rights following the MOE guidelines for parents' consent.
Selangor	A public school in Ampang	- Social media platforms are used as an avenue to spread mean messages/gossip about other students - Corporal punishment such as caning is a practice in the school. Teachers believe it works on some students, specifically for offences like theft, vandalism and fighting. - Teachers are understaffed, needing more support and counsellors to manage students	- The school educates their students to embrace differences and respect one another, in the spirit of inclusive learning environments - Parents' consent is required to share or use the students' photos - Teachers make sure that students communicate when they feel unsafe, but no further explanation was given on how this is done
N/A	A public school in a rural area	- Lack of awareness of the required standards for safe and inclusive environments - Corporal punishment is used, though only as a last resort for students who skip school	Corporal punishment is generally not a practice in school

Annex 2: Students' Survey and Interview Results

1. Issues and best practices identified in **the surveyed students'** respective schools.

Data overview:

During the survey, students indicated various reasons for feeling unsafe and/or left out at school, along with any initiatives that have been carried out to promote safety and inclusivity. These have been categorised and listed below, alongside the number of times each reason, incident and initiative has been indicated in total.

Reason	Count
Bullying	290
Cultural insensitivity	214
Discrimination/prejudice	234
Exclusion/isolation	224
High academic pressure	220
Lack of privacy	235
Lack of security presence	230
N/A ("I feel school is safe")	269
Peer pressure	238
Poor teacher-student relationship	237
Sexual harassment/assault	246
Victim of theft	1
Unfair punishments / teacher misconduct	243

Table 1: The students who took the survey cited these reasons for their feeling unsafe in school.

Initiative	Count
A different learning method	45
Almost none	1
Anti-bullying programmes	100
Counselling support	70
Peer mentoring	90
School campaigns	78

Table 2: The students surveyed cited these initiatives for safety and inclusivity in their schools.

Category	Count
Academic/performance pressure	3
Bullying/harassment	7
Discrimination/prejudice	7
Family/home issues	2
Language/cultural barriers	148
Other/unclear	250
Personal interests/identity	61
Social exclusion / friendship issues	557
Socioeconomic/material differences	71

Table 3: In the survey, the students gave multiple reasons for why they felt left out at school. The count includes multiple incidents that can fall within the same category.

2. Issues and best practices identified in the interviewed students' respective schools.

Data overview:

Out of the 391 responses collected from students, 43 provided further elaboration on their responses and were interviewed. Their insights informed this research's analyses, highlighting key issues and associated best practices. These selected responses are categorised into two groups: current school-goers (indicated in green) and school leavers (indicated in orange).

State	Student's Background	Issues Identified	Best Practices Identified
Melaka	- Female, Chinese, Buddhist 15-17 years old - National school (Sekolah Kebangsaan / SK / SMK) - Low-income household (B40)	- Lack of privacy - High academic pressure - Stolen wallet - Feeling excluded at school—"when I spoke to others, they didn't respect or look at me" - Female students are not allowed to wear white or skin-coloured bras - Spot checks / invasion of privacy	School is supportive of students' families' well-being—"when someone in the school has a family death or needs surgery, the school asks us to donate money to raise funds for that student, which is great"
Negeri Sembilan	- Male, Chinese, Buddhist 15-17 years old - National school (Sekolah Kebangsaan / SK / SMK) - Middle-income household (M40)	- Bullying - Exclusion/isolation - Peer pressure - Discrimination/prejudice - Cultural insensitivity and racism—"sometimes, some Malays will like to make fun of Chinese and say something like 'chi chong chi chang' to look down on Chinese"	

State	Student's Background	Issues Identified	Best Practices Identified
Johor	- Female, Malay, Muslim 18+ years old - National school (Sekolah Kebangsaan / SK / SMK), National-type Chinese school (Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan Cina / SJKC), National-type Tamil school (Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan Tamil / SJKT), Religious school (e.g., Sekolah Agama, Tahfiz, etc.), Boarding school (e.g., SBP, MRSM), Special education school, Homeschooling - Single-parent household	- Bullying - Lack of security presence - Lack of privacy—student has personally experienced breaches of privacy - High academic pressure - Peer pressure - Poor teacher-student relationship - Sexual harassment/assault - Students from different backgrounds are treated unfairly and school lacks diversity	School provides and arranges counselling sessions for students
Johor	- Female, Malay, Muslim 18+ years old - National school (Sekolah Kebangsaan / SK / SMK), Homeschooling - Single-parent household	- Bullying - Unfair punishments / teacher misconduct - Lack of security presence - Peer pressure - Discrimination/prejudice—disciplinary actions are biased - Cultural insensitivity - Poor teacher-student relationship—was embarrassed by teachers - Sexual harassment/assault	- Peer mentoring - School educated students to not bully others with physical disabilities

State	Student's Background	Issues Identified	Best Practices Identified
Johor	- Female, Malay, Muslim 18+ years old - National school (Sekolah Kebangsaan / SK / SMK), National-type Chinese school (Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan Cina / SJKC), National-type Tamil school (Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan Tamil / SJKT), Religious school (e.g., Sekolah Agama, Tahfiz, etc.), Boarding school (e.g., SBP, MRSM), Special education school, Homeschooling - Single-parent household	- Bullying—bullying in locker room - Unfair punishments / teacher misconduct - Lack of security presence - Leadership lacks representation - Lack of privacy—"my concerns were shared publicly" - High academic pressure - Exclusion/isolation - Peer pressure - Discrimination/prejudice - Cultural insensitivity - Poor teacher-student relationship - Sexual harassment/assault	- School runs anti-bullying programmes - School increased supervision for bullying cases
Johor	- Female, Malay, Muslim 18+ years old - National school (Sekolah Kebangsaan / SK / SMK), National-type Chinese school (Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan Cina / SJKC), Boarding school (e.g., SBP, MRSM), Special education school, Homeschooling - Middle-income household (M40)	- Bullying - Exclusion/isolation - Cultural insensitivity—others mocked student's culture - Students from different backgrounds are treated unfairly—school staff lacks training	- School provides counselling support - Personal issues are addressed privately - Teachers involved parents in discussing matters involving students (e.g., when students were excluded from school trips)

State	Student's Background	Issues Identified	Best Practices Identified
Johor	- Female, Malay, Muslim 18+ years old - Religious school (e.g., Sekolah Agama, Tahfiz, etc.), Boarding school (e.g., SBP, MRSB), Special education school - Low-income household (B40)	- Bullying—for physical disability - Lack of security presence - High academic pressure - Exclusion/isolation - Peer pressure - Cultural insensitivity - Poor teacher-student relationship - Students from different backgrounds are treated unfairly (staff-hiring practices aren't diverse) - Sexual harassment/assault	- Teachers adopted a different learning method as an approach to make students feel safer/included - School ensures confidentiality - School educates students about bullying
Johor	- Female, Malay, Muslim 18+ years old - National school (Sekolah Kebangsaan / SK / SMK), Special education school, Homeschooling - Low-income household (B40)	- Bullying - Lack of privacy - Peer pressure - Poor teacher-student relationship - Felt left out because student did not have branded clothes - Theatre productions lack representation	- School runs anti-bullying programmes - School promotes diversity - Private matters are handled with care
Johor	- Female, Malay, Muslim 18+ years old	- Unfair punishments / teacher misconduct - Lack of privacy—student was called out during assemblies - Students from different backgrounds are treated unfairly - Music programmes lack diversity	School provides counselling support

State	Student's Background	Issues Identified	Best Practices Identified
	- National school (Sekolah Kebangsaan / SK / SMK), National-type Chinese school (Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan Cina / SJKC), National-type Tamil school (Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan Tamil / SJKT), Religious school (e.g., Sekolah Agama, Tahfiz, etc.), Boarding school (e.g., SBP, MRSM), Special education school, Homeschooling - Low-income household (B40)	- Exclusion from school clubs - Cultural insensitivity - Poor teacher-student relationship	
Johor	- Female, Malay, Muslim 18+ years old - National school (Sekolah Kebangsaan / SK / SMK), National-type Chinese school (Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan Cina / SJKC), National-type Tamil school (Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan Tamil / SJKT), Boarding school (e.g., SBP, MRSM), Special education school, Homeschooling - High-income household (T20)	- Bullying - Unfair punishments / teacher misconduct - Lack of security presence - Exclusion/isolation—felt different because of language barrier - Cultural insensitivity—teased for lunch choices - Sexual harassment/ assault - Students from different backgrounds are treated unfairly	- School staff is mindful of privacy - School staff promote a respectful culture

State	Student's Background	Issues Identified	Best Practices Identified
Penang	- Female, Malay, Muslim 18+ years old - National school (Sekolah Kebangsaan / SK / SMK), National-type Chinese school (Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan Cina / SJKC), National-type Tamil school (Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan Tamil / SJKT), Religious school (e.g., Sekolah Agama, Tahfiz, etc.), Boarding school (e.g., SBP, MRSM), Special education school, Homeschooling - Single-parent household	- Bullying - Unfair punishments / teacher misconduct—student was ignored by teachers - Cyberbullying - Lack of security presence - Lack of privacy—student was called out in assemblies - Peer pressure - Discrimination/prejudice - Students from different backgrounds are treated unfairly - Festivals of all cultures not celebrated - Poor teacher-student relationship - Sexual harassment/assault	- Peer mentoring - School involved parents when cases such as cyberbullying happen
Penang	- Female, Malay, Muslim 18+ years old - National school (Sekolah Kebangsaan / SK / SMK), National-type Chinese school (Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan Cina / SJKC), National-type Tamil school (Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan Tamil / SJKT), Religious school (e.g., Sekolah Agama, Tahfiz, etc.), Boarding school (e.g., SBP, MRSM), Special education school, Homeschooling - Single-parent household	- Bullying—student was pushed during recess - Lack of security presence - Lack of privacy—private conversations are overheard - Exclusion/isolation—student spoke a different language - Discrimination/prejudice - Cultural insensitivity - Poor teacher-student relationship	- Peer mentoring - Staff intervened in cases of bullying

State	Student's Background	Issues Identified	Best Practices Identified
Penang	- Female, Malay, Muslim 18+ years old - National school (Sekolah Kebangsaan / SK / SMK), National-type Chinese school (Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan Cina / SJKC), National-type Tamil school (Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan Tamil / SJKT), Religious school (e.g., Sekolah Agama, Tahfiz, etc.), Boarding school (e.g., SBP, MRSM), Special education school, Homeschooling - Single-parent household	- Bullying—was called names and teased for having accents - Lack of privacy—personal details were disclosed - Some students from different backgrounds were treated unfairly - Peer pressure - Felt left out because student had a different educational background - Morning announcements lack inclusivity	- School provides counselling support - School held language appreciation day
Penang	- Female, Malay, Muslim 18+ years old - National school (Sekolah Kebangsaan / SK / SMK), National-type Chinese school (Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan Cina / SJKC), National-type Tamil school (Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan Tamil / SJKT), Religious school (e.g., Sekolah Agama, Tahfiz, etc.), Boarding school (e.g., SBP, MRSM), Special education school, Homeschooling - Single-parent household	- Bullying—felt different due to skin colour - Unfair punishments / teacher misconduct - Lack of security presence - Lack of privacy—personal details were disclosed - Exclusion/isolation - Peer pressure - Cultural insensitivity - Students from different backgrounds are treated unfairly - Lack of diversity in recognition awards - Poor teacher-student relationship - Sexual harassment/ assault	Student was excluded from joining a club, but teachers still encouraged them to join

State	Student's Background	Issues Identified	Best Practices Identified
Selangor	- Male, Malay, Muslim 18+ years old - National school (Sekolah Kebangsaan / SK / SMK) - Low-income household (B40)	- Bullying - Unfair punishments / teacher misconduct - Lack of privacy - Peer pressure - Discrimination/prejudice—students from different backgrounds are treated unfairly - Poor teacher-student relationship - Got sexually assaulted two times [twice] by a senior, and no further action was taken even though the case has been reported to the disciplinary teacher - Feeling excluded at school—opinions are not considered, complaints are not taken seriously	
Selangor	- Female, Malay, Muslim 18+ years old - Boarding school (e.g., SBP, MRSM), Special education school - Low-income household (B40)	- Bullying - Unfair punishments / teacher misconduct - Lack of security presence - Lack of privacy - Exclusion/isolation - Peer pressure - Discrimination/prejudice - Poor teacher-student relationship - Sexual harassment/assault - Student feels uncomfortable in school uniform (School) music lacks representation	- School provides counselling support - School maintains student confidentiality - Disciplinary actions are taken on those who name-call others

State	Student's Background	Issues Identified	Best Practices Identified
Selangor	- Female, Malay, Muslim 18+ years old - National school (Sekolah Kebangsaan / SK / SMK), National-type Chinese school (Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan Cina / SJKC), Boarding school (e.g., SBP, MRSM), Special education school, Homeschooling - Middle-income household (M40)	- Bullying - Unfair punishments / teacher misconduct - Lack of security presence - Lack of privacy—felt exposed during meetings - High academic pressure - Exclusion/isolation—student felt unwanted - Discrimination/prejudice - Cultural insensitivity - Poor teacher-student relationship - Sexual harassment/assault	School runs campaigns such as tolerance programmes
Selangor	- Female, Malay, Muslim 18+ years old - National school (Sekolah Kebangsaan / SK / SMK), National-type Tamil school (Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan Tamil / SJKT) - Middle-income household (M40)	- Bullying - Cyberbullying - Unfair punishments / teacher misconduct - Lack of security presence - Peer pressure - Discrimination/prejudice - Art clubs ignore cultural art forms - Student feels uncomfortable in school uniform - School does not respect boundaries or privacy—student was called out in assemblies - Sexual harassment/assault	School takes action against cyberbullying via messages, by blocking offenders

State	Student's Background	Issues Identified	Best Practices Identified
Selangor	- Female, Malay, Muslim 18+ years old - National school (Sekolah Kebangsaan / SK / SMK), National-type Chinese school (Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan Cina / SJKC), Homeschooling - High-income household (T20)	- Bullying - Unfair punishments / teacher misconduct - Lack of security presence - Lack of privacy—sensitive topics are discussed openly - High academic pressure - Exclusion/isolation—student felt like they did not matter - Peer pressure - Discrimination/prejudice - Cultural insensitivity—teased for religion - Poor teacher-student relationship - Sexual harassment/assault	- Peer mentoring - School held interfaith talks for inclusivity
Selangor	- Female, Malay, Muslim 18+ years old - National school (Sekolah Kebangsaan / SK / SMK), Religious school (e.g., Sekolah Agama, Tahfiz, etc.), Homeschooling - Low-income household (B40)	- Bullying - Unfair punishments / teacher misconduct - Lack of privacy—student's privacy was compromised - High academic pressure - Peer pressure - Discrimination/prejudice - Some students are treated unfairly - Cultural insensitivity—got teased for choice of lunch - Sexual harassment/assault	- School provides counselling support - Speech therapy for students with speech difficulties

State	Student's Background	Issues Identified	Best Practices Identified
Selangor	- Female, Malay, Muslim 18+ years old - National school (Sekolah Kebangsaan / SK / SMK), Homeschooling - Single-parent household	Peer pressure	- School provides a diversified learning method - School ensures student privacy - School took action when bullying cases happened
Selangor	- Female, Malay, Muslim 18+ years old - National school (Sekolah Kebangsaan / SK / SMK), National-type Chinese school (Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan Cina / SJKC), National-type Tamil school (Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan Tamil / SJKT), Religious school (e.g., Sekolah Agama, Tahfiz, etc.), Boarding school (e.g., SBP, MRSM), Homeschooling - High-income household (T20)	- Bullying—student was pushed - Exclusion/isolation - Peer pressure - Discrimination/prejudice - Cultural insensitivity - Lack of privacy—"I've been embarrassed in front of others" - Some students are treated unfairly - Student finds it hard to understand homework - Felt scared to speak in school - Student felt like they did not belong, because they did not understand the homework	- School runs campaigns - School increased supervision to monitor bullying cases
Selangor	- Female, Malay, Muslim 18+ years old - National-type Chinese school (Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan Cina / SJKC), Special education school - Low-income household (B40)	- Cyberbullying on apps - Lack of privacy—sensitive topics are discussed openly - Environmental clubs ignore urban issues	Peer mentoring

State	Student's Background	Issues Identified	Best Practices Identified
Selangor	- Female, Malay, Muslim 18+ years old - National school (Sekolah Kebangsaan / SK / SMK), National-type Chinese school (Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan Cina / SJKC), Religious school (e.g., Sekolah Agama, Tahfiz, etc.), Special education school, Homeschooling - Low-income household (B40)	- Lack of security presence - Lack of privacy—student had overheard confidential discussions among staff/teachers - High academic pressure - Exclusion/isolation - Peer pressure - Discrimination/prejudice - Cultural insensitivity - Student newspapers lack diverse voices - Sexual harassment/assault	When student was mocked for their clothing, school conducted discussions to address differences
Terengganu	- Female, Malay, Muslim 18+ years old - National-type Tamil school (Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan Tamil / SJKT), Religious school (e.g., Sekolah Agama, Tahfiz, etc.), Special education school, Homeschooling - Middle-income household (M40)	- Unfair punishments / teacher misconduct - High academic pressure - Peer pressure - Discrimination/prejudice - Lack of privacy—student had been called out in assemblies - Scholarship information is not shared equally - Poor teacher-student relationship - Sexual harassment/assault - Student felt like they did not belong, because they were the only vegetarian	Peer mentoring

State	Student's Background	Issues Identified	Best Practices Identified
Terengganu	- Female, Malay, Muslim 18+ years old - National-type Chinese school (Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan Cina / SJKC), National-type Tamil school (Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan Tamil / SJKT), Religious school (e.g., Sekolah Agama, Tahfiz, etc.), Boarding school (e.g., SBP, MRSM), Special education school, Homeschooling - Low-income household (B40)	- Bullying - Unfair punishments / teacher misconduct - High academic pressure - Exclusion/isolation - Peer pressure - Cultural insensitivity - Poor teacher-student relationship - Lack of privacy—"my concerns were made public" - Students from different backgrounds are treated unfairly - Lunch schedules do not take fasting into account - Sexual harassment/assault	- School runs anti-bullying campaigns - School provides counselling
Terengganu	- Female, Malay, Muslim 18+ years old - National school (Sekolah Kebangsaan / SK / SMK), National-type Chinese school (Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan Cina / SJKC), National-type Tamil school (Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan Tamil / SJKT), Special education school - Middle-income household (M40)	- Bullying - Cyberbullying - High academic pressure - Peer pressure - Cultural insensitivity - Poor teacher-student relationship - Lack of privacy—felt exposed during meetings - Felt uncomfortable in uniform - Recess activities are not inclusive - Student felt like they did not belong during a cultural celebration that they did not understand	- Peer mentoring - Everyone is treated equally - School involved parents to discuss cyberbullying cases

State	Student's Background	Issues Identified	Best Practices Identified
Terengganu	- Female, Malay, Muslim 18+ years old - National school (Sekolah Kebangsaan / SK / SMK), Religious school (e.g., Sekolah Agama, Tahfiz, etc.), Boarding school (e.g., SBP, MRSB), Special education school, Homeschooling - Low-income household (B40)	- Bullying– student has a different accent and was called names - Discrimination/prejudice - Sexual harassment/ assault - Lack of privacy–sensitive topics are discussed openly - Uniform options are limited	- School runs anti-bullying programmes - Everyone is treated equally - Teacher disciplined offenders
Terengganu	- Female, Malay, Muslim 18+ years old - National school (Sekolah Kebangsaan / SK / SMK), Religious school (e.g., Sekolah Agama, Tahfiz, etc.) - Low-income household (B40)	- Bullying–teased for clothing - Unfair punishments / teacher misconduct - Lack of security presence - Lack of privacy–felt exposed during meetings - High academic pressure - Exclusion/isolation - Poor teacher–student relationship - Sexual harassment/ assault - Food policies do not consider all diets	- School provides counselling support - Staff talked to students for bullying cases

State	Student's Background	Issues Identified	Best Practices Identified
Terengganu	- Female, Malay, Muslim 18+ years old - National-type Chinese school (Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan Cina / SJKC), Homeschooling - Low-income household (B40)	- Cyberbullying - Unfair punishments / teacher misconduct - Lack of security presence - Lack of privacy - High academic pressure - Poor teacher-student relationship - Sexual harassment/ assault	- Teachers adopted a different learning method as an approach to make students feel safer/included - Student trusts staff with personal issues - When cyberbullying happens, school gets parents involved to address the issue
Wilayah Persekutuan	- Male, Indigenous, Christian 18+ years old - National school (Sekolah Kebangsaan / SK / SMK), National-type Tamil school (Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan Tamil / SJKT), Boarding school (e.g., SBP, MRSM), Special education school - High-income household (T20)	- Bullying - Unfair punishments / teacher misconduct - Lack of security presence - Lack of privacy - High academic pressure - Exclusion/isolation - Discrimination/prejudice - Cultural insensitivity - Poor teacher-student relationship - Virtual learning is not inclusive	- School adopted a new/different learning method as an approach to be more inclusive - School staff are respectful of boundaries
Wilayah Persekutuan	- Male, Indigenous, Hindu 18+ years old - National-type Tamil school (Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan Tamil / SJKT), Boarding school (e.g., SBP, MRSM), Homeschooling - Low-income household (B40)	- Lack of security presence - High academic pressure - Poor teacher-student relationship - Sexual harassment/ assault - Feel excluded and was ignored at programmes - Attendance policies are rigid	- Counselling support is provided - Personal issues are addressed privately - Everyone is treated equally - When a student was mocked for their physical appearance, the school held sensitivity training

State	Student's Background	Issues Identified	Best Practices Identified
Wilayah Persekutuan	- Male, Indigenous, Christian 18+ years old - National-type Tamil school (Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan Tamil / SJKT), Religious school (e.g., Sekolah Agama, Tahfiz, etc.), Boarding school (e.g., SBP, MRSM) - Low-income household (B40)	- Bullying - Unfair punishments / teacher misconduct - High academic pressure - Peer pressure - Discrimination/prejudice—students from different backgrounds are treated unfairly - Poor teacher-student relationship - Internet access is not universal/accessible to everyone	- Personal concerns are handled discreetly - Coach talked to players after witnessing exclusion from sports team
Wilayah Persekutuan	- Male, Indigenous, Christian 18+ years old - National school (Sekolah Kebangsaan / SK / SMK), National-type Chinese school (Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan Cina / SJKC), Religious school (e.g., Sekolah Agama, Tahfiz, etc.), Boarding school (e.g., SBP, MRSM), Special education school, Homeschooling - Middle-income household (M40)	- Lack of privacy - Exclusion/isolation - Discrimination/prejudice - School does not respect boundaries or privacy—was called out in assemblies - Technology/Internet is not inclusive or accessible to everyone	- School conducted campaigns - Staff increased supervision after witnessing bullying in cafeteria/canteen

State	Student's Background	Issues Identified	Best Practices Identified
Wilayah Persekutuan	- Male, Indian, Christian 18+ years old - National school (Sekolah Kebangsaan / SK / SMK), National-type Chinese school (Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan Cina / SJKC) - High-income household (T20)	- Lack of security presence - Bus routes to school are inconvenient	- School staff maintains students' privacy - School organised cultural programmes to address colourism/racism
Wilayah Persekutuan	- Male, Indian, Muslim 18+ years old - National-type Chinese school (Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan Cina / SJKC), National-type Tamil school (Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan Tamil / SJKT), Religious school (e.g., Sekolah Agama, Tahfiz, etc.), Homeschooling - Middle-income household (M40)	- Bullying - Student felt like they did not belong in school, because they did not receive help when needed - Peer pressure - Student's personal details were disclosed - Students from different backgrounds are treated unfairly (e.g., fundraising expectations are unequal)	- School provides counselling support - School promotes a respectful culture
Wilayah Persekutuan	- Male, Indigenous, Hindu 18+ years old - National-type Chinese school (Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan Cina / SJKC), Religious school (e.g., Sekolah Agama, Tahfiz, etc.), Boarding school (e.g., SBP, MRSM), Homeschooling - Middle-income household (M40)	- Lack of security presence - Sexual harassment/assault - Lack of privacy—student experienced public embarrassment - Technology access in school is not equal	- School runs anti-bullying programmes - School promotes a respectful culture

State	Student's Background	Issues Identified	Best Practices Identified
Wilayah Persekutuan	- Male, Indian, Buddhist 18+ years old - National school (Sekolah Kebangsaan / SK / SMK), National-type Chinese school (Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan Cina / SJKC), National-type Tamil school (Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan Tamil / SJKT), Boarding school (e.g., SBP, MRSM), Special education school, Homeschooling - Single-parent household	Internet access is not equal	- Personal issues are addressed privately - School promotes tolerance
Wilayah Persekutuan	- Male, Indian, Buddhist 18+ years old - National school (Sekolah Kebangsaan / SK / SMK), National-type Chinese school (Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan Cina / SJKC), Boarding school (e.g., SBP, MRSM), Special education school, Homeschooling - Middle-income household (M40)	- Bullying - Unfair punishments / teacher misconduct - High academic pressure - Peer pressure - Discrimination/prejudice - Lack of privacy—student's concerns were made public - Special education is underfunded - Sexual harassment/assault	School runs campaigns

State	Student's Background	Issues Identified	Best Practices Identified
Wilayah Persekutuan	- Male, Indigenous, Christian 18+ years old - National-type Tamil school (Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan Tamil / SJKT), Religious school (e.g., Sekolah Agama, Tahfiz, etc.), Boarding school (e.g., SBP, MRSB), Special education school, Homeschooling - Low-income household (B40)	- Bullying—teased for religious dress - Unfair punishments / teacher misconduct - Lack of security presence - Lack of privacy—student has been embarrassed by teachers - Exclusion/isolation - Virtual learning is not inclusive - Peer pressure - Discrimination/prejudice - Cultural insensitivity - Poor teacher-student relationship - Sexual harassment/assault	- School runs campaigns - School holds awareness sessions
Wilayah Persekutuan	- Male, Indian, Muslim 18+ years old - National school (Sekolah Kebangsaan / SK / SMK), National-type Chinese school (Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan Cina / SJKC), National-type Tamil school (Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan Tamil / SJKT), Religious school (e.g., Sekolah Agama, Tahfiz, etc.), Homeschooling - Single-parent household	- Bullying—was teased about my family - Unfair punishments / teacher misconduct - Lack of privacy - High academic pressure - Exclusion/isolation - Peer pressure - Discrimination/prejudice - Cultural insensitivity - Gifted programmes lack diversity - Poor teacher-student relationship - Sexual harassment/assault	- Peer mentoring - Personal issues are addressed privately - Teachers discussed inclusivity with students

State	Student's Background	Issues Identified	Best Practices Identified
Wilayah Persekutuan	- Male, Indigenous, Muslim 18+ years old - National school (Sekolah Kebangsaan / SK / SMK), Religious school (e.g., Sekolah Agama, Tahfiz, etc.), Special education school, Homeschooling - Middle-income household (M40)	- Bullying–teased about skin colour - Unfair punishments / teacher misconduct - Lack of security presence - Lack of privacy–“my concerns were shared publicly” - High academic pressure - Exclusion/isolation–felt left out of everything for having a different opinion - Peer pressure - Discrimination/prejudice - Cultural insensitivity - Poor teacher–student relationship - Sexual harassment/assault - After-school programmes lack diversity	- School runs campaigns - School organised cultural programmes
Wilayah Persekutuan	- Male, Indian, Hindu 18+ years old - National school (Sekolah Kebangsaan / SK / SMK), Religious school (e.g., Sekolah Agama, Tahfiz, etc.), Boarding school (e.g., SBP, MRSM), Special education school - Single-parent household	- High academic pressure - Exclusion/isolation–had a unique perspective and was excluded from lunch group - Poor teacher–student relationship - Sexual harassment/assault - School supplies are not provided	- School provides counselling support - Teacher encouraged student to socialise

Annex 3: Examples of Failed Accountability and Transparency

Cases of failures in accountability and transparency during investigations into cases perpetrated by those in authority, as documented by representatives of the Tiada.Guru Campaign.

1. Conflict of Interest at the School Level

To-date, investigations into misconduct by MOE officers, including teachers, are entirely the prerogative of the Head of Department. In a school setting, this is a principal or headmaster. Unfortunately, this individual may have a conflict of interest in maintaining their title, their reputation, and/or their school's external image. In August 2024, senior police officers in Sabah called out school officials for refusing to report severe cases of misconduct, with one principal even admitting that they did so to "protect" the school's reputation.⁵⁰ This "open secret" admission of cover-ups shows that school principals are not only unfit to be investigators, but are also unfit as enforcers. To-date, no public action was taken against this principal, reinforcing the status quo of Ministry-wide impunity for egregious misconduct and criminal acts.

2. Conflict of Interest at the MOE Level

Unfortunately, this open secret is not merely at the school level, but also at the MOE itself. If the MOE fails to act, it allows perpetual and thorough immunity for national educator misconduct. In October 2025, the Director General of Education, the second-highest public servant at the MOE, admitted that the MOE was aware of cases of sexual harassment and bullying that had been "swept under the rug".⁵¹ Unfortunately, the MOE provided no comment on whether or not the perpetrators (as well as those orchestrating the cover-ups) were referred for criminal prosecution under the MACC Act, as the law requires.⁵² This report corroborates an earlier admission by former Education Minister Maszlee Malik in October 2025, stating that the MOE was found to have repeatedly covered up cases of misconduct even during his time in office.⁵³

3. Criminal Corruption

To be certain, the act of "protecting" any public servant from disciplinary, civil and/or criminal proceedings is precisely defined as criminal corruption under the MACC Act.⁵⁴ Thus, such cover-ups and protection schemes are not merely *further* misconduct, but have been elevated to criminal acts and must be prosecuted. The repeated confirmation of severe and open criminal activity at the MOE is a clear sign of its unsuitability for conducting internal enforcement and/or referring cases to the Education Services Commission. Unfortunately, this Commission can only be considered quasi-independent as it relies almost entirely on retired senior MOE servants, again opening itself up to the same real and perceived conflicts of interest.

⁵⁰ "Cops: School Officials Should Report Crimes, Not Cover Them Up," *The Star Online*, August 26, 2024, <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2024/08/26/cops-school-officials-should-report-crimes-not-cover-them-up>.

⁵¹ "Many Sexual Harassment, Bullying Cases 'Swept Under Rug': Edu DG," *Malaysiakini*, October 14, 2025, <https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/758040>.

⁵² "Cheap Talk & Cheap Reforms Destroy Our Schools," *Tiada.Guru*, October 15, 2025, <https://tiada.guru/updates/cheap-talk-cheap-reforms-destroy-our-schools-current-moe-has-lost-all-credibility-no-rule-of-law>.

⁵³ Maszlee Malik (@DrMaszleeMalik), "Deep State dan Little Napoleon di KPM," Facebook, October 2, 2025, <https://www.facebook.com/DrMaszleeMalik/posts/pfbid0rH2DkQCjLqFxEKiZrmK64AkJbyQVHDK5A1GLn7Yf2Y68CVNVx9a9aMj7hdGn2Rz3L>.

⁵⁴ "The Law of the Land," *Tiada.Guru*, accessed January 5, 2026, <https://tiada.guru/en/law-of-the-land#macc>. See definition 'f' of 'gratification'.

4. Inadequate Enforcement

As of this report, the government has proposed external investigations with recommendations, but not external enforcement. This loophole is a well-known fatal failure of most oversight mechanisms active to-date in Malaysia, such as the Enforcement Agency Integrity Commission (EAIC), Independent Police Conduct Commission (IPCC), and the Human Rights Commission (SUHAKAM).⁵⁵ This investigate-and-recommend structure does not work against entrenched misconduct and criminal activity, including at the MOE. Key investigative agencies have admitted that federal ministries have refused to act “on recommendation”, particularly in severe cases of misconduct. The most egregious example comes from the MACC, one of the nation’s only criminal investigative bodies. From time to time, the MACC recommends corrective action, instead of enforcement via criminal prosecution. In May 2023, MACC Chief Commissioner Azam Baki admitted that Heads of Department across the public service have ignored the MACC’s recommendations well over 500 times, including in some reports as old as 12 years.⁵⁶ If Heads of Department *already* willingly ignore recommendations from the MACC, then a weakened Public Ombudsman is likely to meet the same, or an even worse, fate. A second example comes from SUHAKAM, Malaysia’s statutory body for human rights. It also suffers from this perennial loophole of “recommendations only”, with no ability to enforce its findings nor recommendations. This loophole was prominently activated by the government in one of SUHAKAM’s highest-profile investigations: in October 2020, the police argued to a High Court that SUHAKAM’s findings were not binding, and thus no action was necessary, even after SUHAKAM’s multi-year investigation found that the police were responsible for the government’s forced disappearances.⁵⁷ To wit, the High Court found that SUHAKAM’s investigation was true.⁵⁸



⁵⁵ Deborah Loh, “EAIC Hamstrung by Lack of Power,” *The Malaysian Bar*, March 18, 2009, <https://www.malaysianbar.org.my/article/news/bar-news/news/eaic-hamstrung-by-lack-of-power>; Tim Leonard, “AIM, SUARAM Slam EAIC Bill,” *The Malaysian Bar*, March 13, 2009, <https://www.malaysianbar.org.my/article/news/bar-news/news/aim-suaram-slam-eaic-bill>; Blake Chen, “IDEAS: Oversight Bodies on IGP Lack Independence,” *Free Malaysia Today*, November 4, 2016, <https://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/nation/2016/11/04/ideas-oversight-bodies-on-igp-lack-independence>. Oversight failures in the EAIC have been reported in various news websites.

Karen Yee Lynn Cheah, “Press Release | IPCC Lacks the Authority to Uphold Police Accountability,” *The Malaysian Bar*, December 22, 2022, <https://www.malaysianbar.org.my/article/news/press-statements/press-statements/press-release-ipcc-lacks-the-authority-to-uphold-police-accountability>; “Malaysia: Proposed Law Reverses Police Reforms,” *Human Rights Watch*, August 28, 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/08/28/malaysia-proposed-law-reverses-police-reforms>; Nor Azizah Mokhtar, “SUARAM Says IPCC a ‘Toothless Tiger,’” *New Straits Times*, January 22, 2024, <https://www.nst.com.my/news/nation/2024/01/1004359/suaram-says-ipcc-toothless-tiger>; Rhea Yasmine Alis Haizan, “A Slew of High-Profile Accusations Puts Malaysia’s New Independent Police Conduct Commission Under Scrutiny,” *Channel News Asia*, January 17, 2024, <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/asia/malaysia-police-commission-ipcc-misconduct-4050961>; “Joint Statement: Empower IPCC to Remedy the Public Trust Deficit in PDRM,” *Amnesty International Malaysia*, January 22, 2024, <https://www.amnesty.my/2024/01/22/empower-ipcc-to-remedy-the-public-trust-deficit-in-pdrm>. Various news articles report on the lack of trust in IPCC.

Zikri Kamarulzaman, “SUHAKAM: We’re Worse than a Toothless Tiger,” *Malaysiakini*, April 15, 2015, <https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/295338>; Rahimy Rahim and Iyia Marsya Iskandar, “Give Commissioner Right to Enforce, Says SUHAKAM,” *The Star Online*, January 19, 2023, <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2023/01/19/give-commissioner-right-to-enforce-says-suhakam>; Nicholas Chan, “Strengthening the Royal Malaysia Police by Enhancing Accountability,” *Policy IDEAS*, no. 33 (Kuala Lumpur: Institute for Democracy and Economic Affairs, 2016), <https://www.ideas.org.my/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Policy-IDEAS-No-33-Strengthening-the-Royal-Malaysia-Police-by-Enhancing-Accountability.pdf>; Arfaeza A. Aziz, “Ex-Rights Commissioner Anwar Slams SUHAKAM,” *Malaysiakini*, July 7, 2006, <https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/53558>. SUHAKAM’s lack of enforcement power has been cited by various parties.

⁵⁶ Aliza Shah and Iyia Marsya Iskandar, “Azam Baki: ‘Dept Heads Ignoring MACC Reports’ [NSTTV],” *NST Online*, May 9, 2023, <https://www.nst.com.my/news/nation/2023/05/907275/azam-baki-dept-heads-ignoring-macc-reports-nsttv>.

⁵⁷ “Police Ask Court to Reject SUHAKAM Findings in Suit by Amri’s Wife,” *Free Malaysia Today*, October 26, 2020, <https://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/nation/2020/10/26/suhakam-findings-not-binding-on-suit-by-activist-amris-wife-say-cops>.

⁵⁸ “Malaysian Court Rules Police and Government Responsible for Pastor and Activist Abduction,” *CNN World*, November 7, 2025, <https://edition.cnn.com/2025/11/06/asia/malaysia-court-ruling-pastor-activist-disappearance-intl-hnk>.

5. Investigative Failures

The most detailed public investigation of MOE misconduct in Malaysia's history was published in July 2023, where the High Court of Kota Kinabalu ruled in favour of three 18-year-old Sabahan plaintiffs alleging severe breaches of the Education Act, the Federal Constitution, and the Public Officers (Conduct and Discipline) Regulations. Its detailed findings establish the failed mechanisms within the MOE, as shown by extracts of the 2020 High Court Judgment reproduced below:⁵⁹

1. *[25] Together with some of her classmates, PW1 had met with Cikgu Kamisah (class teacher of 4SS) and Cikgu Shamsul (assistant class teacher of 4SS) to complain about the first defendant's absences. Instead of taking action, they informed them that they do not want to get involved in the matter and to ignore the first defendant's transgressions.*
2. *[47] ... Despite knowing about the first defendant's [SMK Taun Gusi Teacher Jainal Jamran] absenteeism since May 2017, the second defendant [SMK Taun Gusi Principal Suid Hanapi] failed to take any reasonable steps to exercise disciplinary control and supervision over the first defendant.*
3. *[78] Following the above, the plaintiffs submit that the instances of the first and second defendants' flagrant disregard and abhorrent attitude towards the plaintiffs' education and by extension their future is reflected perfectly in PW10's [SMK Taun Gusi Teacher Nurhaizah Ejab] recorded private conversation with Cikgu Eddy where he had admitted, inter alia, that he knew about the first defendant's absences and, more importantly, that the second defendant was very much aware of it but intentionally neglected to take action....*
4. *[47] The evidence of the second defendant [SMK Taun Gusi Principal Suid Hanapi] that he was only informed about the first defendant's absenteeism in November 2017 is not credible and the court finds the second defendant to be an **unreliable witness**. Despite knowing about the first defendant's absenteeism since May 2017, the second defendant failed to take any reasonable steps to exercise disciplinary control and supervision over the first defendant.*

Most disturbingly, the High Court found that the purported investigator and enforcer, a high-ranking *Pengetua Cemerlang*, was not only in breach of the Federal Constitution, the Education Act and the Public Officers Regulations, but was also well aware of vast misconduct at his school and intentionally refused to act. His severe inconsistencies and changing timelines led the High Court to deem him an "unreliable" witness. One can only question how many other "investigations" he conducted at his former secondary school, and how many of those children still await justice.



⁵⁹ "The 2020 High Court Judgment."

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