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Malaysia weighs tougher action to stem school bullying problem



Starting next January, Malaysian students can be suspended from school for bullying, with the penalty possibly reflected as a “black mark” on their school-leaving certificate. Photo: Malay Mail Online

PUBLISHED: 9:50 PM, OCTOBER 21, 2016

KUALA LUMPUR — Starting next January, Malaysian students can be suspended from school for bullying, with the penalty possibly reflected as a “black mark” on their school-leaving certificate, Education Minister Mahdzir Khalid said.

According to Mr Mahdzir, a national-level committee has been tasked to work on the mechanics of the system, to be rolled out in the next school year. He was elaborating on his statement on Sunday that the ministry was thinking of suspension as a punishment, with bullies getting up to a year in community service or time in a rehabilitation centre before they can come back to school.

“We are not out to punish, but to find a solution to the problem — mainly to stop it from occurring,” he said this week.

The number of bullying cases in schools dropped to about 3,000 last year, from 4,000 in 2014. The latest reported case left a Secondary Two student hospitalised after he was beaten up by

four Secondary Three students in a school in Sungai Petani, Kedah on Aug 29. The victim suffered internal bleeding in the head and bodily injuries.

The punishment for bullying is currently limited to caning and calling in the student's parents.

Mr Mahdzir said all schools, especially secondary schools where most of the cases happen, would set up their own board — consisting of school officials, parents, teachers and others — to evaluate cases of bullying on their premises.

The board will conduct hearings to decide if a student is guilty and, if so, how long to suspend them from school. This will then be submitted to the district education department for endorsement.

“The standard operating procedure of the board hearings will be drawn up by the ministry,” he said. “This is the way to decentralise the operation and not leave it to one person or the ministry to make a decision (on).”

Mr Mahdzir said the national committee was also looking at other options, besides suspension. One of the suggestions was for the parents of the student to come to school every day with their child for a certain period of time to monitor them.

He had said that instances of bullying which had become criminal cases would be left for the police to investigate. Suspended students who were due to sit for major examinations would have to take them the following year.

Ms Noor Azimah Abdul Rahim, chair of the Parent Action Group for Education, said suspension should only be used as a last resort, and urged schools to decide if students needed counselling.

“Some students tend to bully others when they have family problems or if they want attention,” she told the New Straits Times. “If the reason cannot be traced, only then should the suspension be implemented.”

Ms Azimah questioned the wisdom of suspending students for a year without classes or follow-up.

A bully might end up dropping out of school altogether and getting involved in crime, she said.

Mr Mak Chee Kin, chairman of another parents' group, Malacca Action Group for Parents in Education, said he supported the idea of suspension, and that it might force parents to be more involved in teaching their children to respect others.

However, he said a year might be too long, and suggested three to six months for the less severe cases. MALAY MAIL ONLINE