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Letter to the Editor

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Towards environmental literacy

Sahabat Alam Malaysia (SAM) welcomes and fully supports the proposal by Natural Resources and Environment (NRE) Minister Wan Junaidi Tuanku Jaafar to introduce environmental education in schools.

SAM believes that educators of today should promote environmental literacy in schools and as early as in pre-school level. According to the UNESCO-UNEP International Environmental Education Programme, an environmentally literate person is an individual who is able to understand, make informed decisions and act concerning the environment; working individually and collectively in promoting a balance between the quality of life and the quality of the environment.

In Malaysia, environmental education in schools is often sidelined. Thus, a new curriculum with a more holistic approach is needed in achieving environmental literacy. In addition to the current syllabus which has some elements of environmental education infused into several subjects and existing environmental clubs in schools, SAM strongly encourages the NRE and the Education Ministry to implement hands-on initiatives to the pupils.

The hands-on initiatives should focus primarily on outdoor exposure to inspire environmental awareness and action. Among them gardening, farming, river monitoring, learning about trees and forests can provide in-depth, holistic awareness and understanding of the importance of the environment and our relationship with it.

These initiatives not only promote a sense of ownership and appreciation, but also provide a sense of empowerment to the pupils in making a change towards a sustainable lifestyle. It will also help the pupils to be critical thinkers and responsible towards their natural surroundings.

Environmental education should also embed the values of sustainable consumption, sustainable development and of stewardship of natural resources in individuals and communities. The knowledge gained should be translated to attitudes in caring for the environment, working for its defence and protecting its richness.

SAM is willing to provide assistance to the Ministry in creating the curriculum. It is crucial that the pupils of today understand that we are all global citizens living in a global environment; every footprint we leave has its repercussions and affects each and every one of us.

Thus, environmental education is a step in achieving environmental literacy in promoting positive decision-making and action-taking; all towards a cleaner, greener, healthier environment.

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