

Let disabled attend regular schools, say groups

By James Gough

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IPOH — Allowing children with disability to attend regular schools should be encouraged by the Education Ministry, say two organisations involved in pushing for the agenda.

National Early Childhood Intervention Council (NECIC) president Datuk Dr Amar Singh said a meeting with the ministry's director-general Datuk Dr Khair Mohamad Yusof was receptive to the proposal when it was made two months ago and subsequently resulted in a meeting with 30 senior officers.

"The DG (director-general) said he was committed to the proposal of inclusion for

special needs children, but the time for implementation remains to be seen," Amar said at the 5th NECIC Conference opening ceremony here yesterday.

The initiative is being pushed by NECIC and Unicef.

He said there were 475,000 persons registered with disability in 2012, which represented 1.6% of the country's population.

"According to Ministry of Education 1% of that population is in school" he said.

"The figure should be higher. This is because many parents do not favour registering their children as Orang Kurang Upaya (OKU) as it hinders their children's chance for a normal education."

Amar said to include special needs children in regular classrooms, assistance from schools, headmasters and teachers are needed.

"Teachers, too, would like to work with these children, but they just don't know how. We want to work with the teachers," he said.

"Currently, the Education Department's target is to create more special education classes. That is exclusive. We are proposing for it to be more inclusive."

At the conference, Ng Jun Yin, 11, who is autistic, gave a speech and urged people to "see me, not my disabilities. Then everyone will try to 'fix' my problem and forget to look at the real me."

Jun Yin's father, Kelvin Ng Kok Heng said Jun Yin went to a normal school since Year One and would be sitting for his UPSR next year.

"It was a challenge bringing him up but it is worth the effort," Ng described Jun Yin's studies as "better than average".

"He can be in the top five in his class when he does not play too much of computer games," said Ng.

The bi-annual conference this year, themed "Passion has no parameters" attracted 1,000 participants.

The aim is to gather professionals from health, education and social welfare departments together with parents and non-governmental organisations to share and interact on the issues of dealing with children with disabilities.

Loo Lean Lim, 64, from Penang who has a son, Loo Jian Wen, 24, with disability has attended all the conferences.

"This bi-annual event is very useful for me to learn and understand how to deal with this issue. My son has graduated in mass communication and at the last conference, he shared his experience," he said.