

Ensuring school safety is a collective responsibility

The Star Malaysia · 2 Sep 2026 · ASSOC PROF DR NORHASLINDA JAMAIUDIN Department of Political Science and Madani Studies International Islamic University Malaysia

ON July 1, 2026, the Education Ministry issued a circular announcing the launch of the School Pupil Protection Policy, an initiative aimed at enhancing the existing guidelines for protecting students in all educational institutions under it.

The policy is built around five core principles: safeguarding students' interests; upholding their right to freedom of speech; shielding them from threats; preserving their privacy and dignity; and guaranteeing equal access to education, learning opportunities, welfare assistance and participation in all educational settings.

The policy embodies a holistic approach that engages the entire school community in efforts to minimise potential risks to students.

I believe it is important to view this policy as a proactive strategy. While existing laws often respond reactively to incidents, preventive measures are crucial in proactively addressing and reducing violence in schools, given the rise in incidents of bullying, exploitation and abuse that have been highlighted recently.

This protection plan requires participation from all key stakeholders, including school administrators (headmasters and teachers), parents, students, security personnel, canteen staff and others such as Education Ministry and the district education office, who must all sign a "Letter of Compliance".

The Education Ministry had actively engaged with selected primary, secondary and vocational schools to gather valuable input from those most affected – students and teachers. Their concerns, demands, and suggestions were carefully considered and integrated into the policy.

Nevertheless, the announcement sparked strong reactions, particularly among teachers who deemed the requirement to sign the compliance pledge as inappropriate and undermines their ability to provide the best protection for their students.

Their concerns are completely valid, especially without clear explanations on the 11 statements in Section C of the compliance pledge.

How will these statements impact their roles as educators? Will their rights be at risk? What roles do other stakeholders play in this protection policy?

The Education Ministry must focus on refining the implementation of the School Pupil Protection Policy. Raising awareness of this policy's importance is crucial, as even a minor misstep could undermine the efforts invested in its development.

The ministry should have organised meetings with school representatives nationwide before rolling out the policy. These meetings would have provided an opportunity to clarify the processes and key actions outlined in the policy.

Lack of proper explanation can impede efforts to foster a safe school environment.

It's important for the community to recognise that the School Pupil Protection Policy is a collaborative effort that relies on shared responsibility to ensure safety in educational settings. Without a clear understanding of the policy, effective implementation and the right mindset, it may fail to achieve the desired outcomes.