

# MISSION SCHOOLS: CURRENT STATUS AND ISSUES

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## BACKGROUND

Our mission schools in Malaysia were founded after plenty of travailing prayer and with the blood, sweat and tears of the pioneering missionaries and the local community, from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century up to 1958 with the founding of Assunta School and Bukit Bintang Boys' School, Petaling Jaya. Our schools are old schools, with many in the centenarian age. Even our youngest schools are over 40 years old. The founders were the various teaching orders of the Catholic Church, the Methodist Church in Malaysia, the Anglican Church, the Brethren Church, the Presbyterian Church and the Basel Church in Sabah.

From being pioneer schools in favour with the Government(s) of the day in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, our mission schools have had to adhere to the nationalization and centralization policies of Malaysia post independence. The 1961 Education Act and the Aziz Report on the Teaching Services of 1971 resulted in the loss of control of the mission schools by Mission Authorities with the right to hire and fire teachers taken away from the Managing Mission Authority and with 99.9% of teachers in mission schools opting to be Government servants with full benefits.

Today, the total number of mission schools in Malaysia as of January 2008, from the Economic Planning and Research Unit of the Ministry of Education is 410 schools. The total student enrolment in mission schools in Malaysia is 241, 272.

Please refer to Annexure A

– <http://www.assuntaalumni.com/media/missionschools-BasicData.html>

Today, we are reassured that our mission schools are supported by the Ministry of Education, Malaysia in their long term plans for education, the National Education Blueprint, in the cluster school programme and others. We thank the Ministry of Education for such assurances and look forward to the implementation of these promises and assurances.

## CURRENT STATUS

*Mission schools or Missionary Schools* are capital assisted schools or 'sekolah bantuan modal' in the same category as Chinese Conforming Schools and Sekolah Agama Rakyat where the land and buildings of the schools are NOT owned by the Government but by the owners. In the case of our mission schools, the owners are the Mission Authorities, like the various teaching orders and the titular Bishops of the various dioceses of the Catholic Church, the Secretary of the Trustees of the Methodist Church in Malaysia, the relevant Mission Authority for the Anglican Church, the Brethren Church and the Presbyterian church.

After 1971, when nearly all mission school teachers opted to be Government servants, all mission schools opted to be run by the Government. The schools became partially aided Government Assisted Mission Schools with

- (i) all the teaching and subordinate staff appointed and paid by the Government
- (ii) allocations for utilities and subjects on a per capita basis granted by the Ministry of Education
- (iii) the implementation of the national curriculum
- (iv) the enrolment of students under the Ministry of Education

But the maintenance of the buildings as promised under the Aziz Report Review of 1971 did not materialize. Instead all headmasters in mission schools found they had to source out or raise funds to maintain and repair buildings and to buy students' and teachers' tables and chairs. These schools have had to apply for capital assistance once in 2 years or just before elections to get such funds. (If only elections are held every year, our mission schools would benefit more!) The Aziz Report Review promised a dollar for dollar allocation in the construction of new school blocks but this was rarely implemented and school heads found they had to be innovative and resourceful and raise funds themselves with the help of the Boards of Governors and the local community.

This is the status of mission schools today, partially aided, not given the same help as fully aided Government schools because the Mission Authorities own the land and the buildings.

## ISSUES

### **MAINTENANCE GRANTS, QUIT RENTS, BASIC FURNITURE**

We have been asking for annual maintenance grants to repair, renovate, refurbish and repaint our schools because they are housed in old buildings. Roofs leak, water pipes corrode, beams are eaten away by termites, the electrical wiring has to be replaced, floorboards too, drains and internal roads of the schools are full of holes, toilets are ancient and do not work.

With their schools badly in need of funds to repair dilapidated buildings, many mission school heads look with envy at new Government schools looking like hotels and resorts. Can we blame them for grouching over the inequity of the situation? They are Government servants but have to work so much harder. Of course we tell them their mission schools can boast of their character and vintage value.

The solution by the Ministry of Education Authorities is that the land and buildings of our mission schools be completely surrendered to the Government so that it can do all the necessary maintenance work. The Ministry officials tell us that they cannot repair somebody else's property.

Our answer: an anomalous situation occurs here - the Mission Authority gives free and unencumbered use of the land and buildings of the school, usually in prime areas, to the Government, to run, to all intents and purposes, a Government school for national purposes, without charging even a nominal rental. In turn, up to 2002, before intense lobbying bore fruit, the Mission Authority was charged exorbitant quit rents at commercial rates for the land the Government is using.

Today, our Mission Authorities have been granted nominal quit rents of RM1 or RM10 by various State Governments on condition the land status is changed to 'school land' (*tukar syarat*). But they have had to promise that the school will continue to run by the Government. With such legal promises made by the Mission Authorities, we are pleading with the Federal and State Government to give our mission schools annual maintenance grants, if possible under the purview of the Boards of Governors so that the best contractor can be appointed to do the job.

It makes no sense for us to surrender our land – we forfeit owners' rights and also will have no more '*locus standi*', no legal standing whatsoever. Whatever rights or influence the Mission Authorities may have, would disappear as in the case of St. George's Girls' School, Penang. Now, even with the land owned by the Mission Authority, there is no logical reason why students' and teachers' tables and chairs and computers for the schools' ICT laboratories cannot be allocated to mission schools.

For years, we have been told that it is Government policy NOT to give mission schools basic furniture for students and teachers because the land does not belong to the Government. Only this year we found out the rationale – that tables and chairs are developmental expenditure under the Boards of Governors. Our contention is that the tables, chairs and computers are basic necessities of education and do not add to the value of the land and buildings. Whose children are in our schools? Children of taxpaying citizens! Whose teachers are working in our schools? Government servants! If fully aided Government schools are entitled to this basic furniture for the education process, our 'bantuan modal' schools should be eligible. Moreover, our mission schools since 1997 have been classified as '*Sekolah Kebangsaan*' and '*Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan*', that is, national schools, and therefore should be treated no differently from fully aided Government schools.

It does not seem fair, equitable or reasonable that the Boards of Governors deriving no income whatsoever from the schools, not even having control of the school bookshop or the school canteen, should have to foot the bill to buy students' and teachers' tables and chairs.

As for the utilities bills, if the State Education Departments absorb these bills for fully aided Government schools, they should do the same for mission schools.

## **EXTENSION OF LEASES OF MISSION SCHOOLS**

Our mission schools have provided excellent holistic character education. Some leases are expiring within the next 5-20 years. Since our mission schools have proven their worth, we ask for the leases to be extended.

## **PRINCIPLE OF MAXIMUM CONSULTATION**

We ask that the Ministry of Education Malaysia keeps its promises regarding the principle of maximum consultation in the appointment of Headmasters/Principals in our Government Assisted Mission Schools in letter and spirit. It is logical that since the Mission Authorities are owners of the land, they would want the right person who is qualified to be appointed, that if our choice does not quite meet the approval of the

Education Authorities, they would revert to us until an agreeable solution is found. This is what consultation is about, not imposition from above.

We are asking for a mechanism or standard procedures for maximum consultation with mutual agreement and adequate notice that our nominations for such headships are successful. Today successful nominations of our mission candidates depends very much on prayerful effort, vigilance, perseverance and resilience on our part, contingent on goodwill and rapport with the top authorities in the Ministry of Education. But when our last 'Joseph' returns home to the Lord, what will ensure that the principle of maximum consultation takes place to our satisfaction?

In addition with so many promotions to DG52 for cluster school and Sixth Form School headmasters, it becomes a monumental task to find the right candidate in the right category to head such schools. Thus we are asking the top Education Authorities to use their discretionary power to appoint our nominated DG48 education officers to such posts on an acting DG52 basis. The introduction of DG52 and DG54 posts was to make the education service more attractive and not to make it more difficult for us to even do the nominations. Our plea is that such promotions be merit based and equitable.

We also ask for a multiracial teaching force in our mission schools, that more non-Malays be trained as teachers at our Government Teacher Training Colleges and be appointed to promotion posts. If the answer is that not many non-Malays want to be teachers, we ask the Government to launch a campaign to recruit more non-Malays in the teaching profession as has been done for the Police Force and the Army.

In short, we are asking for rational decisions to be made in education so that the interests of all parties be safeguarded.

The other issues which the Malayan Christian Schools' Council is pursuing are contained in our appeal to Y.B. Datuk Seri Hishamuddin bin Tun Hussein Onn, our Honourable Minister of Education dated February 13<sup>th</sup> 2008, a copy of which is enclosed for your perusal (Annexure B)

– [http://www.assuntaalumni.com/media/MCSC\\_to\\_Datuk\\_Hishamuddin.pdf](http://www.assuntaalumni.com/media/MCSC_to_Datuk_Hishamuddin.pdf)

Needless to say, the struggle continues and we solicit your prayers and support. Our standpoint too is that our mission schools are worth fighting for. Look at our mission school products – our alumni who have contributed to every facet of national life and nation building, proof of the efficacy of the mission school ethos and character. We look not only to the Government for the sustenance and flourishing of our schools but to our alumni for we know our alumni love their alma mater with an everlasting love. The ethos and character of our mission schools are distinct and worth preserving, a legacy to be passed on with pride.

16 August 2008