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SPECIAL EDUCATION IN MALAYSIA

Malaysia has a total of 78,310 students with special needs. Special education in Malaysia provides educational opportunities for children with special needs such as those with visual impaired, hearing impaired as well as children with learning disabilities. Students with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), minimal Mental Retardation, specific Learning Difficulties such as Dyslexia and those with Down Syndrome and Autism are placed in the Learning Disabilities (LD) category.

Students with special needs can now choose from three different schooling options: (1) Special education school program for students with visual or hearing impairment; (2) Special Education Integrated Programme (SEIP) where students with learning disabilities, hearing impairment and visual impairment are placed in regular schools but in separate classrooms from their able mainstream peers; and (3) Inclusive education programs where students with special needs will attend regular mainstream classes with their able mainstream peers in regular schools (Ministry of Education, 2013).

Students with special needs are first diagnosed by a Medical practitioner before they are placed accordingly in these categories. Currently only 15,117 students with special needs are in inclusive programs. 60,873 attend SEIP programs, and the remaining 2,320 attend special education schools.

The Ministry of Education of Malaysia decided to integrate students with special needs into the national schools as part of a reform initiative to educate the community and increase awareness on the educational rights of children with special needs (Jelas & Ali, 2012). Schools now are responsible to accept students with special needs, provide appropriate facilities and support to meet the needs of these students (Adams et al., 2016).

The introduction of the “Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013–2025” in 2012 highlights the Malaysian Ministry of Education commitment towards an inclusive education model based on current national policy and international best practices. Among the 11 Key Shifts in the Education Blueprint for transformation and change were that by 2021 to 2025, 75% of students with special needs will be enrolled in inclusive programs, every child with special needs will be provided with high-quality education and all teachers will be equipped with basic understanding and knowledge of special needs.

The Ministry of Education has also launched a one-stop information portal named iSayang for parents of students with special needs. Additionally, the Ministry through the special needs Vocational Programme aimed to equip students with special needs with knowledge, skills, and industry-recognised certification for employment. These vocational institutions were selected based on their facilities and the guarantee of employment upon graduation. Further assistance will be provided for students with special needs to integrate into employment through the Employment Transition Programme in June 2013 with a collaboration with Malaysian Care, a non-governmental organisation. Initiatives such as this were intended to encourage parents of special needs children to come forward and register themselves to access this privilege.
Autism or Autism Spectrum Disorder has grown at an alarming rate. It is reported there is 1 autism child in every 68 child birth (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2014). Autism is a repetitive behaviour disorder that affects the ability of a child to communicate and interact with other people (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

It is not contagious or an illness that will outgrow like flu or cold. It is a disability that results from a child’s nervous system. Autism affects males mostly compared to females (Baron-Cohen, 2002). A diagnosis of autism can typically be made by 4 years old (Arking et. al., 2008).

The causes of Autism are debatable and remain largely unknown. Children with Autism appears to have a few autistic behaviour traits but usually they appear physically normal.

**Spectrum**

is a word that usually best describes Autism which means that every child is different. They vary from mild to severe sign of Autism, depending on the child.

*According to Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorder (DSM-5) (American Psychiatric Association, 1987), the traits of Autism are:*

**A**

A deficit in social communication and interaction which include inability to share interest, emotions, poor verbal and non-verbal communication, no eye-contact and inability to adjust behaviour suiting the social context.

**B**

Restricted, repetitive patterns of behaviour, interest and activities which leads the child to have a stereotyped behaviour (spinning objects, echolalia), difficulties with transitions or small changes, strong attachment to unusual objects and have a hypo or hyperreactivity sensory input.

**C**

The symptoms may be present in early developmental period and causes significant impairment in social, occupational or other important areas that could effect the child’s functioning.
Pictures above shows the characteristics that are usually common in Autism kids based on the diagnostic criteria of DSM-5, however, not all Autistic children have the same characteristics as above.