To test or

not to test

Dr Wan Zahid is urging the Education

"The fault is not with the instrument. It is

"Just like if we misuse a knife for killing

knives but instead enforce its proper use," he

"We should avoid throwing the baby along

In terms of policy planning, Dr Wan Zahid

Ministry to obtain feedback on the efficiency

"When assessment is standardised, you

can make an evaluation of the system, but a

school-based system will not allow you to do

this because the value of an A can vary from

Former education director-general Tan

He said the ministry must be able to

should be able to achieve at each level, and

Once a curriculum has been designed. Dr

Abdul Rahman suggested that the ministry

level through a set of guidelines for the

"As an example, by Year Two, the guide

"Schools are very different so the ministry

must be able to spell out what the minimun

standards are, and ensure students are not

lines must ensure that each child can read

ment," he explained in an interview.

said it was important for the Education

people, it does not mean we should ban

with the bathwater," he said.

Ministry to retain UPSR and PMR.

how we use it

of the system

one school to another.

evaluation," he explained

alternative must be better.

taught, he added.

write and count

integral part of the

system, but how

crucial are they to

Malaysian education

the learning process?

UCH interest has been generated since the proposal to abolish the ian Pencapaian Sekolah Rendal (UPSR) and Penilaian Menengah Rendah (PMR) was made. Deputy Prime Minister and Education

Minister Tan Sri Muhviddin Yassin said on lune 20 that the two examinations could b abolished to remove the pressure of an exam He said the ministry was studying the

change and urged scholars, educationists and various stakeholders to provide input. letters to the editor with suggestions on whether these two examinations should be

One called for a referendum to be held among interested parties since the issue was of national interest while another felt it was necessary to maintain the UPSR, but not the

There have also been calls to look into how many public examinations students should sit for, once they are in the school system and whether examinations were necessary Former education director-general Tan Sri

need to understand the UPSR and PMR. "Roth are about evaluation The ministry does not call the instruments

examination and they are very clear about the

reason why the PMR replaced the SRP wer Certificate of Education Examination) This is because examination is summa-

tive in its nature (an assessment given at a particular point of time to gauge the person's nowledge up to a certain point), while evaluation is formative so that remedial measures can still be taken "PMR was changed from SRP to make the

assessment formative in general, so that remedial measures can be taken.

"It should be such because SRP is no longe The PMR assessment should thus provide

critical feedback to the school for remedial or

while previously the SRP was terminal, meaning that nothing could be done if students

Dr Wan Zahid felt that unfortunately "we ave not been able to completely achieve the formative function of the two assessments so

ey become summative and normative." He suggested injecting some criterion-

Giving the Fardhu Ain assessment as an example he said 17 items were considered a ust knowledge for all Muslims. There is no grade ... only completed or not means you have not completed Fardhu Ain. 'In normative assessment, you will get an

Dr Wan Zahid urged that UPSR and PMR be

achievement achievement Should they stay or go? education in Malaysia, it is time to re-assess our assessment system. Stories by KAREN CHAPMAN, TAN SHIOW CHIN and TAN EE LOO

T some point in their schooling life,

some form of centralised exam. Whether as a form of evaluation, assessment or examination, these paper-based tests are used to ensure that students of the same level have achieved the objectives of the education system they are a part of. In Malaysia, primary school pupils have the Jian Pencapaian Sekolah Rendah (UPSR) at

every student is likely to experience

the end of Year Six, while secondary school-(PMR) at Form Three and the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) or Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia Vokosional (SPMV) at Form Five With Deputy Prime Minister and Education

finister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin having ducation Ministry is still mulling the possibility of doing away with the LIPSR and PMR (see sidebar), the debate for and against these exams has stirred up again. The question StarEducation has posed is: are

hows a positive correlation between exams and learning," says International Medical

"Nowadays, we are talking a lot about

authentic learning and authentic accessment.

than an end-of-the-year exam," he explains.

passing, or not, of exams.

primary school teacher in Australia

teachers inculcate into students

exams really necessary for learning? children's learning to nurture creative and Learning is not about exams He adds: "Continuous assessment is a more "There is no evidence that I'm aware of that

reliable way of looking at the learning proc-University (IMU) Psychology head Prof Dr Ray

are designed to pick up the best rote-

small aspect of the learning process

learners, although memory work is only one

motivate kids to enjoy learning, rather than

His colleague, Faculty of Medicine and

Pook, agrees

Health deputy executive dean Prof Dr Peter

"We should create more curiosity in our

assessment system in Australia for primary and secondary schools relies on continuous

"The type of assessment they have looks at that is assessing life-long learning skills rather broader education skills like communication critical thinking and teamwork, rather than Those sort of skills are assessed by teachers

Learning, he believes, should not be about \*Learning should be about the interest that and through activities like debates, dramas, analysing issues and project work." Although he has only been in Malaysia for He adds that the type of assessment

two years. Prof Wilks speaks from his experience as an education psychologist and former

conducted here is consistent with the type of

one part of holistic education." Mother of two Chua Hooi Dean agrees that if there were no public exams, her children would have more time to explore areas like music and the arts, which could help instill

and curiosity, rather than

mugging for the exams. -SHARON OVINIS / TheStar

mean more opportunities for parents and chil-

"I've always wanted to teach my children to

play the piano, but they are tired most of the

dren to spend quality time together.

samples of students' work to illustrate the standards at each level to ensure the consist

nate inconsistency in marking among schools as moderation of the marks awarded by teac rs for school-based assessments is often cite as a means of addressing the issues of equity and fairness by making adjustments, where with the standards of the MES," she explained

"It is not new as it has been practised in the involves the use of an appointed moderato to re-mark a sample of students' work previously marked by the class teacher.

The marks of the moderator are compared with those of the teacher and the relationship between the two sets of marks are then

If the results are not satisfactory, an adjustment is made to all marks awarded by the teachers to bring them in line to the LIPSR and PMR standards.

Yap said she was sure the ministry would programmes on school-based assessments for the teachers to strengthen their understand-



achievement, while still maintaining public

stand, says: "It's no harm sitting for an exam,

tion system more holistic, there should be

more activity-based learning in the school

"Mowever if the goal is to make the educa-

When there is less emphasis on exams, he

ise activities such as field trips and excursions

contact with nature and discover new learning

pportunities that may not be present in the

Father of four Dr Arzmi Yaacob agrees that

public exams should stay, but does not oppose

"The exams will serve as an indicator for

schools, and will give students positive pres-

tudents to gauge how well they have done in

"It's like a check and balance.

which would allow school children to be in

says, teachers would have more time to organ- hard," she says.

exams, is to lower the weightage given to

ate what the children have learnt and the paperwork would still need to be done," she On whether taking away examinations

Another teacher in a secondary school said study hard, Yap said school-based assessnational-based examinations were important. nents did not mean that students would not "This is to ensure that a grade which is attained in a school in Kedah is similar to the

one in Sabah "If not, I feel the weightage of the grade may not be the same even if the MES gives guidelines for marking in school," she said This she added could lead to problems in the workshop or classroom " she added when selection for residential schools were A senior teacher in a primary school said

With less emphasis on scoring A's, students will have more time for other pursuits like

Father of three Dr Theng L C, who takes that Noor Mohd Junaizee thinks that school-based

sure and motivate them to work hard for what

However, Form Three student Esmerald

assessments are good enough to test students

when we undergo school-based assessment

so it will still motivate me to study and work

"It would definitely take the pressure off the students if the Government ever decides to

abolish the UPSR and PMR," she adds.

school and have more time to pursue m

interest in drama and performing arts.

Chua shares their opinion.

even if the UPSR is abolished.

"Exams are still exams as we need to evalu

Form Two student Sally Lim agrees.

I would probably feel more relaxed in

"However, I'd still study hard for scho

"Children will find going to school and

learning even more fun when there is no pres-

assessments and the SPM," she say

"There is competition among the students

on their knowledge and skills in the subject

they want," he says.

areas they study in school.



sure of getting good grades in exams like the UPSR, which many people use to determine if he child is smart or not," says Chua.

The had aspects of exams

Picking up her point, Prof Pook says: "We

need to understand what the UPSR and PMR are doing: they are actually streaming kids into

"But in terms of psychology, it is actually had to label kids like that. "It's positive reinforcement for the smart

kids — smart, as is defined by our assessment system - but not for the kids who don't do

"The tools that we are using at the moment re picking up all the rote-learners." Adds Prof Wilks: "From a psychological point of view, to label a child of 12 is kind of a

life sentence "Experiments show that if you tell a teacher

hat a child is of a certain achievement level. they will teach to that level.

one-fit-for-all. Some people don't react well used throughout the year, so that all student have an opportunity to show what they have learnt in situations they perform best in.

ones driving our kids

driving our kids.

They won't raise their teaching to the ne

Prof Pook says that it is the negative aspec

"It's not just the assessment system and

education system that needs to be changed

the education system changes, the method

of assessment will also follow suit," says Pro

"Speaking as a former teacher, I have to sa

"Rut a written exam shouldn't he used as

stions to test students on, and also, havin

that we do take comfort in having one set of

that threat of a big exam over our students

under those type of situations.

"It will take an enormous change; but whe

we also have to change as we are the ones

rionists like himself and Prof Wilks.

## Decision soon on exams



Muhyiddin chatting with a Year Six pupil about to sit for the UPSR on the first day at SK Bukit Damansara last September while Education director-general Tan Sri Alimu

ADC to the Deputy Prime Minister DSP Yusni Mohd Jamil (third from left) look on. THE decision on whether to abolish or retain an accurate picture of the situation the Ujian Pencapaian Sekolah Rendah (UPSR)

and Penilaian Menengah Rendah (PMR) will be made in a month or two Deputy Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin said the Government would announce its decision after considering the

views of various stakeholders. "We will hold roundtable discussions will be invited to give their input," he told reporters after opening the National

Pre-School Education Conference 2010 on Muhviddin, who is also Education Minister, said the discussions were impor-

particularly through the media, was encou aging and positive, and would be taken into On June 20. Muhviddin said the two

examinations could be abolished to remove tant as detailed input was needed to obtain system on pupils and students.

"The discussions will start soon and I hav

(Tan Sri Alimuddin Mohd Dom) to make th

Muhviddin reportedly said the decision

to scrap the examinations would take effect

necessary arrangements," he said.

## It must be a better alternative

deprived of further learning," he said. Teachers need to be trained so that any child who does not meet the minimum stand review the whole education system," he said.

"This is not to say that a school-based ards, could be pulled aside and given the things as it is crucial in terms of formative remedial assistance required. "It is important that schools have enough

FROM PAGE 7

medial teachers to do so," he added. in nature because the teacher needs immedi He said teachers also need to ask themate feedback with regards to what has been elves if they have taught their students to the best of their ability.

Dr Abdul Rahman said the success of any Sri Dr Abdul Rahman Arshad welcomed the programme at the school level depends to proposal to abolish the exams but said the large extent on the quality of leadership

"Ry this I mean the school head must know spell out a curriculum on what needs to be

the target to be achieved motivate his teachs, work as a team leader and not just as a

"He or she should also be an inspiration to include the necessary components to ensure the students and be professionally able," he their physical, intellectual and moral develo

Dr Abdul Rahman who is also Clusters of Excellence Advisory Board chairman, said the board had presented to then Education dinister Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Tun Hussein in 2008, a report containing 75 chools could be more effective

Among the proposals forwarded were the hool-based assessment, the abolition of the ele-session schools and smaller class sizes "Perhans the ministry can look at the commendations as a starting point to

Retired super principal Datuk Mary Yap said the Education Ministry's proposal to abolish UPSR and PMR is part of an educaional reform that is set to bring about greater

improvements for the country. be a viable option in place of the nationalhased exams as the assessment system will e presumably designed by the Malaysian

She said that under such a system, the full range of students' achievements will be assessed and recognised at a level equivalent the present UPSR and PMR standards. "In other words, the ministry will certainly

make references to the existing standards of JPSR and PMR and school-based assessment will not lower the existing standards of these two public examinations," she opined.

Yap, who now freelances as a training expert and senior consultant in education. innovations and school transformation, said a proper understanding of the line of demarcation between the teacher's role in guiding the students in school-based assessments and his role in assessing the student's achievement, is

of the teachers and to allay the concerns of the parents and community about it.

One of the advantages of school-based assessment, she added, is that it provides a more comprehensive assessment on students' overall performance and has both a formative

\*Formative assessment involves the collection of evidence about the progress being made by students and using this evidence as feedback to improve teaching and learning,"

The design of school-based assessment is an inseparable part of the process of curriculum planning classroom delivery and assessment and it helps teachers capture the students' learning progress in the form of

technical and vocational schools to assess the skills' subjects with proven records that the students have fared well," she said. Yap said school-based assessments have been adopted by most examination bodies in

the Western countries over the past 20 years to further enhance the quality of learning For example, she said in Hong Kong, the United Kingdom and Australia the weightag given to school-based assessment is about 0% with Canada giving it 100%

Asked what would happen if there was no standardised scoring. Yap was sure the MES would provide detailed marking criteria and

This has already been done for the practiexaminations of the vocational and techni ll subjects, Bahasa Malaysia and English ora

Dr Abdul Rahman says the success of any rogramme at the school level depends on he quality of leadership.

ing on the concept and how to conduct it would mean students were less likely to

"The students' academic performance will still be assessed but in a more diversified mode such as through project work, simple tions, group assignments and practical work