



Klang, Selangor, Malaysia

SMK Kampong Jawa

**How a marginalised school's
fortunes can be turned around**



**WORLD'S
BEST SCHOOL**
Overcoming
Adversity



TEMPLETON WORLD
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**WORLD'S
BEST SCHOOL
PRIZES**

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Introduction

SMK Kampong Jawa, a secondary school in Klang, in the state of Selangor, Malaysia, was once in the bottom two out of the thirty-eight schools in the Klang district but has since seen its academic scores improve by 20%. It has also received an award for the highest online attendance during the pandemic.



Profile:



Country:

Malaysia



Region:

Selangor



School type:

Public school



Location area:

Town



Student population:

2000+



Prize Category:

Overcoming Adversity

“We learned that we have to broaden our networking with the communities, and we must get them involved. Only then would we understand the culture of the school. We want them to reach out.”
– Lynn Ebrahim, Teacher, SMK Kampong Jawa



CONTEXT AND CHALLENGE

In 2017, with 75% of the student body coming from lower-income households, SMK Kampong Jawa was associated with urban poverty, poor attendance, and a loss of trust in the local community. Classrooms were marked by vandalism, theft was commonplace, and vulnerable students were often groomed into local gangs, earning the school the moniker of “Dark Dungeon”.

In those days, school counsellors were overworked, with a backlog of cases, and in some cases even received death threats from gang leaders. Few were committed to the school’s overall success. Some teachers were so demoralised they began requesting transfers to other schools. “The biggest challenge,” says Lynn Ebrahim, a teacher at SMK Kampong Jawa, “was to change the mindset of teachers because they were underrated.

They had no self-esteem because families and the communities really looked down on the school because there was no academic achievement.”

It was denied when the school requested funding from sponsors to purchase better equipment. A year later, the school’s academic results were low: just 59% of its students obtained their leaving school qualifications. The onset of home-based learning in March 2020 only exacerbated the school’s inherent problems, with many students lacking devices or connections to access online education, and teachers lacking the confidence to create engaging lessons or an educational model that would cater to students’ needs.

In the eyes of the wider community, the school was seen as a “lost cause”.



**“Their perception changed...
The community, the parents,
the families around the
school are actually trusting
the school as their school of
choice.”**

**- Lynn Ebrahim, Teacher, SMK Kampong
Jawa**



EXPERTISE AND APPROACH

The school started in a new direction when it was selected as part of the 'Trust School Transformation' programme, led by LeapEd Services, together with Yayasan AMIR and the Malaysian Education Ministry, sponsored by Tenaga Nasional Berhad, Malaysia's national electricity company. In just 632 days SMK Kampong Jawa managed to turn hardship into success.

Another force behind that change came with the appointment of a new Principal in August 2020. "He was the catalyst of change," says Ebrahim. "He empowered the leadership team." The new Principal realigned the school's policies with his vision for change and put into place a long-term model for academic success.

Once the early implementation was underway, SMK Kampong Jawa designed online classes that experimented with breakout rooms and collaborative learning structures. These offered close peer-to-peer support and ensured small group sessions were productive and engaging. As a result, online attendance and academic results started to improve.

The school also focused on the challenges some of its students were facing and began networking with local charities to help those struggling financially. In one case, SMK Kampong Jawa was able to help a student's family move to a better home. The school continued to provide face-to-face and virtual lessons in its classrooms over the course of the pandemic.

Another area of focus, however, was getting students access to online learning. Six teachers decided to lead the staff in learning the essentials of digital pedagogy and online applications to help keep students engaged and facilitate their learning during that period of isolation.



Intern teachers from local universities, KUIS, UITM Puncak Alam, MSU played their roles in delivering engaging online lessons. These intern teachers held small tutorial groups online for the school and community. Teachers also started to embrace professional development, becoming a part of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) to gain access to the best teaching practices. These PLCs soon became a tool for some members of the faculty who were struggling in the profession.

As the teachers' confidence increased, so did their numbers in these online teaching sessions, which focused on collaborative learning, coaching, Assessment for Learning (AFL), and developing their creative problem-solving skills. Some of these sessions were led by school advisors from the Trust School programme, while others were planned and delivered by the school's middle leadership. In total, the programme delivered 32 online sessions in 2021 for Middle Leaders, connecting teachers from across the Trust School network.

At the same time, the school was building rapport with the local community. This allowed them to make over 500 phone calls to parents to check on their children, and school counsellors undertook home visits to those who were not attending. The visits revealed the true nature of the poverty some students were living in and the despair that many families faced. In one case, a family of eight was living in a shipping container after the family had lost their income during the Covid-19 lockdowns. Because of this and other reasons, the three school-aged children had to take turns going to school.



The school began rallying the community to support the families facing such monumental challenges. In the case of the three boys, the school succeeded in raising the funds and buying the necessary items for all three of them to make it back to school.



“We are proud and loud to announce and share to other schools in the world that we embrace every solution.”

**- Lynn Ebrahim, Teacher, SMK
Kampong Jawa**



OUTCOMES AND RESULTS

The school's initiatives led to increased academic success, with academic scores rising by 20%. As a result, the school was recognised for its efforts in digital and online learning, with the highest online attendance award during the pandemic. The school also had an 18% increase in enrollment for the 2021-2022 academic year, which showed that the community and parents had regained their trust.

Due to the Principal's motivation and encouragement, teachers became more inspired and began engaging more with their students. The teacher's scheduled extra lessons and even counsellors grew more comfortable with their roles, focusing on student problems and implementing evidence-based interventions.

The faculty leadership roles became more defined, with Middle Leaders taking charge

of handling Professional Development courses for teachers and other core staff. As a result, several middle leaders were chosen to share pedagogical Best Practices at the district level and have emerged as Master Trainers.

Despite its academic success, the school noted that some students were being left behind. Because of this, it scheduled more home visits. Led by school counsellors, and assisted by members of the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA), the school began to uncover more critical reasons why some students were falling behind in their studies.



Key Steps



NEW LEADERSHIP

The catalyst for change came with the appointment of a new Principal, who encouraged the school's staff to think differently. He and the faculty outlined improvement plans for the school and its wider environment.

Every morning during the first week back from lockdown, the Principal visited every class without fail to motivate students and articulate what he expected from them. His mantras were to “attend school to find success” and “success belongs to those who are patient and work hard”. Slowly, this began to encourage both the students and teachers. He also spoke to parents during Yassin Recital (a weekly religious event for Muslim parents) and during parenting, seminars held online.





ESTABLISHING A SENIOR LEADERSHIP TEAM

The second step is appointing a Senior Leadership Team (SLT), committed to changing the school environment. Using a distributed leadership approach, key team members were empowered to innovate and inspire change in their respective areas.

The team conceived and co-constructed a detailed work plan with Specific, Measurable Achievable, Realistic and Time-bound (SMART) objectives. The work plan consisted of roadmaps and timelines, charting the progress and shortcoming of the school's initiatives to change the wider school environment. All administrators became members of the school 'Think Tank' and were made accountable for specific deliverables.

The SLT sought ideas from teachers, counsellors, parents, and of course students. By bringing the whole school community together, the SLT helped create a collective vision and work ethic to make the change happen.





DIGITAL TEAM

The school then went on to create a 'digital team,' that would help identify the school's IT logistic capacity. However, because the school lacked the budget for a new IT infrastructure, most of the funding came from teachers' own contributions.

Teachers who were confident in their IT skills helped create a plan, also guiding other teachers on how to manage a new norm of learning. Young trainee teachers on training placements in the school helped the more experienced teachers learn and understand new applications.

Digital apps for teaching were specifically selected for their low data (i.e. processing) usage, making them more accessible to students with poor connectivity. The team worked with the local community to raise funds to get students to access to devices, and parents to understand how to support their children. Parents and members of the community were invited to online tutorials, and the whole school team benefited from the innovative, digital approaches.





LESSON ASSESSMENT

Once teachers become more confident in online teaching, and students had better access to digital platforms, the school then began to assess whether students were benefiting from the new lesson plans. In the school's mind, high academic performance depended on high-impact lesson planning, and so it continuously improved and shared the new norms of learning through Continuing Professional Development (CPD) and Professional Learning Communities (PLCs).

Faculty began to adopt best practices when using the school's online assessment, making sure the data captured students' learning. They could then adapt and adjust their teaching styles, based on information analysis, to better suit students' needs.





TARGETED INTERVENTIONS

Once faculty began to effectively track student attendance and outcomes, the school counsellors used the findings to identify struggling students and make targeted interventions. Additionally, the school started to notice that some students were missing out on the opportunities that co-curricular activities afforded them.

The school recognised that students needed to be involved in additional activities to be more competitive for future job and university entrance applications, and order to develop into well-rounded people. Whilst the Ministry of Education mandated that only five sessions of co-curricular were necessary, the school decided to expand the number and ran a total of 33 school activities throughout the year.





COMMUNITY COLLABORATION

As the school moved through the pandemic, it realised it was important to increase networking and collaboration with the local community. It held self-evaluations and gained feedback after each school programme. The main purpose was to collectively analyse and determine areas of improvement. Faculty used Google Forms to elicit feedback from parents, students, and the community. They then shared the findings to iron-out matters arising and any conflicts.

Using that data, the school worked to foster restorative practices aimed at the local community, resolving conflicts and holding individuals and groups accountable. Faculty also focused on families in need, raising and distributing relevant aid and funding.





COMMUNITY OUTREACH

The next step was to work with religious and charitable organisations willing to provide funding for families in need, thereby creating a deeper connection with the local community. The school helped families complete and submit applications and kept track of what help was needed. By ensuring that outside agencies were providing assistance, the school ensured that its students could once again concentrate on their education.



RECOGNISE ACHIEVEMENT

The school made sure that its final step was to celebrate the work of students, parents, and teachers, presenting awards to those who had gone above and beyond the call of duty and to all stakeholders, including parents, who had been supportive of their children.



Advice and Guidance

The school encourages empowering teachers and other faculty members to work towards the one common goal of student wellbeing. Every child matters in the framework of the school's expertise. It is also important to share teaching practices with other institutions and learn what methods are most effective. Appreciating and recognising student and teacher achievements also helps boost morale.

More information

 [smkkj_official](#)

 [wbssmkkj](#)

[Access the school's report](#)

[Read more information about LeadEd's Trust Schools Programme in Malaysia](#)

