

By **REBECCA RAJAENDRAM**
educate@thestar.com.my

WE need to keep the children's imagination captivated if we want them to embrace science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) education.

This is how the Pintar Foundation has been trying to draw school students to the sciences with its Pintar Mobile Learning Unit (PLMU).

The blue bus with no passenger seats but full of STEM exhibits is one of two that made a stop in SK Taman Midah 2, Cheras recently during its second launch for the year.

Back in May, the first PLMU was launched for secondary schools.

Pintar Foundation, a non-profit organisation dedicated towards providing equitable access to quality education for rural and underserved schools in Malaysia, has been sending their two PLMUs across Peninsular Malaysia since 2009 with a different theme adopted every two years.

This year the theme is "Stemworld", says Pintar Foundation chairman Tan Sri Arshad Ayub.

"We know that Malaysia is moving closer to the realisation of its goal to establish a scientific and innovative society by the year 2020.

"Thus, we are always looking at ways to promote STEM as an approach and a way of thinking for educators to help students integrate knowledge across subjects by incorporating beyond classroom learning. It also encourages them to think in a more logical and holistic way in order to be equipped with 21st century skills.

"I believe that if we all rally together on this, our younger generation will have a strong foundation to be digital citizens and future innovators in a rapidly evolving borderless world," he says.

During the launch, Deputy Education Minister Datuk P Kamalanathan says: "To ensure that STEM education is truly exposed to students, the passive teaching method in

Exposing kids to STEM



Kamalanathan launching the Pintar Mobile Learning Unit bus at SK Taman Midah (2) while Arshad looks on.

the classroom needs to be transformed into active learning that emphasises creative ideas and higher order thinking skills."

He adds that the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025 also includes strategies to strengthen STEM education in order to produce more experts in the fields.

These initiatives, he says, take into account the 2014 report on the strategy to achieve a 60:40 ratio of science and technical stream students to arts students.

According to ministry data from 2014, Kamalanathan says that the reverse is the reality with only 47% of school students opting for the science stream.

After exploring the bus, Kamalanathan,

says he found the facilities on the bus "fun" with the cycling exhibit being his favourite.

"Not only do you get to burn calories when you cycle for one-minute, but you also learn how much energy you can produce to power the lights and air conditioning on the bus.

"You can also convert the "calories" to "money" and pick what you would like to spend it on, indirectly teaching economics and budgeting."

He says the concept of linking everyday activities to STEM keeps children excited and would trigger their interest in the field.

The fun and engaging elements of the exhibits - which include computer games and interactive quizzes - will spark children's

interest in STEM and encourage them to take it up in their further studies.

The PLMU is the first Pintar National Programme and remains as one of the most anticipated national programmes for the foundation.

Currently, they maintain two units of buses, and one of them is "Kembara #mydigitalmaker with Pintar", a project collaboration with Malaysia Digital Economy Corporation (MDEC). The buses will run all year to visit Pintar schools.

The PLMUs are expected to visit at least 100 schools this year, with a focus on getting more students per school to enjoy the activity stations for a longer period.