



Australian High Commission
Malaysia

MEDIA RELEASE

**AUSTRALIA AND MALAYSIA CELEBRATE SUCCESSFUL
BRIDGE SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM**

Pulau Ketam, 11 September 2026 – The Australian High Commission in Malaysia, together with Malaysia's Ministry of Education and SMK Pulau Ketam, today celebrated the success of the 2025-2026 *ASEAN-Australia Building Relationships through Intercultural Dialogue and Growing Engagement (BRIDGE) School Partnership Program*, highlighting the strong and enduring education partnership between Australia and Malaysia.

The Australian High Commissioner to Malaysia, Her Excellency Ms Danielle Heinecke was thrilled to visit SMK Pulau Ketam, a BRIDGE participant, for a closing ceremony. Also present at the ceremony were Deputy Director, Teacher Professionalism Division, Malaysia's Ministry of Education Puan Hajah Rossheta binti Abdul Rahman and Principal of SMK Pulau Ketam Mr Mohamed Nizam Bin Banaji. They were joined by Ms Nalini Lohanathan, Head of English Language at SMK Pulau Ketam and Ms Chris Goularas, an English teacher from Adelaide High School – both participants in the 2025-2026 BRIDGE program.

Ms Heinecke said, "Australia and Malaysia are close friends, with education being a cornerstone of our longstanding relationship. The BRIDGE program demonstrates the enduring value of that partnership by creating meaningful opportunities for students and teachers to exchange ideas, strengthen intercultural understanding and develop global perspectives that extend beyond the classroom.

"The partnership between SMK Pulau Ketam and Adelaide High School as part of the BRIDGE program is a great example of the strength of Australia-Malaysia education links and the important role young people play in shaping our shared future."

An initiative under the ASEAN-Australia Centre and delivered in partnership with Asialink as the implementing partner, the BRIDGE program supports partnerships between Australian and Southeast Asian schools, creating opportunities for students and educators to deepen cross-cultural understanding, collaborate on shared projects and forge lasting international connections. Participating schools undertake a comprehensive program of professional learning, student engagement and collaboration including virtual exchanges and reciprocal visits between educators.

Malaysia's Minister of Education, Yang Berhormat Datuk Seri Fadhlinah binti Sidek, reflected on the BRIDGE program, "This program establishes meaningful teaching and learning exchange between Malaysian and Australian schools, it perfectly aligns with Malaysia's aspirations of producing future-ready, resilient global citizens who are deeply grounded in their identity yet fully capable of thriving on the world stage."

Malaysia has continued to demonstrate strong interest in the BRIDGE program, with more than 80 Malaysian schools applying to participate in the recent recruitment rounds. For the current round, Malaysia is the only ASEAN country with two schools selected, which are SMK Pulau Ketam in Selangor and SMK Takis Papar in Sabah. Since 2015, 30 Malaysian schools have participated in the BRIDGE program with Australian schools.

As part of the program, SMK Pulau Ketam partnered with Adelaide High School in South Australia through a range of collaborative initiatives, including First Nations storytelling and a digital pen-pal project using Canva. These initiatives enabled students to explore culture, identity and creativity while fostering friendships and strengthening intercultural understanding across borders.

The partnership also included reciprocal educator exchanges. Ms Nalini visited Adelaide High School in June 2026, while Ms Goularas is currently undertaking a reciprocal visit to SMK Pulau Ketam, providing both educators with valuable opportunities to share teaching practices and strengthen professional networks.

Ms Nalini said, "On behalf of SMK Pulau Ketam, we are delighted to be part of the BRIDGE program in partnership with Adelaide High School. This program has provided a wonderful opportunity for our students to connect across cultures, learn from one another and build lasting friendships. We believe these connections between Australia and Malaysia are incredibly valuable in developing confident, globally minded young people."

Ms Goularas, who is currently visiting SMK Pulau Ketam as part of the reciprocal exchange, said, "My time at SMK Pulau Ketam has shown me how education can bridge cultures and connect people across borders. I consider it a privilege to have met the exceptional staff and students in person, and I can already see the potential for meaningful bonds to form

between them and my students in Adelaide through this shared program. The island school itself is truly unique, and it was lovely to witness the interactions between the staff and students. Everyone I met welcomed me with warmth and generously shared their sense of pride in their school community. I am truly excited to keep building on the connection between our schools with the aim of fostering intercultural understanding and helping shape the global citizens of tomorrow.”

Since its inception in 2008, the BRIDGE program has provided structured opportunities for educators and students across the Indo-Pacific to build cross-cultural understanding, with more than 1,200 schools participating in the program.

Applications for the Round 3 of the BRIDGE program are currently open and will close on 4 October 2026. To apply, please visit <https://asialink.unimelb.edu.au/education/program/asean-australia-bridge/>.

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Note: Imagery can be downloaded [here](#).

Media enquiries: public-affairs-klpr@dfat.gov.au