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# In Kerala school, no sir or madam, only 'teacher'

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Senior Basic School at Olassery village. Express Photo

ADDRESS your teacher as “teacher”, not as “sir” or “madam”, a school in Kerala’s Palakkad district has told its students.

The government-aided Senior Basic School at Olassery village has become the first school in the state to bring in gender neutrality in addressing a teacher. The school, which has a student strength of 300, has nine women teachers and eight male teachers.

The move comes close on the heels of several schools adopting gender-neutral uniforms for the students.

“One of our staff members, Sajeev Kumar V, broached the idea about abandoning the practice of male teachers being addressed as sir. He was inspired by the campaign launched by Palakkad-based social activist Boban Mattumantha to do away with the practice of addressing government officials as ‘sir’.”

Also, similar changes were being brought in by a panchayat not far from the school, the headmaster said.

The Mathoor panchayat, which is 14 km from the school, had taken a decision to do away with the practice of “sir” and “madam” in July last year. The governing body had directed the public to address panchayat staff by their designation.

Venugopalan said the panchayat decision also influenced the school. “We thought why can’t we introduce the same change at our school to bring in gender neutrality in addressing teachers. The move was welcomed by the parents as well.”

they addressed the teachers. Now, nobody calls a male teacher ‘sir’, he said.

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Boban Mattumantha, who has approached the government to do away with the practice of addressing government officials as “sir” or “madam”, said similar changes should happen in schools as well.

“The words ‘sir’ and ‘madam’ are against gender justice. Teachers should be addressed by their designation, not by their gender. The new way of addressing the teachers would help students to create awareness about gender justice. The address of ‘sir’ is a relic of the colonial era, which should be done away,” he said.