



Public Schools in India

This editorial is based on [“We Must Revamp Schools As They Reopen After The Pandemic Break”](#) which was published in Livemint on 21/04/2022. It talks about the scenario of public schools in India and the findings of ASER 2021 about the same.

For Prelims: Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) Report 2021, Unified District Information System for Education (UDISE), Teacher Training, Nipun Bharat Initiative

For Mains: ASER 2021, Public Schools in India, NIPUN Bharat Initiative.

After remaining shut for about two years due to **Covid-19 pandemic**, schools have gradually started re-opening and welcoming children back.

However, with almost two years of absence from school and students having spent most of their time at home with either semi-structured or no educational activity, **managing the school premises would be a bit of a challenge for the students.**

This calls for **urgent actions from schools for resuming structured educational activities** along with assuring **conducive classroom spaces** which are sensitive to the prolonged anxiety, stress and isolation that students face.

The question of school preparedness becomes even more pertinent in light of the **recent trend of [increasing enrolment in government schools](#)** in India.

What are the Recent Developments in the Enrolment Scenario?

- The [Annual Status of Education Report \(ASER\) Report 2021](#) for rural India notes that there has been a **shift in enrolment from private to government schools** between 2018 and 2021 across all grades and among both boys and girls.
 - The increase is most **striking among children enrolled in the lowest grades.**
 - For both girls and boys in **classes I and II**, enrolment in government schools **increased by 9 percentage points and 14.1 percentage points** respectively from **2018 to 2021.**
- Overall, a total of 17 states saw an **increase in enrolment in government schools.**
 - **Uttar Pradesh and Kerala topped the chart** and saw an increase of 13.2 and 11.9 percentage points respectively in enrolment in government schools in the given period.
 - The shift back to government schools **reverses a decade-long trend** where private school enrolment kept growing at the expense of government schools
- **Nagaland and Manipur** saw a **decrease of 11.4 and 13.4 percentage points in enrolment** levels in government schools over the period under review.
- However, the shift has not been to private schools, but is reflected in much larger numbers of

children who are currently **not enrolled** in these states—an increase from **1.1% to 15.5% in Manipur and 1.8% to 19.6% in Nagaland** from 2018 to 2021.

- On average in 2021, the proportion of children aged 6-14 currently not enrolled in school has increased by 2.1 percentage points compared to the 2018 level, with states like Andhra Pradesh (7%), Manipur (15.5%), Nagaland (19.6%) and Telangana (11.8%) showing a high increment in their currently-not-enrolled levels compared to 2018.

What Key Challenges Confront the Government Schools?

- **Learning Level Crisis:** The ASER presented its findings on **‘Learning Levels’ for West Bengal, Chhattisgarh and Karnataka** which showed that there is a learning crisis in these states and the situation might be the same in other states and UTs.
 - In West Bengal, there is a **decline in the proportion of children** enrolled in Class I in government schools who can -
 - **Read letters of the alphabet** (by **7 percentage points** since 2018 and now below 2014 levels)
 - **Read single-digit numbers** (almost **10 percentage point** drop since 2018).
 - In Chhattisgarh for Class I, the proportion of children **who can read letters** has decreased by 8.3 percentage points since 2018 and there is a **10 percentage points drop** in that of government-school students of Class III **who can do subtraction** when 2021 levels are compared to 2018.
- **Poor Infrastructure of Schools:** As per data for 2019-20 from the [Unified District Information System for Education \(UDISE\)](#), only **12% of all government schools had internet facilities** and only **30% had computers**.
 - About 42% of these schools were **without furniture**, 23% without **functional electricity**, 49% without hand-rails, 22% **without ramps for the physically disabled**, and 15% **without WASH facilities** (which include **drinking water, toilets and hand wash basins**).
 - The already poor state of school infrastructure might have further deteriorated in the past two years, during which government schools were either closed or used as makeshift wards for the isolation of covid-positive patients.
- **Insufficient Number of Teachers:** Pandemic disruptions drew attention to the challenges of teachers, who were offering educational and non-educational support to school students across India.
 - Even before the outbreak, the educational landscape of India was mired in a range of challenges - **recruitment and management of teachers, inadequacy of [teacher training](#) and a teacher shortage**.
- **Learning Loss due to Covid:** Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, schools were the ones to **remain shut for the longest period** and several students in government schools belonged to the families that **could not afford to receive [online education](#)**.
 - Consequently, when the schools reopened, **children were unable to catch up with their syllabus**. This posed the biggest challenge to teachers.
 - One-third of children in Classes I and II have not yet seen the inside of a physical classroom.

What can be the Way Forward?

- The rising enrolment levels in government schools offer a chance for the central as well as state governments to **ensure the retention of students**.
 - Schools should identify the children who are lagging behind and **run basic revision and bridge programmes** for them to consolidate their skills of reading, writing, numeracy and comprehension at their own pace.
 - The [Nipun Bharat initiative](#) is a reassuring step in this direction.
- A revamp of school infrastructure is the need of the hour, with a **special focus on information and communication technology**, apart from (including Covid-19 prevention measures) necessitated by risks of the pandemic.
- India faces an acute scarcity of teachers in government schools. This gap needs to be filled to maintain the stipulated [pupil-teacher ratio](#) in these schools.
 - In the light of increased enrolments, it is pertinent to undertake a closer examination of our

present teacher availability.

- **Flexible rescheduling the academic timetable** and exploring options in collaboration with schools, teachers, and parents for providing access to education to a larger section of students.
 - **Giving priority to the less advantaged students** who do not have access to e-learning.
- The shift to government schools in a time of crisis offers a clear indication of people's **expectations of the state's role in providing education** as a matter of right and not just another service.
 - Greater effort is required on the part of all governments in charge of education—at the state and central levels—to **improve the perceptions of various stakeholders** (especially parents and children) **vis-a-vis state-run schooling systems in India.**

Drishti Mains Question

Discuss the key challenges faced by the public schools in India.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions (PYQs)

Q. Consider the following statements: (2018)

(1) As per the Right to Education (RTE) Act, to be eligible for appointment as a teacher in a State, a person would be required to possess the minimum qualification laid down by the concerned State Council of Teacher Education.

(2) As per the RTE Act, for teaching primary classes, a candidate is required to pass a Teacher Eligibility Test conducted in accordance with the National Council of Teacher Education guidelines.

(3) In India, more than 90% of teacher education institutions are directly under the State Governments.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2
- (b) 2 only
- (c) 1 and 3
- (d) 3 only

Ans: (b)