Primary Education in West Bengal

The Scope for Change

Pratichi Institute and *shiksha alochana*

Pratichi Institute
shiksha alochana

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Preface

The present report is the product of a shared exercise by a group of teachers, ranging from primary-school to university level, and socially oriented researchers and activists of West Bengal. Indeed, the report is very much a part of collective action towards ensuring primary education with quality and equity. While the moral commitment and forward-looking activities taken up by this group of teachers and others, assembled on a platform called *shiksha alochana*, amply indicate the scope for positive changes in schooling at the primary level, they also underscore the urgency for some major changes in public policy on primary education and its delivery.

The report is divided into two parts, with a very important appendix. The first part presents the context of discussion in some detail. The second part narrates the experience of change and points out areas of concern, drawing upon the lessons learnt from everyday school practices. The Appendix presents an analysis of the available secondary data on the primary school system in West Bengal. This exercise aims to complement the experiences collected through micro-level practices. The report insists that though motivation is crucial, that alone cannot bring about the required improvements in the delivery

of primary education. Changes in public policies on primary education, with a guarantee of their implementation, are as imperative for the secure delivery of primary education as air and water for the survival of plants.

This study has made a significant departure from the conventional methods of social research. It attempts to place the practical experiences of schooling and school improvement at the heart of the debate on how feasible it might be to improve the state school system. We very much hope that the exercise, perhaps the first of its kind at least in West Bengal, will inspire the teachers and all others involved in the delivery of primary education, and encourage the government and the wider public to address the centrally important concern: quality primary education for all.

Finally, the present report is not in anyway compre-hensive. It did not have the scope of addressing the multiple issues involved in the delivery of education. Yet, we believe that the experience based remedies suggested in the report will be useful for the larger public as well the education planners.

Foreword

Amartya Sen

Improvement of primary education has been one of the principal objectives of the work of the Pratichi Trust since its establishment nearly two decades ago. Our initial focus was very much on the schools of West Bengal, and even though our coverage has geographically broadened since then, we are still particularlyconcerned with what is being achieved in West Bengal (and with the changes that are still needed).

We are particularly keen on subjecting the progress as well as the limitations of schools in West Bengal to continuous assessment and scrutiny. The Pratichi Institute undertakes public discussions on education, health, nutrition, and gender inequality on a regular basis–including holding large annual meetings and smaller forums for regular exchange of views and analyses. The participants include teachers, educational researchers, academic educationists, the interested public, grass root level health workers, and the school children themselves–and of course their parents and guardians. These collective efforts constitute *shiksha alochana*, and they remain

as important today as they have always been in guiding Pratichi's educational efforts. The involvement of school children themselves in these discussions may be unusual, but the success of a school can depend greatly on the direct and first-hand experiences and concerns of the school pupils. Indeed, the analysis of needed improvements can be usefully enriched by drawing on the perspectives of the pupils, and nothing perhaps is, ultimately, as important as the sense of belonging that students of a school may develop. There can be few things as inspiring as the student's perception that "this is my school" and "my voice is important here."

In producing this report, we are guided by *shiksha alochana*, and we also take note of the part that *shiksha alochana* plays on the understanding of what the demands of primary education really are. The illuminating outcome of intense discussions of primary teachers, academics, and activist-researchers is reported in detail in the body of this report. A few of the conclusions can be usefully aired in this brief foreword.

Along with a general expansion of schooling facilities in West Bengal, there has been substantial progress in improving the pupil-teacher ratio (PTR) for West Bengal as a whole. Even though there are some schools still with an unacceptably high PTR, including some with a ratio over 40, the average PTR is now down to a much more favourable ratio of 23 to one. There is scope for redistribution of resources here, since some lucky schools have exceptionally low ratios (even as low as of 12 to one), while others–particularly

in Malda, Murshidabad and North Dinajpur–have to live with very adverse ratios.

There has also been substantial improvements in some of the schools in their functioning and in the learning achievements of their students, partly benefiting from the new educational strategy of "continuous and comprehensive evaluation" (CCE). But in a large number of other schools the implementation of CCE has been quite poor, in contrast with what has been achieved in the "transformed" schools. That gap needs to be closed–or at least systematically reduced.

In improving the functioning of the schools, the cooperation and enthusiasm of the teachers are essential, as we have discussed in our earlier reports as well. The need for leadership, with the encouragement of the unions of primary school teachers, remains critically important. But it must also be noted that many schools need much greater supportive facilities, both of a basic kind (the schools are still under-funded and under-resourced even in terms of very elementary provisions), and in terms of the lack of skilled instructions–and necessary instruments–for music, dance, drawing and sports. This is a substantial resource need, with a deficit that has been estimated to be, on an average, Rs. 69,000 per annum per school (in today's prices).

Similarly, while there have been big improvements in the implementation of the Mid-day Meal programme (and there is certainly a strong case for being happy about this), there is a deficiency of support the government provides. For exam-

ple, the cost of an adequate meal now is above seven rupees per child, whereas the actual governmental allocation is only a little over four rupees.

Finally, one of our long-standing concerns has been the tendency to overload the formal requirements that a student has to fulfil. For example, *Amar Boi*, a textbook for six-year-old students is 348 pages long (which can be rather hard for a 6-year-old even to lift). There is room for some practicality here.

To conclude, the progress of primary education in West Bengal gives us grounds for some satisfaction, but we cannot escape the diagnosis of a number of serious gaps, telling us about additional things that have to be done. Much would depend on the involvement and commitment of the teachers and their sense of confidence, and here we could not but observe a wide variation.

Like in every profession, we teachers too can learn from each other, and collaborative *shiksha alochana* can itself be a way of self-improvement of teaching. However, the need for more resources and facilities fits well with the demands of comprehension and responsible behaviour. Our hope is that along with a fuller understanding of the professional and social commitments of the teachers, governmental provisioning of greater facilities that the schools need would make it easier for teachers to feel more confident and enthusiastic about the work to be done.

Policy reforms and attitudinal developments are closely related. We need both.

Highlights

- Access to primary education in West Bengal has increased substantially. Nevertheless, this does not automatically translate into assured quality education for all. Inequitable delivery is a problem in itself, and as an analysis of secondary data shows, it also becomes a cause of drop out.

- Nevertheless, the equitable delivery of quality education is not an insurmountable challenge. Societal interventions by a section of primary teachers, in collaboration with Pratichi Institute and some academics and researchers, resulting in the creation of a quality-alert platform called shiksha alochana, eminently demonstrate the possibility of change. Their interventions demonstrate how a holistic approach can transform the schools into vibrant social institutions. The activities carried out in the transformed schools bring out the need for interconnectedness rather than isolated efforts.

- The inspiration for these improvements draws substantially on a sense of belonging among children, teachers, and the local community, encapsulated in the shared notion that "It is our school". In all the transformed schools, the most frequent stress was on the importance

of building up a lively relationship between the children, teachers and parents.

● Such initiatives reinforce the basic idea that education is not just about learning the alphabet and numbers, but enabling the students to develop their intellectual, physical and social capabilities. Importantly, enhancing the children's capabilities also results in enhancing the capabilities of the teachers and others involved in running the schools.

While the activities in the schools are rooted in a sense of the intrinsic value of education, their implementation depends primarily upon two inseparable factors: (a) motivation and commitment, and (b) a decent infrastructure to viably translate that motivation and commitment into action.

● Although dedication and a sense of vocation are essential for the proper delivery of education, the political, economic and social conditions of our times have created a system where imparting education cannot rely on volunteerism alone. For example, an exercise involving data collected from 37 schools regarding their minimal requirements for decent functioning shows a deficit of Rs 33,000 per annum. It means the schools must arrange, on average, for a sum of nearly Rs 3,000 per month. Since the transformed schools took the above expenditures as non-negotiable, they had to find ways to make up the shortfall, mainly through contributions from teachers and the local community. But obviously, volunteerism cannot be a general solution. As anybody can guess, schools

that do not have such motivated teachers to organize funds are reduced to meeting the deficit by simply not incurring some items of expenditure, however essential they may be.

- The call for additional funds does not stop there. To run the schools properly, there is an urgent need of skilled instructors in music, dance, drawing and sports, and also to take care of the pre-primary children, at least on a part-time basis. If restructured on these lines, the actual minimum requirement of funds to make a school worthy of the name would imply a huge deficit of Rs 69,000 per annum.

- There have been some important improvements in implementation of the Mid-day Meal programme, but the paucity of funds is still a major cause for concern. While a decent meal would require a conversion cost of at least Rs 7.17 per child per day, the present allocation is only Rs.4.13. There is thus a deficit in conversion cost of Rs. 3.04 per child per day.

- This deficit is met through contributions from teachers and others. But, such an urgent issue cannot be left to voluntary generosity. Moral inspiration cannot and does not always translate into efficiency. There are varying degrees of efficiency among the vast cohort of teachers: some are so efficient that they can arrange funds, official support and local involvement, but there are others who, with every good intention, cannot achieve the same success owing to lack of opportunity, or of exceptional organizational skills that can hardly be demanded of them all.

- There is insufficient provision of human resources in the schools, owing to (a) an actual shortage of teachers, especially for co-curricular activities, and (b) irrational distribution of the existing teachers, further aggravated by lack of their proper training.

- The fact that training programmes are often found to be lifeless has at least partly to do with what an official diagnosed as the lack of "lively flow of information". There is a system in place, but owing to the lack of human resources on the one hand and a deficit in policy orientation on the other, the functioning of the system often suffers from serious ailments. To illustrate: the data collected from two circles in North 24 Parganas and Jhargram districts respectively revealed that only 8 (20%) of the total schools were visited by a school inspector in the previous six months.

- The problem is made acute by a shortage of teachers, mainly owing to uneven distribution. According to government data, 4 per cent of the primary schools in West Bengal are run by only one teacher. While the average pupil teacher ratio (PTR) has dramatically improved to 23, there are many schools with an adverse PTR of over 40, while elsewhere it is 12. In other words, at least 20 per cent of the primary schools in the state suffer from teacher shortages, while many other schools have an excess number of teachers. The problem is acute in Malda, Murshidabad and North Dinajpur.

- The problem of resource distribution is also reflected in the U-DISE 2015-16; it shows

that 847 villages in the state do not have a government-run primary school, while there are villages which have more such facilities than required.

- Gaps in resource provision and training arrange-ments appear to be the parts of a neglected whole. Be it the evaluation of students or preparation of the syllabus, curriculum and text books, any serious observer can sense insensibility and unconcern. The experience of the "transformed" schools shows that proper implementation of "continuous and comprehensive evaluation" (CCE) can bring about radical changes not only in students' learning achievement but in school functioning as a whole. But the CCE is generally implemented in a lacklustre manner.

- The same is the case with textbooks. Of several problems, we give just one instance here, of the Standard One textbook Amar Boi. It contains 348 pages and makes the six-year-old child wrestle with its weight.

- The systemic problems seem to have found an answering response from certain sections of teachers. As our experiences demonstrate, despite myriad odds it is not at all impossible to make considerable progress. There are inherent and imposed difficulties, yet the realization that our children are the future of our civilization can certainly make some difference. Unfortunately, some sections of teachers find a comfort zone in policy deficits: their common refrain is "The system does not allow us to work." A drastic shift in this attitudinal paradigm can only come about throgh a socially informed movement for change – change in both policy and social attitude.

Box-1: The Creation of the Report

- In 2016, the teachers involved in this transformation of primary schools set up *shiksha alochana*, a platform for exchanging views and gathering wider knowledge on school reform.

- Researchers of Pratichi Institute published a report, *schooler maney*— the meaning of a school on the teachers' efforts to transform their schools. Also, some stories of transformation were highlighted by popular newspapers and news channels.

- There was more and more interaction with academics, researchers and other collaborators. From the ensuing discussions, both among teachers and between teachers and other parties, it was increasingly felt that while the altruistic initiative of these teachers was highly laudable, there is need for systemic modification to ensure effective and equitable delivery of education in all the primary schools in the state.

- After several rounds of discussions it was decided to prepare on the basis of the experiences of the teachers and others a report on the scope of positive changes in primary education in West Bengal. Following the decision a two-day workshop was organized on 25-26 February, 2017 at Renuka Debi College, Palashi, Nadia. According to the agreed focus of the present report, teachers shared among themselves the responsibility of writing on specific issues. It was decided that teachers would consult parents and fellow teachers in their area before and after writing the respective parts, and would also discuss the issues with other participants over phone, Whatsapp and email. Also, it was decided to collect information from some of the transformed schools regarding the activities, provisions and resources. Pratichi researchers took up the job of analyzing the available secondary data.

- The teachers' write-ups were presented in a subsequent workshop on 29-30 July, 2017 at the Institute of Development Studies, Kolkata. The framework of the report was also discussed in the meeting.

- Researchers of Pratichi Institute, in consultation with academics, activists and of course the participant teachers, worked the write-ups into an organized structure. This exercise provided Parts One and Two of this report.

- Results of the analysis of secondary data have been presented in the Appendix.

Part 1
The Context of the Report

1.A. Public Discussion as a Vehicle of Change

It has been recognised for decades that the state of school education in India in general is far short of ideal. But this has not resulted in much improvement, at least not in some parts of the country. Public policy has often, though not always, been almost designedly indifferent to the cause. As seen from the report of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), the quality of education delivered in the schools–both the public and the much-lauded private ones–is nowhere near internationally acceptable standards. The concern for quality has also given rise to a huge market for "shadow education"–in the form of private tuition in West Bengal, and coaching centres in many parts of the country. However, we need to be careful lest the very diagnosis adds to the disease. There have been clear signs of some serious efforts to overcome the existing problems. This was made possible by the vocal dissatisfaction among large sections of the Indian public–organisations as well as individuals. The criticism resulted in reformed policies of school education in Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Mizoram, Tripura, Himachal Pradesh and

some other states; this in turn has increased the sense of dissatisfaction and call for reform in other states.

The enactment of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) 2009 is nothing but the cumulative result of a country-wide movement demanding equal and universal opportunity of school education. It is true that the educational guarantee provided through the RTE is confined to elementary level; but there are welcome signals, including the constitution of the Rashtriya Madhyamik Siksha Abhiyan (RMSA), that secondary school education may also be made universal.

Most notably, one vital problem of school education, namely access to schools, has largely been overcome; other infrastructural issues including paucity of teachers, classrooms and so on are also being addressed. The positive results of such interventions can be seen from the enhanced Net Enrolment Ratio (NER), and dramatic improvement in the Pupil-Teacher Ratio (PTR).

Table-1.1. Select Indicators of Progress in Primary Education in West Bengal: 2004-05-2015-16

	2004-05	2015-16
Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) Primary	107	104
Net Enrolment Ratio (NER) Primary	86	94
Pupil Teacher Ratio (Pupil per teacher)	49	23

Source: State Report Card of respective years. PTR for 2004-05 calculated from the Annual Report, 2005-2006, Department of School Education, Government of West Bengal.

Nevertheless, universal access to schools does not, in itself, guarantee equal opportunity of learning for all. Divisions based on social identity, economic class and gender, which have traditionally prevented large numbers of children from attending school, has to some extent been removed through expansion of school infrastructure, launching of the Mid-day Meal scheme etc. All these measures deserve to be applauded.

But while these achievements offer some reassurance, they add substantially to many challenges that lie ahead. The principal challenge is the universalization of learning achievement in order to eliminate exclusion of many children owing to their historically constructed disadvantaged background, involving factors like poverty; caste divisions; belonging to minority religious, linguistic and cultural groups; and being girls. There is a plethora of evidence to show that the poor and inequitable functioning of schools is not only due to the teachers' much-criticized irregular attendance and discriminatory treatment of children in the classroom but also, in many cases, owing to pedagogical deficiencies including neglect of teachers' education. These problems have led to children helplessly quitting their studies mid-way.

Public efforts and deliberations, based on various types of interaction–for example, between parents and teachers; professionals from higher education and primary education; and with social activists and public officials, political bodies such as teachers' unions and social outfits, the

media, the intelligentsia and so on–are crucial in translating the goal of equitable education into reality. Modest as they are, the Pratichi Trust's efforts at public dissemination of research findings on the primary school system have created a much-needed awareness of the issues. Helped immensely by media reports, the functionality of our schools has become a focal point of societal debate, so that some schools at least have greatly improved in operation. The Mid-day Meal programme has made a lot of difference not only in raising the attendance of children but also in the actual delivery of education. Moreover, it has generated a lot of public discussion and debate, drawing public attention towards the delivery of primary education generally.

The importance of public deliberation can be gauged from a fact related to the implementation of the RTE. In the initial phase of the implementation of the RTE, teachers were found not only indifferent but also hostile to the Act. They were made to believe through various channels that it was meant for privatizing the education system entirely, and that it was an instrument of oppression against the teachers. Such beliefs were constructed through hearsay, as most of the teachers had no real knowledge about the Act. Only a fortunate few had access to the original document, and even if others could find it from different sources, they could hardly comprehend the substance of the legislative directions, for the document was in English– to be precise, legal English. Perplexing as the situation was, it required some immediate steps

to be taken. The Pratichi Trust prepared a Bangla translation of the document; and with support of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Kolkata, organised a series of workshops on the issue and circulated limited copies of the translation of the Act. This small intervention made a lot of difference. Teachers became ready to discuss the issue, and as mentioned above, one of the teachers' unions took the initiative to carry out a survey of the preparedness of the school system to implement the Act.

A major problem with our educational planning is the hierarchical structure of the system, so that the scope to practise democracy at various levels is very limited. But research and practice bear out that horizontality in the planning process could play a very fruitful role here, as many of the problems caused by faulty planning can be resolved at the planning level itself by meaningful use of the real-life experiences of ground-level practitioners.

Lessons learnt from an exercise carried out by us can usefully illustrate the point. The Pratichi Trust organized a series of teachers' writing workshops where a total of 400 teachers recorded in writing their day-to-day experience of school functioning. The write-ups were vastly illuminating, as they did not just talk about the problems but presented many solutions to specific problems of teaching and learning, parent-teacher collaboration, operation of the Mid-day Meal programme, improvement of school infrastructure and environment through local participation, and so on. Some of the write-

ups were so brilliant that they would adorn the post-editorial pages of vernacular newspapers. A selection with analysis has been compiled by us in a volume with the title *Kolomchari – Penwalk.*[1]

While planned participation at all levels of policy formulation and implementation has huge advantages, a lack of the same can be irretrievably counterproductive. For example, the RTE provisions of 'no detention', 'continuous and comprehensive evaluation (CCE)' and 'no corporal punishment' have been taken from scientifically developed notions across the globe. But given the practices of detention, annual examination and corporal punishment in the Indian school system for generations, the ideas came to teachers and parents as a shock. Their unreadiness to accept the new concepts made them so resistant that they interpreted them mechanically and absolutely, hence in a totally negative way. Many teachers told us that they felt discouraged to teach, as they found no reason for teaching: "If the children are automatically promoted to higher grades, what is the point of teaching?"

Some teachers and parents still complain that the system has made the students, or at least some sections among them, indifferent towards studies. "Why should they take interest in studies when they are promoted to the next class without doing any work?" they ask. This view is rooted in the convention of annual examinations that, in effect, holds the students responsible for the

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1. An English translation is available at pratichi.org/content/penwalk-experiences-primary-teaching-west-bengal-glimpses-teachers' writings-workshops

outcome. Yet some teachers have enviable clarity about the scientific basis of these issues, and put the question in the right perspective: students come to school since they cannot learn everything on their own, so it is the school's responsibility to steer them to achieve the desired level of learning. But the conventional examination system creates a huge escape route for the entire school system by suggesting that students fail because they either lack merit or do not work hard.

When CCE was introduced, it was burdened with the baggage of the old puritanic exam-centred values. Hence the radical reform implicit in CCE was taken by many as a mere routine affair: it did not fire the imagination of the educators. The main idea of CCE is to assess the entire schooling process, the achievement of both students and teachers. Continuous evaluation allows immense scope for the teacher to identify the students' strengths and weaknesses on an individual and everyday basis, and accordingly take remedial measures. Unfortunately, a grave lack of initiative on the part of the authorities, as of other agencies including teachers' unions, academics and media, to highlight this deeper scientific aspect of evaluation left the very concept of CCE distorted and vulgarized. Teachers with a clearer understanding of the matter were not involved, as they could have been, as resource persons to motivate their colleagues. Had their views been consulted during the planning process, the entire teaching community could have been much more easily reconciled to the whole principle of CCE. Also, had these teachers been involved in training

and orientation of their colleagues, and provision made to listen to dissenting voices, the essential goals of the RTE could have been implemented much more productively.

While coercive law has its own power to exact compliance, it suffers from an inherent inability to stir people's moral sentiments and voluntary commitments. Yet morality is inseparably linked to pluralistic thinking, based on mutual respect and accommodation, and serving to spread those values further. Education being a freedom-enhancing activity, its operation is separable from freedom based on interactive deliberations.

1.B. *shiksha alochana:* **Demonstrating Social Morality**

Over the past five years, the interactions initiated by Pratichi have played a substantial part in organizing teachers into a platform to enhance primary education by transforming the primary schools. The platform, called *shiksha alochana* ("Discussing Education"), is the initiative of a number of primary school teachers, Pratichi Institute, and some academics and activists of West Bengal. It aims to enhance primary education in West Bengal through interactions between primary school teachers across the state at one level, and between teachers and the larger public at another. The goal of viable change being the main driving force behind its foundation, *shiksha alochana* has actively propagated the positive changes brought about by some teachers in alliance with local communities, with the aim

of expanding their reach and number.

The initiative begun in a handful of schools chiefly in two districts, North 24 Parganas and South Dinajpur, has now struck roots in about 200 schools across twenty districts of the state. Demolishing the popular belief that absenteeism and indifference are congenital characteristics of primary school teachers, many of them have come in proactive contact with *shiksha alochana*'s campaign to transform the supposedly malfunctioning primary schools into centres for effective delivery of education. More encouragingly still, many teachers have found a very positive response to their invitation to poor and disadvantaged communities to participate in this transformation.

While hailing the outstanding dedication and commitment of the organizers of *shiksha alochana*, we should point out that its formation was not the outcome of good intentions alone. Rather, it called for strong social commitment, answering to a deep (if largely silent) social revulsion at the unprincipled dilution of our expectations from school education in recent times. With growing repudiation of the meaning and content of education, the publicly delivered school system that should have guarded the founding principles of education–freedom, equality, and justice– has tended to take a reverse route, allowing the powerful to turn the blessing of education into a mere commodity, and leaving the disempowered in the hands of destiny. Socially meaningful research by the Pratichi Trust alongside other organizations and individual researchers, has

played a crucial role by not only exposing the inadequacies of the state education system but also reinforcing the social demand to restore the meaning and content of education within the public school system itself. That some teachers, no matter how small their number, have come up, with extraordinary courage and empathy, to transform the schools into fruitful social institutions by ensuring greater participation of children, parents, and teachers finely exemplifies this social demand for positive change. Recognition of this social demand has brought teachers and researchers to a jointly conceived platform for social action.

Of course, this did not happen overnight. It took several years to develop, through plentiful discussions informed by research findings and practical experience, with the skill to build up an effective platform for discussion, action and further research, and to enhance individual and social capabilities. In other words, the agenda covered all the vital sectors: teaching and learning, research and documentation, and public engagement.

The formal decision to create the platform was taken at a meeting of teachers, researchers and other activists in 2015. The focus of discussion chiefly centred on how to improve the quality of teaching and learning. In 2016, *shiksha alochana* held its first annual general meeting. By this time, its members had been enriched by sharing thoughts and practices that gave them a deeper grasp of the overall functioning of a school. It now decided to prepare a report on

primary education in West Bengal, based on the experience of teachers who had already wrought a significant change in the life of their own schools. In 2017, it went further by developing a concrete plan of action that would contribute meaningfully to teaching and learning, overall school development, community participation, and school and community health.

The main strategy of the movement is interactive deliberation. In one direction, members of *shiksha alochana* are engaged in creating, gathering, and sharing positive experiences, and in applying them creatively in their own sphere of work. At the same time, efforts are on to generate more discussion on educational issues among the larger public–intellectuals, media, government officials–and to draw policy attention to some basic issues concerning the delivery of education. Experience shows that the promises (or perils) within the movement's ambit are linked to many other aspects besides teachers' commitment and community zeal, though these undeniably play a central role in transforming the schools. The stumbling blocks, too, are inseparably connected with public policies on education in particular, and public delivery of services in general. These impediments include: the gap between the number of teachers required and those available; deficiencies in teachers' training; the absence of teaching posts for co-curricular activities like music, drawing and sports, essential for the proper functioning of schools. But perhaps the biggest problem relates to the very process of designing public policies, which hardly takes into

account the grassroot realities in which the chief implementers–in this case teachers–carry out their work. Here, *shiksha alochana*'s pivotal role has been to showcase examples of positive change, as also to document and discuss widely the process of those changes in order to underline the policy needs.

Towards achieving the goal of making quality schooling available for all, shiksha alochana's activities seek to enhance the capabilities of its members through discussion, exchange and action. This has come from the recognition of plurality in the delivery of education with respect to both needs and content. Children have varying inclinations and each child is different from her fellows; this requires the teacher to acquire the ability to address the individual needs of each child. This ability can be best developed through interactive practices–interaction between teachers, between teachers and students, and between teachers and the local community, especially parents. Beyond teaching and learning, interactive practices are central to reforming the school physically–making the school ambience, classrooms, mid-day meal and sanitary facilities functional and enjoyable. Accordingly, members of shiksha alochana have been carrying out a series of activities. These include teachers' workshops on subject teaching, community participation, identifying the gaps, etc. on the one hand; and on the other, various school-based innovative activities like reading festivals, mathematics festivals, language festivals, mothers' festivals, sports, wall magazines, annual school magazines,

teaching and learning outside the class rooms, excursions, and so on. Some of the writings and drawings by select children of some of the schools engaged in this movement for has been able to arouse interest of a publishing house, Annapurna Publishers, of Kolkata to publish in 2018 a compilation of such works, entitled *Ganga Faring.*

As a part of these efforts and initiatives, a group of 22 committed and inspired teachers, some academics and researchers assembled for a rigorous two-day workshop at Renuka Devi College, Palashi, Nadia District on 25-26 February 2017 to discuss the preparation of a report which would not only contribute to our knowledge of the delivery of primary education, but would also help in organizing teachers and communities across the state to quicken the pace of change. It was decided that the report will focus on the changes required in policy formulation and implementation as felt by the teachers and communities in their respective areas. Teachers divided among themselves the task of preparing preliminary inputs for the report. The write-ups were presented in another workshop held at the Institute of Development Studies, Kolkata on 29-30 July 2017. Researchers and academics helped give shape to the report. Besides these two large workshops, there were several rounds of consultation between the contributors. In short, the preparation of the report was a fully participatory exercise. Each and every participant contributed to the report in two ways: by taking part in the writing, and by gathering input from

parents and others that went into their own contributions.

Hence this report has benefited immensely from ground-level experience of the reality of the changes that the teachers have themselves wrought.

Part 2

The Scope of and Requirements for Change

2.A. The Meaning of a School

"*Sir, kemon achhen?*–How are you, sir?" The sociability demonstrated in this question, asked by students of a primary school in West Bengal, is not just about manners. It contains within itself a long and interwoven story of transformation–transforming what their school stood for. The village in question is located in a remote corner of Murshidabad district. Almost the entire population is uncertain about obtaining two square meals a day. Moreover, the greater part of the adult population has very little exposure to alphabets and numbers. Not that there was no school in the village: it was established in the 1950s, but "*thekeo chilona*"– it was and wasn't there. This intriguing comment by a local woman, whose daughters were among the students greeting the visitors to the school, implied her having acquired, since that time, a new sense of what a school stands for: a place where children not only learn reading, writing and numeracy, but where they are at home, a place they love to be in. "*bari jete chayna*"–they don't want to go home, said

the mother. Their teachers love them so much that they often ride on the teachers' shoulders, and can freely ask them questions or even point out the latter's behavioural shortcomings if they find any.

In another school in the same district, all the teachers were seen wearing light sleeveless jackets round the year.

– What made you wear a jacket on this hot July day?

– There's a story behind it. One day a child asked us, "If the children are made to wear school uniform, why aren't the teachers?" Her point was jubilantly supported by other students. So we met the same day to discuss the children's contention. One of our colleagues thought it a very positive sign: "It means we have succeeded to some extent in doing what is expected from us, namely imparting education. The primary goal of education is to encourage children to ask questions without fear. So we have to respect their suggestion."

– So you decided to wear the jacket as your school uniform?

– It took a long time to decide. The children had raised an issue bearing on their very perception of the school: it is a space shared by everybody involved in the process of schooling. So we invited the mid-day meal cooks to the meeting–they too are part and parcel of the school. The discussion went on for hours. There were many suggestions including different uniforms for teachers and cooks, or for men and women. Finally we agreed

upon a neutral uniform.

Another example of children's developing such fearlessness is as follows. A group of people were visiting a school in South Dinajpur district. There was a billboard at the entrance requesting everyone to leave the shoes outside, but somehow it did not attract the notice of the visitors–they just walked in. The children assembled on the verandah, however, did not fail to notice this, and asked the visitors politely to remove their shoes. In another school, some visitors threw empty plastic tea-cups on the school grounds. The children started picking them up and put them into the bin. The gesture embarrassed at least one visitor, who quickly joined the children in their chore.

The activities carried out in these schools followed an understanding that insisted upon teamwork and interaction rather than isolated acts. Take, for example, the issue of cleanliness and hygienic practices. Through sustained initiatives taken by the schools, the children have developed the habit of using the toilets and keeping them clean, and washing their hands after using the toilets as well as before and after the mid-day meal. In some of the villages, the influence has extended to the children's families. Many of the teachers have taken pains to universalize the sanitation programme in their villages. Thus, besides the practical outcomes for health and hygiene, the activities of 'hand wash' and the proper use of toilets have contributed richly towards building up empathy, companionship and collective action. In many of the schools, any visitor will be

emotionally moved at seeing the older children help the younger ones wash their hands, use the toilets, and eat their lunch. Similarly, collectively organized activities in many schools include cleaning the premises, watering the plants in the garden, conducting sports and games and other so-called non-academic practices on the one hand, and cultural activities, wall magazines, and other academic complementarities in the broadest sense.

It is not just the smart habits of the children or their collective involvement in various activities that make a school a school. The underlying inspiration derives from a sense of belonging among children, teachers, and the local community alike: "It is our school." It comes from a series of schooling activities: teaching and learning inside and outside the classroom; recitation, dance, drama and music; sports and games; drawing, painting and toy-making; wall magazines, story sessions, news reading, using the library; organizing the mid-day meal, practising cleanliness, fostering companionship among students; and, of course, interaction with the parents and local communities. Data collected from 37 primary schools that have transformed themselves into inclusive social institutions show that aside from teaching and learning, these schools are engaged in a wide range of activities (Table 2.1).

Table-2.1. Distribution of Schools by Type of Activities other than Textbook-based Interactions (Number of reporting Schools =37)

Type of activity	Proportion of schools pursuing the activity (%)	Frequency of activity
Dance and music	95	daily to monthly
Drawing	95	daily to quarterly
Acting	57	weekly to weekly
Sports and games	92	daily to weekly
Recitation	89	daily to monthly
Story telling	92	daily to weekly
Quiz	78	daily to quarterly
Functional Library	78	daily to weekly
News reading	89	daily to weekly
Wall magazine	65	monthly to yearly
Printed magazine	22	monthly to yearly
Nail checking	100	daily to fortnightly
Washing hands	97	Daily
Toilet flushing	97	Daily
Toilet cleaning	97	daily to weekly
Gardening	62	Daily
Kitchen garden	27	Daily
Sky-watching, excursion, household survey on social issues, reading festivals, children's fair	89	—
Parents' meeting	100	monthly to weekly
Teachers' visit to parents	89	weekly to monthly
Parents' visit to school	100	Daily
Parents' cooperation in school development	89	—

The activities listed above are neither comprehensive nor universally practised. They vary from school to school, depending upon the infrastructure, local social settings, degree of leadership among the teachers, and other factors. There is, however, a common notional thread

that links the transformed schools together and sustains their transformation: the idea that education must focus on the children's deeper acquisitions and capabilities. Importantly, the process of enhancing the children's capabilities also enhances the capabilities of the teachers and all others involved in the functioning of the schools. For example, the teachers need to expand their range of reading, to develop their writing skills, to learn new things, and to interact with parents and others; above all, it greatly enhances their imagination and broadens their professional horizons. Similarly, in several cases the transformation has enhanced the parents', especially the mothers', level of learning. Setting up of community libraries in some of the transformed schools was a result of growing demand from the parents, mainly mothers, to increase their opportunity to read books and magazines.

While these activities are rooted in the philosophy of education, their implementation depends primarily on two inseparable factors: (a) motivation and commitment, and (b) a viable infrastructure to effectively translate that impetus into reality. The motivation and commitment is often demanded of the teachers alone; but it has to involve a range of other agents of educational delivery–policy makers and implementers, parents and the local community, and the students themselves. The motivation and commitment of one group depends greatly upon that of the rest In the schools in question, the very high level of students' motivation first ensues from the

teachers, and then from the parents who have been motivated by the teachers. Again, while in some schools, the teachers' motivation was emboldened by parental support, in other areas the lack of parental support has had a negative impact on the teacher's motivation.

While local sources of motivation and commitment are important, a conducive public policy on education is essential to generate and sustain the enthusiasm required for the delivery of education. To illustrate this point, in many schools both teachers and parents are highly dedicated to the cause, but policy failures often depress their efforts to motivate the children. Policy failures entail a wide range of deficiencies and organizational weaknesses: shortage of teachers (chiefly owing to uneven distribution), lack of proper training for teachers, inadequacy of funds, absence of mechanisms for democratic participation of the various concerned groups, and so on (more on this presently). Indeed, lack of policy support has made it enormously difficult for the transformed schools to carry out the activities that make them a second home for the children and institutions of their own for the local people.

The extraordinary courage and social commitment of the teachers and local people have made it possible to "reach the impossible" in certain schools. But, it will be unrealistic and unfair to demand that teachers everywhere show the same degree of the motivation and selfless resolution. However, the experiences gathered from the 'transformed' schools can be immensely educative.

They show that it is feasible to transform poorly functioning schools into vibrant centres of capability enhancement. They also demonstrate that such change is largely contingent on a robust systemic arrangement based on sound policy and its effective implementation. The following part of the report illustrates these contentions.

2.B. Stories of Transformation: An Overview

Even a few years back, most of the schools from where teachers have joined the platform of *shiksha alochana* had a depressing look. In most cases, the school routine began with a prayer meeting followed by some classes, and closed after the mid-day meal. Instead of summarizing the process of transformation one by one, let us describe in some detail one instance that substantially overlaps with the rest.

About half a decade ago, a primary school in South Dinajpur District was almost defunct. The school building was almost derelict, without a boundary wall, so that cattle grazed freely on the grounds; coming to school was a mere pastime for the children; even the Mid-day Meal programme had stopped for several months. Two newly joined teachers were utterly confused: what could they do here? Children of Standard 4 did not know the alphabet; not even half the enrolled students attended school daily; the huge cracks in classroom walls made perfect shelters for snakes and other vermin, while rodents bored deep holes in the floor. The teachers spent a few days observing and measuring the situation, and thinking up ways and means to change it.

Their first challenge was to ensure that all the children attended school on a regular basis. This required at least two things: the children had to find the school interesting, and the parents find it worthwhile to send their children to school. It was not the classrooms or the so-called teaching-learning activities that brought success; rather it was a series of activities outside the classroom, from simple conversations to singing songs and playing football, that established a bond between the children and the teachers. This relationship quickly expanded to a bonding with the school. At the same time, the teachers endeavoured to extend the relationship further by bringing the parents closer to the school. At first they met them at the village corners, and then started visiting their homes. They encouraged them to talk–not just about the school or their children's education but also, or even more, about their lives and livelihood, the village environment, their customs and practices, and so on. Most of the time they spent with the parents was devoted to listening. Basically, before taking up regular teaching, they had to learn a lot from the children, the parents, and the local setting.

Having made an entry into the social space, the teachers' next challenge was to improve the level of basic learning. As mentioned above, even students of Standard 4 could not recognize letters or numbers. There were fifty children and only two teachers. It was not possible for them to make good these deficiencies in the normal course of schooling: it called for additional efforts. So, they began coming to school much earlier than the

scheduled time, and leaving much later as well, so that they could teach the children in batches. But the learning gap was so wide that their efforts still fell short. The local community now came forward to help. Next door to the school was a club, a few of whose members had the basic skills of reading and writing. The teachers asked them to volunteer their help in ensuring children's studies out of school hours. The request was welcomed by the members, who attended to the children in the morning and evening, before and after school.

This was nothing but a sorry makeshift arrangement. The inadequacy of regular teachers could not be compensated by such voluntary initiatives. Nonetheless, through collective effort, the system was developed in such a way that besides classroom teaching and learning, a space was created for many other activities – drawing, singing, dancing, sports, drama, cleaning the school grounds and classrooms, and so on. It needs special mention that the villagers were very poor and could not contribute financially to these activities. Hence the teachers had to undertake the burden of organizing the additional funds required to bettering the infrastructure and improving the quality of teaching and learning. As regards infrastructure, they had to arrange money to buy utensils for the mid-day meal, fence the school premises, renovate the crumbling school building, buy an audio system, and acquire material for sports and for creative and cultural activities. To improve the quality of education, they had to organize sports and cultural activities,

which again called for special skills; so they had to hire on part-time instructors in these various skills. Moreover, when the pre-primary class was introduced without any provision for additional teachers, they had to hire a local girl on a part-time basis to help with the extra students. The government-allocated fund was too meagre to meet the expenditure; so the teachers had to take special initiatives to fill up the gap – collecting money from well-wishers where possible, and paying from their own pockets if required.

By pursuing the matter untiringly at the official level, the stopped Mid-day Meal Programme was re-launched. Toilets were set up. Most importantly, funds were allocated for a new school building. With the reintroduction of the school meal and the setting up of toilets, children were taught to wash their hands with soap before and after the meal, and to use and clean the toilets properly. Going further, the teachers coordinated with local government departments to arrange for a toilet in every house in the village.

Faster than one might expect, the school took on a completely different aspect. Lack of reading, writing and numerical skills is now a thing of the past. The walls are full of children's writings and drawings. The children have a shop of their own without any salesperson: they take what they need – pencils, exercise books, erasers – and drop the price into a box. The toilets in the school are spick and span. Preparation and serving of the mid-day meal is admirably organized. The cooks wear caps and gloves; the meal is served on tables; the water used for washing-up is purified through

a sand-bed device, and afterwards used to clean the toilets and irrigate the kitchen garden. The field outside is lush green.

Outside the school campus is another kitchen garden, set up and maintained by the villagers for the school meal. Those who let their cattle graze in the school ground now net the animals' mouths lest they should damage the trees and plants. The entire village is linked up to an audio system set up inside the school. If there is a school function, this enables villagers at least to listen to it if domestic or other engagements do not allow them to attend in person. The old school building has been renovated for use as a guest house in one portion, and a public library for the parents and other villagers in the other.

The school has by now received several awards from the state and Union governments, and has become a sort of pilgrimage site for people interested in education.

The trajectory of transformation was not necessarily the same in all the schools. Different schools followed different routes. Yet one element was common to all the endeavours: empathy, which in these schools has given a new meaning to the relationship between children and teachers, and between the school and the local community.

In all the transformed schools, the greatest emphasis was on building up a lively relationship between the children and the teachers. Children would not come to the school, or at least try not to, if the teacher appeared frightening or indifferent. Any onlooker can see the difference

by visiting one of the transformed schools. Let us look at one in Nadia.

The school is located in a village difficult of access, inhabited mostly by poor farm labourers. Most of the children attending the schools are the first generation to do so in their families. In such a scenario, traditional social norms do not allow the students to come close to the teachers. Keeping a distance from the teacher used to be taken as a mark of respect; the stern teacher would be considered successful by local society. The efforts of the present teachers in this school have completely changed the scene: children climb on the shoulders of the teachers, play with them, and ask hundreds of questions. Teachers not only know all the 200-odd students by name but also know where they live, as they frequently visit their homes, especially to enquire about their wellbeing when they miss out on school. Such absence, however, is a rarity, occasioned only when children fall ill. As a mother describes it:

> The children don't want to come back home from school. Had the school been open 24 hours, I think they wouldn't have returned home at all… We are their parents, but they love the teachers more than they love us…This is obvious, because they spend most of their time in the school, in fact more than they spend with us.

Important though it is, affection alone can neither ensure a productive relationship between children and teachers, nor develop a sense of belonging among the children – a prerequisite for making school education successful. The emotive bond does not work in isolation; it is

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the complementarity of cordiality, teaching-learning and other enjoyable activities in the school, involvement of the local community in the schooling process, and the ambience of the school that make the relationship happen. It is important to realize that the relationship is a dynamic process of *happening*, not something *given* once and for all. This happening, in the transformed schools, has taken a route where teaching and learning have found a new meaning. In such schools, teaching involves a set of activities listed in Table 2.1. This reinvention of teaching requires the teachers to keep thinking how to add more and more innovations to the process of teaching and learning. This urge among a section of teachers to innovate, despite a severe lack of effective training to guide them in doing so, led to their tackling the problem as a personal challenge: they involved themselves individually and collectively to develop new methods of teaching, handling difficult situations like teaching children from extremely unequal socio-economic settings, diverse levels and competencies, and other obstacles. The methods they devised were then shared with other teachers to be fine-tuned and multiplied through continuous practice.

Most importantly, the innovations were devised to address practical problems encountered during the teaching-learning process. For example, in one school, one among 30-odd children was so weak in her studies, especially in arithmetic, that even her parents feared she had special learning problems and would have to drop out of school. The teacher reports:

What could be done? In the arithmetic class, the child would sit quietly, looking blank, while others were excitedly doing their classwork. I was clueless. But if there is a problem, there is a solution; and this solution came miraculously. One day a high-school boy was going down the road outside the school on stilts made of locally produced bamboo. All of a sudden, the girl brightened up: "Ran-pa, ran-pa, ami charbo (Stilts, stilts: I'll ride on them)", she cried. I went out and asked the boy if he would lend his stilt for a few minutes. He obliged. I brought the stilts into the school and gave them to the girl. I stood by to help, but she didn't need any. She started running on the stilts. When the boy came to take them back, she was very sad. So with the help of some villagers I made a pair of stilts for her; every morning, I would bring them to her and ask her to count the steps she took. What a surprise! Her progress in counting and then in numerical exercises was unbelievably quick. In a few months, she gained so much ground that she met all the requirements of her course. Now she is studying in high school, in Standard 6.

A plethora of teaching-learning materials prepared jointly by teachers and children have made all the transformed schools much richer in classroom resources than they used to be a few years ago.

2.C. The Urgency of Systemic Reorganization

Telling the larger public–through the popular media, or by organizing workshops and meetings –the story of these transformed schools elicits two different responses. The first is a kind of scepticism rooted in the negligible number of such schools. It is often asked, "How can only

a few hundred examples be replicated in 67,000-odd primary-level institutions (formal primary schools and Shishu Shiksha Kendras)? Can the example of a handful of self-motivated teachers work any substantial overall change in primary education in West Bengal? What about the large number of schools where children of Standard 4 cannot even recognize the letters and numbers? Can the task of universal and equitable delivery of such a crucially important public good, namely, education, be left entirely as a societal responsibility?" Such scepticism is at least well-intentioned. It contrasts sharply with the second reaction, mainly from those in positions of power – political leaders and the educational bureaucracy. Let us hear some common responses to the problem of delivery of education:

– *Sab thik ache*–everything's fine. Some people are maligning us to belittle our government's achievements. There may be some minor problems, but our government is leaving no stone unturned to solve them. It's all a conspiracy against the government: look at the pile of court cases over the recruitment of teachers. In fact, our government has solved almost all the problems.

– You know, the main problem is that parents don't care. They don't send their children to school, don't supervise their homework; they employ them in domestic work or set them to earn some income.

– Basically, it's the teachers that are responsible for the poor learning achievement of the children. There's no shortage of teachers, no lack of infrastructure. The government has provided everything. So, why shouldn't the children reach the expected level of learning? The government

cannot change the attitude of the teachers: what can the government do if they don't teach? Look at the schools that are winning various awards. If some teachers can transform their schools, why not the others?

Logical and necessary as it may appear, making improvements in educational delivery exclusively contingent on teachers' motivation and their individual efficiency is not only counter-productive but contrary to the meaning and practice of education.

Firstly, though volunteerism and a sense of vocation is an intrinsic element of the educational process, our political-economic and social conditions have given birth to a system where delivery of education demands many other inputs. The very notion of formal employment of teachers involves certain norms based on economic exchange. And in a society with multiple divisions and varied class interests, the demand for omnipresent volunteerism is totally unreal. Every teacher cannot be expected to have the same degree of motivation. Still more deplorably, examples of subjective motivation being thwarted by objective realities are the exception rather than the rule.

Secondly, moral inspiration cannot and does not always translate into efficiency. There are varying degrees of efficiency among the vast cohort of teachers. While some have the gift to realize their motivation by organizing things in a socially productive way, others often lack that ability. This is also the case among the members of shiksha alochana: some are efficient enough to arrange

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funds, official support and local involvement, while others, no less well-intentioned, cannot do the same owing to their lack of organizational skills.

Thirdly, and most importantly, there are important locational and socio-constitutional variations that can frustrate both the moral inspiration and the organizational skill of the teachers. For example, in all the transformed schools, a great part of the material requirements have been contributed by the local society–parents as well as others (more on this presently). But in some places, the parents and local community are economically so fragile that they cannot contribute to the schools in cash or kind. So, the enthusiastic teachers, who have taken the task of transforming the schools as their moral responsibility, have had to arrange for the required resources out of their own pocket or from friends and well-wishers. But, the difficulty of sustaining such arrangements in the long run has already had a reverse impact on the children's performance and the school's as a whole.

In a word, state-wide action under public policy is vital to pollinate the teachers' motivation by supporting them in various ways. Unfortunately, the situation often takes the opposite turn in practice.

We discuss below some of the urgent issues that demand immediate systemic reorganization.

2.D. Inadequacy of Funds

Reports on educational delivery often tend to focus on the availability of teachers, classrooms,

toilets, kitchen sheds and libraries–and rightly so, for of course these are crucial prerequisites. Unfortunately, similar stress is not laid on the basic requirements for day-to-day functioning of the schools. Data collected from 37 schools about their minimal needs shows a deficit of Rs 33,000 per annum (presented in Table 2.2). It needs to be mentioned that the shortages of funds for implementing the Mid-day Meal Programme has not been included in this calculation. We will discuss the issue of mid-day meals issue separately.

Table-2.2. Requirement Versus Allocation of Funds for Meeting Day-to-Day Expenses of Schooling

Items	Annual amount required (in Rs)
Cleaning materials	1500
Sports and games	6000
Electricity bill	6000
Cultural functions	6000
Stationeries	3000
Parents' meetings	3000
Internet	6000
Evaluation	6000
Medical kit	2000
Prizes	6000
Total expenditure	**45500**
Grants received from the School Education Department (School Grant Rs. 7,500 + School Maintenance Fund Rs. 5,000)	12500*
Deficit	**33000**

* As per the U-DISE 2015-16, primary schools were granted an annual sum of Rs 17,496 on average. The sum reportedly varied between Rs 16,032 and Rs 20,567 according to the enrolment strength of the schools (see Table 3.4). Nevertheless, teachers in the schools reported that they only received an

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annual amount of Rs 12,500 (Rs. 7,500 as school development grant and Rs. 5,000 as school maintenance fund). The allocation for Teaching and Learning Materials (TLM) has been discontinued. In some districts the grant amount is even less–pnly Rs. 10,000 per annum (school grant Rs. 5,000 + school maintenance fund Rs. 5,000).

How is this deficit met? Since the transformed schools took the above expenditures as non-negotiable, they had to find avenues to make up the shortfall, mainly through contributions from teachers and the local community. It meant the schools had to arrange an average sum of Rs 3,000 per month. Clearly, volunteerism cannot be solution for running the schools. So as anyone might guess, schools which do not have such motivated teachers are reduced to meet the deficit by leaving out some items of expenditure, however essential they may be.

The need for additional funds does not end there. As can be seen from the activities carried out by the transformed schools, there is a need for human resources with special expertise in music, dance, drawing and sports. Since these activities have been taken as integral to schooling, most of the transformed schools have organized such expert services from the local youth on a semi-voluntary basis. For example, in one of the schools, two local youths help with the sports and cultural activities respectively. A teacher of the school with links to persons with resources has managed to collect some money to pay the two volunteers Rs 1,000 a month. In another school, a relatively "less efficient" teacher could muster support to pay a volunteer to give dancing and singing lessons to the children. As an ex-army man, the teacher himself has taken the onus of

helping the children in physical exercises, sports and games!

The paucity of funds, stemming from policy lacunae–financial planning and provision not matching ground-level requirements–has been aggravated by a recent policy decision. The Government of West Bengal decided to launch a pre-primary class in every primary school for children below 6 years of age. But this decision has not been backed up by providing additional teachers for the pre-primary section. Shortage of teachers has been a major problem for many decades, for the country in general and West Bengal in particular.[2] The implementation of the Right to Education Act was expected to solve this problem. But the mechanically designed norms for deployment of teachers have hardly made any effective impact, being based on enrolment rather than the number of classes. Thus a school with 60 students can have two teachers, but with four classes to teach (in West Bengal, most primary schools go up to Standard 4), while logically there should be at least four teachers to teach four classes.

The second problem relates to another political and bureaucratic legacy: a huge disparity in the distribution of teachers. Teachers with "connections" manage to find a posting in the locality of their choice. As a result, while some areas suffer from a serious shortage of teachers,

2. The Pratichi Education Report I, Delhi : TLM Books in association with Pratichi Trust, 2002 and The Pratichi Education Rport II, Delhi : TLM Books in association with Pratichi Trust, 2009 had drawn attention in this issue.

others have more than the norms require. The new addition of a pre-primary class has aggravated the problem. A teacher's description of their strategy to come to terms with the situation relates to the additional need, and subsequent provision, of funds:

> What to do? We are the only two teachers in the school, and now there are five classes. Also, to be honest, we do not have any experience or training in handling pre-primary children. It has been recognized worldwide that women are best at caring for small children, as they have the patience and natural instincts for the task... So we held a meeting with parents and other villagers. It was decided to ask a local Madhyamik-passed girl to take care of the pre-primary class. She agreed. We could not accept her services on a completely voluntary basis, so we decided to compensate her a monthly amount of Rs. 1,000. Since villagers were too poor to contribute much, the teachers decided to pay the major share from their pockets, leaving the community to contribute a token amount… We were already spending some money to hire a music instructor. While one part of her remuneration (Rs. 1,000 a month) was provided by well-wishers, the rest came again from the teachers' pockets… To tell you the truth, we have to spend about Rs 2,500 every month from our pockets to meet various school-related expenditures including temporary recruitment of instructors, which is crucially important for effective functioning of the school.

If the calculations are restructured to incorporate the actual minimum requirement of funds for a school worthy of the name, there appears a huge deficit of Rs. 69,000, as reflected in Table 2.3.

**Table-2.3. Minimum Annual Requirement of Funds
for a School to Run Decently**

Description	Requirement (in Rs)	Total Deficit (in Rs)
Annual deficit in terms of day-to-day expenses	33000	33000
One additional instructor for sports (Rs.1000 x 12 months)	12000	45000
Second additional teacher for cultural activities (Rs.1000 x 12 months)	12000	57000
Third additional instructor for pre-primary class (Rs.1000 x 12 months)	12000	69000

Ideally, there should be an adequate number of regular teachers for different schooling activities including teaching and learning, arts and culture, and sports. Nevertheless, given the financial constraints of the government, it may not be feasible to provide regular teachers for all these activities. But as seen from the experience of some of the schools, it may not be very difficult to organize auxiliary resources by offering a modest remuneration to educated unemployed youth in the rural areas. It would have the dual benefit of running the schools more effectively, and providing some financial relief to our huge body of unemployed (basically unutilized) youths. Such suggestions, though discussed in public forums, have not so far attracted policy attention. Nevertheless, any further delay in addressing the issue of minimum resource requirements– material as well as human – will potentially result in far more damaging consequences.

2.E. Inadequate Provision for Mid-day Meal

The cooked mid-day meal (MDM) has proved to be a crucially important intervention in the field of school education. By assuaging classroom hunger, it has played a major role in inducing children from disadvantaged backgrounds to attend school. It has also had several impacts on the school education system: generating public debate on elementary education, attracting parents and others to take part in the day-to-day functioning of the schools, reducing teachers' absenteeism, and so on. After more than a decade of the programme's functioning in West Bengal, the initial cynicism has been put to rest, particularly after overcoming the challenges of launching the programme in the urban areas. Also, infrastructural provisions have improved.

All these factors have changed public perception of the Mid-day Meal Programme. Initially regarded as a "dole" for hungry children from the poorest families, it has gradually found an important place among schooling activities. The idea has gained ground that the school is home for the children during certain hours, hence taking a meal at school is as normal as eating at home. Having applauding the successes, one cannot however overlook the challenges that the schools face in running the programme. The greatest difficulty is inadequate allocation of conversion costs. The approved rates are lower than prevailing market prices. There is no explicit provision for eggs or animal protein, which should be a crucially important component of the mid-day meal. A calculation of the actual

Table-2.4. Estimation of conversion cost of Mid-day Meal (per meal/per child)

Item	Provision of Quantity	Estimated rate	Estimated cost per day (in Rs.)
Pulses	20 gms daily	Rs 100 per kg.	2.00
Vegetables	50 gms daily	Rs. 30 per kg	1.50
Oil and fat	5 gms daily	Rs. 100 per kg	0.50
Salt and condiments	–	–	0.40
Fuel	–	–	1.10
Total			5.50
Egg*	One egg twice a week	@Rs 5 per egg	1.67
Grand total			7.17
Approved budget			4.13
Deficit			**3.04**

cost, set against the approved budget, is given in Table 2.4.

2.F. Teachers' Training

Inadequate provision of human resources in the schools, owing to (a) actual shortage of teachers, especially for co-curricular activities, and (b) irrational distribution of the existing teachers, is further aggravated by lack of proper training. Of the 373 teachers with whom we interacted while compiling this report, only 37 (10%) had reportedly received subject training in full. Most of the teachers had received training in one or more subjects; but since all the teachers are expected to teach all subjects, it is essential that all teachers receive training in all subjects. Despite prior training being mandatory for teachers' appointments, in-service training in individual subjects as well as in general teaching-learning methods is essential. This is specially so in our

state where the entire syllabus, curriculum and textbooks have been changed in recent years.

Besides the coverage gap in training, the deficit in content, process and outcomes of training is even more worrying. Training is often carried out in lecture mode, without scope for discussion or of incorporating the experiences of the teachers. As an education department official told us on condition of anonymity:

> There is a gross lack of planning. Organizing a training programme is no joke. First you have to identify the needs, which requires a lively flow of information. Unfortunately we have not developed this. The content of the training programme is decided at the state headquarters. The system works mechanically. One fine morning comes the order: "Organize such and such training in such and such district and send the compliance report by such and such date!" There is no preparation of any sort. Dates matter, compliance certificates matter, the actual training does not.

The experience of teachers who attend such training programmes reflect the official's caustic remarks:

> As you sow, so shall you reap. How can one blame the teachers for sticking to the traditional methods of teaching? Look at the process of training. Teachers are made to gather in a room where the trainer lectures about joyful learning. The whole affair is so dull that some fall asleep, others chat with each other or play with their mobile phones. There is hardly any room for participation. Some trainers are of questionable ability, making things even more difficult… Understandably, most teachers cannot internalize the proceedings of such a mechanical exercise. It's difficult to imagine

any improvement in teaching and learning after such a training, which is nothing more than a ritual. Our classroom experiences [in the transformed schools] show a continuous interaction between the students and the teacher. Each student has different requirements. Each has different strengths and weaknesses. The same is the case with teachers–they are students at the training sessions, and their individual problems need to be addressed. In class [in the transformed schools] students often solve problems through mutual interaction: when a student raises a problem, the teacher asks the class to gather ideas about its solution. The process is beneficial in two ways: by finding a better way to solve the problem– students often come up with brilliant ideas–and by encouraging cerebral participation of the whole class. But our training programs seldom follow such participatory practices.

2.G. Gap in Procedural Coordination

The reason why training programs are often so lifeless is partially connected with what the official quoted above diagnosed as the lack of a "lively flow of information". There is a system in place, but its functioning often suffers from serious ailments owing to lack of human resources on one hand and deficient policy orientation on the other. To illustrate, data collected from two circles, in North 24 Pargana and Jhargram districts respectively, revealed that only 8 (20%) of the total number of schools had been visited by a school inspector in the previous six months; another 8 (20%) had not had such a visit in the past one year. It is a serious question how the system can be energized with a "lively flow of

information" without direct contact between the schools and the school education department.

Then comes the question of the actual inspection carried out during the visits. In most cases, for obvious reasons, inspectors find very little time to experience the schooling activities. In the said circles, each of the inspectors had more than 100 schools under their purview. In many areas, they are saddled with charge of more than one circle as, according to an official of the Directorate of School Education, the state has a huge number of vacancies (32%) for the post of school inspectors at primary level. In addition, the inspectors are overburdened with various "official" responsibilities that hardly allow them to play their desired role of academic facilitators. The West Bengal Government's recent decision to appoint ad hoc "School Education Advisers" instead of filling up the vacant posts of SIs may be advantageous for the Government: it will not have to abide by the rules and procedures of the Public Service Commission. It could give people temporary appointments, perhaps at a lower pay, to be renewed every year. But the price that is to be paid is huge: such "advisers", alienated from the living processes of the education system, will not tend to have much concern for the delivery of education.

The shortage of inspectors, and their being overburdened with "other" duties, indicate a massive policy neglect that has not only resulted in a lacklustre system of coordination but, over time, also passed on a message to the entire educational community about the department's

perception of the inspectorial system: It is unimportant! "You cannot even imagine how hard pressed we inspectors are," sighed a school inspector.

> We are like toothless tigers—*dhal nei taloyar nei, nidhiram sardar.* We have hundreds of schools to cover, spread across a large area; there may be no public transport over much of it. We have no official vehicle. To visit the schools, we often have to ride pillion on a teacher's motorbike… The practical constraints often defeat your professional obligation. You cannot even be as strict as you should with erring teachersand institutions… Our job is academic, but only in theory. In practice we are mere clerks. The whole education system is running in project mode, without comprehensive planning. And the school inspectors' services are engaged to "get through the program–*program namiye dewa*"… We very much want to perform our academic duties, but have hardly any scope to do so.

Even a little opportunity to function as academic facilitators can produce excellent results. In a few areas within *shiksha alochana*'s reach, some excellent relationships have developed between the school inspectors and the teachers. Like the teachers, these school inspectors are exceptionally motivated toward improving primary education. Their facilitating role in the transformative practices–helping the teachers in various ways, as well as learning from the innovative activities carried out in some schools and sharing them with others–demonstrates how important the school inspectors' role could be. But again, in the absence of systemic support, we cannot force everyone to voluntarily sacrifice their personal

lives and leap into the breach to bring overnight changes.

2.H. Feeble Academic Planning

Gaps in resource provision and training arrangements appear to be endemic features of a neglected whole. The neglect is everywhere. Be it the evaluation of students or preparation of the syllabus, curriculum, and textbooks, any serious observer can sense the insensibility and unconcern. Take for example the practice of continuous and comprehensive evaluation (CCE). It has been reduced to nothing but a new name for the old system of examination. The original idea behind CCE–evaluating the achievement of both students and teachers on a day to day basis–has been consigned to oblivion. True implementation of CCE would require a huge reform of the whole schooling system, from supply of material provisions to academic orientation, planning and practices. The experience of the transformed schools shows that proper implementation of CCE can bring about radical changes not only in the students' learning achievement, but also in the entire functioning of the school. What the teachers have realized with their extraordinary altruism and zeal is remarkable, but it is unfair to expect a universal translation of their commitment. Hence there is a need for radical systemic reform.

Such is also the case with textbooks. We cite here just one problem out of several: the Standard 1 textbook, *Amar Boi*. It contains 348 pages and makes the six-year-old child wrestle with its weight.

The irrational behaviour guiding educational policy can be seen from the textbooks: each of them contains 3-4 pages of "messages" from the authorities. What purpose these bulky messages may serve is beyond the reach of reason. They certainly cannot be meant for the children to read. Why then waste public money by printing millions of pages of no obvious use?

On the other hand there is no handbook containing the syllabus, curriculum and guidelines for teachers let alone for the public in general. Yet such a handbook is essential for any teacher, for her entire academic planning is supposed to be based on this.

2.I. Unconcerned Teachers

The systemic problems seem to have found an answering response from sections of teachers. As our experiences demonstrate, it is not at all impossible to make assured progress despite myriad odds. There are both inherent and imposed difficulties, but the perception that our children are the future of our civilization can inspire us to make some difference. Unfortunately, some sections of teachers create a comfort zone for themselves in the policy deficits: "The system does not allow us to work" is a most cherished premise among them. The possibility of a drastic shift in this attitude lies in a socially informed movement for change in both policy and the social mindset. Public policy and the social psyche are not mutually exclusive; they complement each other. We have to break the artificial barrier separating them.

2.J. The Menace of Private Tuition

The Pratichi Education Report I diagnosed private tuition as a regrettable feature that gave rise to class division in the arena of school education. Necessitated through the poor functioning of the school, private tuition even at the primary level has become culturally ingrained in our society. Various studies have found that 60 to 80 per cent of the children at primary level take private tuition. Even the poorest parents compete with their relatively affluent counterparts by arranging private tuition for their children. In the perception of a teacher of one of the best performing schools,

> "There is no need for either homework or private tuition. Yet parents insist that their children should take private tuition. After prolonged efforts, we have been able to curb this practice to a great extent, yet parents of five of the 381 children in our school could not be convinced that their children could do well without private tuition."

During a conversation with a researcher of the team that has prepared this report, a parent said, "The teachers teach very well. We have no complaint against them. But private tuition will improve the learning level of my child." Notwithstanding its varied and often dubious quality, private tuition was seen by the parents to impart a certain quality to their children's education. While it is true that the increased extent of private tuition shows the parents' concern about quality of learning, in most cases it becomes counterproductive. Most private tutors, especially in the rural areas, are unemployed

youths whose teaching methods often proceed by a contrary route to those practised in the school. The teachers, though they may not have fully grasped the modern methods of teaching, blame the clash between the two methods for the students' poor performance.

Deep rooted as it is, the examples of the transformed school show that the menace of private tuition is not invincible. That 376 of 381 children in a school do not go for tuition amply proves the role of the school's performance which can make this artificial necessity redundant.

2.K. Uneven Distribution of Resources

In the Appendix to this report, we present a quantitative analysis of the distribution of schools in West Bengal with their teacher strength and infrastructural resources, drawing on secondary data. To give a snapshot view, the data reveals a pattern of spatial inequality in the public provision of primary education. For example, we notice the concentration of Shishu Shiksha Kendras (SSKs) in a particular cluster of districts. Again, though the average Pupil Teacher Ratio (PTR) at primary level in the state has come down to 23, the distribution of teachers shows a worrying unevenness–it ranges between 14 and 44 (details given in the Appendix). Even more disturbing is the fact that the state has not only failed to abolish the phenomenon of single teacher schools, but their proportion has actually increased from 3.3 percent in 2014-15 to 4 percent in 2015-16. Also, a sizeable number of schools (6.5 %) have only one classroom for all the students of various

classes. The policy oversight in addressing such palpable inter-school disparities requires urgent attention.

2.L. Constraints of Larger Public Participation

The experience of the teachers involved in shiksha alochana, and of others as well, bear out the possibility of wider public participation in the functioning of the schools. As described earlier in this report, one of the major driving forces behind the success of the transformed schools is the unstinted support of the parents and the local community in their day-to-day functioning. Local communities prove eager to take an active part in the functioning of the schools. Unfortunately, both public policy and the attitude of a section of teachers play a detrimental role in utilizing this invaluable resource. The bureaucratically formed School Management Committees (SMCs) are in many cases found to be defunct; parents' meetings are rarely organized, and even when they are, the rate of attendance is often very thin owing to the mechanical procedure for convening them. For example, in several areas, sections of teachers say that the poor attendance proves that parents are not interested in attending the meetings. But the parents have a different story to tell: meetings are often organized during school hours, which clash with the parents' working time.

Indeed, the principle of general participation has not yet found its true meaning in the delivery of education. There is little room for the teachers to take part in the formulation of policies; parents have little room to participate in school

governance unless teachers proactively involve them in it. Iit is important to explore different ways to liaise with educational authorities at various levels, from the Education Department to curriculum committees and school boards, so that the voices and views of school teachers reach the corridors of educational planning.

2.M. A Concluding Remark

At a time when anything in the state-owned or public sphere is frowned upon, this report indicates how publicly owned state-run schools can be improved through collective efforts of schoolteachers, parents, administrators, educationists and other public-spirited participants. The idea behind this report is not simply to deplore the problems that often impair the optimal functioning of government schools; on the contrary, its aim is to understand better the everyday, undramatic character of such difficulties, so that they can be fixed by means very much ibn our collective power. No less importantly, its goal is to foreground instances in which positive changes have been accomplished in state schools, holding out the promise of "possibilism" within the state school system itself. To put it differently, this report underlines the need to both defend and radically improve state-run schools. To that end, we would suggest a few concrete steps to be undertaken not just by policymakers but as a larger public agenda.

What We Need to Defend

The quality of education has to be debated,

discussed, conceptualized and re-conceptualized in a democratic space; this in turn will shape public understanding. The task   of defining quality education cannot be left to the mercy of the marketplace or assigned purely to parental responsibility, even though we should value parental choice in their children's education. What is quintessentially a social commitment cannot be reduced a private or sectional concern.

Similarly and correspondingly, to ensure quality elementary education for all, we need a vibrant state school system that is inclusive and democratic, and supported through collective resources such as tax revenues, even when private alternatives exist that are mainly geared to the size of the parental purse, and are hence exclusionary.

What We Need to Improve

Since the quality of education crucially depends on the quality of teaching, teacher development and their capability enhancement with respect to classroom pedagogy must be placed at the centre of state school reform. The current practice of teachers' training therefore needs radical improvement.

Again, the quality of children's learning has a lot to do with the syllabus, curriculum and textbooks (not forgetting their load on the child's formative mind and their relevance to her living reality). It is no less reliant on the method of evaluation, whether through "eliminative" or "evaluative" assessment. These foundational nuts and bolts of the educational system are often designed

by specialists and experts, not necessarily in conversation with the schoolteachers entrusted with the crucial task of shaping young minds, and firing their imagination and curiosity. Yet textbook boards, syllabus committees and examination councils do not usually have a significant presence of schoolteachers, whose intellectual contribution could matter a lot in improving the content of education on the one hand and the assessment of children's deeper learning on the other. What therefore calls for urgent improvement is the extent and nature of interaction and collaboration between schoolteachers and various educational bodies. Those of us concerned about the teachers' accountability deficit may consider the well-tested fact that one way to improve teacher accountability is to enhance teacher involvement in educational planning.

Augmenting financial resources is another imperative. While we would not make the simplistic suggestion that more financial fuel would automatically ensure more educational miles, we do stress the need to rethink the current system of minimalist financial support to schools, even while expecting them to maintain the rhythm of their daily routine. As this report clearly indicates, sizable sections of schoolteachers incur out-of-pocket expenditure to ensure that their school's heart does not stop beating. On their own initiative, they maintain a modicum of hygiene in the school premises, and locally hire resource persons who can give the pupils a taste of music, dance, art, aesthetics, theatre, language learning and so on – the kind

of exposure routinely available to children from privileged backgrounds.

A call for more funding is often met with a counter-argument about the eternal fund crunch and the apparent impossibility of 'squaring the circle'. But, such impossibilities rarely surface when public resources are used for private profit – for instance, in the banking sector in the form of huge loans to known defaulters, or in the health sector in the form of public subsidies to private insurance companies. To put it differently, we need to rethink what is and is not possible. If politics is the art of the possible, then a decently functioning government school should fall within the realm of possibility.

In our mission to improve the government-run school system, it is, however, important not to overdraw on the energy and effort of a handful of exceptional schoolteachers. While there is every reason to hail their significant contribution to improving the school system, it would be wise to remember that after all, a decent government school system has to be run not by people of superhuman ability but by ordinary people like all of us, when given the opportunity and encouragement to perform professionally, as members of a collective oriented towards the goal of social justice.

Appendix I

3. A Partial Analysis of Secondary Data on Primary School Education in West Bengal Available in the Public Domain

This part of the report presents a broad and mainly quantitative overview of public provisioning of primary education in West Bengal, and the gaps and challenges therein.

3.A. Distribution of Schools in West Bengal

Let us begin with the distribution of schools. The criteria to establish a new school depend mainly on two aspects: first, the population in a given habitation, and second, its accessibility as stipulated in the norms.[1] For primary schools in the state, this distance has to be within 1 kilometre in rural areas and 0.5 kilometre in urban areas. An additional population-based criterion limits the highest permissible enrolment per primary school at 300.[2] However, in West Bengal and perhaps in many other states, these

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1. Zaidi, S.M.I.A (2012). A study of small primary schools in India: Analysis of school report cards of selected districts in four states, New Delhi:NUEPA

2. See Government memorandum (No. 134-SE (Pry)/10M-95/2000 (Pt.I), at http://www.wbsed.gov.in/wbsed/readwrite/notifications/4006018.pdf

aspects seem not to have been considered while establishing new schools. During a discussion on the issue, a senior district official of the West Bengal Education Department told us on condition of anonymity that "it [the decision to establish a new school] depends more or less on what the political leaders, across party affiliations, want. They like to establish a school in their own backyard as a mark of their 'commitment' to the community." As a result, although the total number of primary schools in the state is fairly adequate, the unevenness in their distribution leaves certain habitations without any primary school within the stipulated distance.

Based on the analysis of official data and the GIS map, a previous report by Pratichi Institute estimated the number of such habitations to be 1186.[3] The National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO 71st round, 2014) also reported that 7.2 per cent of rural households and 9.5 percent of urban households in West Bengal did not have access to primary school of any type within 1 kilometre. Apparently, the number of villages deprived of a primary school within accessible distance is not great; yet judged by the standard of equity, the distribution of government primary school calls for remedial steps. There is an urgent need to bring about a paradigm shift: norms for setting up schools cannot be sacrificed for narrow political or other interests.

In addition, there is a continuing problem of skewed distribution of resources and exclusion

3. Pratichi Institute (2013), What the RTE demands and how much we have: A gap analysis based on DISE data, Kolkata: Pratichi Institute.

of the most disadvantaged from the delivery of education.[4] Among the existing schools, there are wide variances in terms of enrolment, both quantitatively (total enrolment) as well as qualitatively (enrolment of children from various social categories), availability of infrastructural and human resources, achievement of the students, and so on. All these features appear to be interlinked. Government primary schools constitute 85 per cent of all primary schools in the state. Seven different government departments are involved in running them. The overwhelming majority (around 98%) are run by either the Department of Education (74.2%) or the Department of Panchayats and Rural Development (23.5%).[5]

It was only in the late twentieth century that the country in general and the state in particular took up the challenge of providing elementary education to every section of society. Setting about the task, the authorities realized that the available schools were grossly inadequate in number. The deficiency was specially concentrated in areas inhabited by the marginalized sections of society. There was also a huge infrastructural deficiency in the rural areas in general, and the habitations of socially marginalized and economically backward communities in particular.

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4. Rana K (2010), Social Exclusion in and through Primary Education: The Case of West Bengal, Pratichi Occasional Paper no. 3, Kolkata: Pratichi Trust in association with UNICEF Kolkata, http://pratichi.org/sites/default/files/Social%2Exclusion%20in%20Education.pdf

5. U-DISE, 2015-16

Table-A.1: Distribution of Schools with Primary Section according to Management and Category

School Management	Primary Only	Primary with Upper Primary	Primary with Upper Primary, Secondary & Higher Secondary	Primary with Upper Primary & Secondary	Total
Government and government aided					
Central Government.	12		54	14	80
Department of Education	49996	4	52	10	50062
Madrassa Siksha Kendra	27	52		2	81
Madrassa Education Board	7	7	70	40	124
Municipal bodies	1010	22	5	1	1038
Panchayats & Rural Development	15880				15880
Private aided	164	14	19	9	206
Tribal/Social Welfare Department	40	47	8	9	104
Private					0
Private (unrecognised) Madrasa	634	178	8	23	843
Private unaided	7572	977	344	237	9130
Unrecognized	1361	138	41	18	1558
Total	**76703**	**1439**	**601**	**363**	**79106**

Source: U-DISE 2015-16

During 1997-98, the government established around 1,000 child education centres under the programme called Shisu Shiksha Karmasuchi. The centres were called Shisu Shiksha Kendra (SSKs). These schools were monitored by the Department of Panchayats and Rural

Development (P&RD), and were designed to be cost-effective primary schools. The number of such centres rose to 16,850 by 2003-04, within a span of just six years.[6] The official website of the Department of Panchayats and Rural Development insisted, "It was almost impossible to open primary schools at every nook and corner of the State wherever there were some children not having access to a school. Therefore, the Government of West Bengal decided to introduce an alternative elementary education system in West Bengal."[7]

It is not difficult to understand how the state differentiates between the "nook and corner" and the "mainland". But we prefer not to be too explicit in identifying the places treated as "peripheral", and the people who are regarded as "others", and the children for whom "alternative education" is being considered. Nor do we explicitly declare which we consider the best available option for educational delivery.

The Pratichi Education Report I (2002) welcomed the West Bengal Government's initiative to bring underprivileged children within the ambit of the school education system through SSKs; and in many cases, it found that the SSKs were fulfilling the purpose. In some cases, their performance

6. Rana K, Sen S, and Sarkar M (2009), Small Schools for the Underprivileged : The SSK experiment in West Bengal, paper presented at a seminar on Small Schools organised by National University of Educational Planning and Administration, New Delhi, 5-7 February, 2009, http://pratichi.org/sites/default/files/SmallSchoolsUnderprivileged. pdf; Government of West Bengal (2004), The West Bengal Development Report, Kolkata: Department of Planning, Government of West Bengal.

7. http://www.wbprd.gov.in/HtmlPage/ssk.aspx, accessed on 27.12.17

Figure A.1: Distribution of government primary schools according to government departments

Madrassa Education 0.2%

Private Aided 0.3%

Tribal/Social Welfare Department 0.2%

Municipal body 1.5%

P and RD 23.5

Madrasha Siksha Kendra 0.1%

Department of Education 74.2%
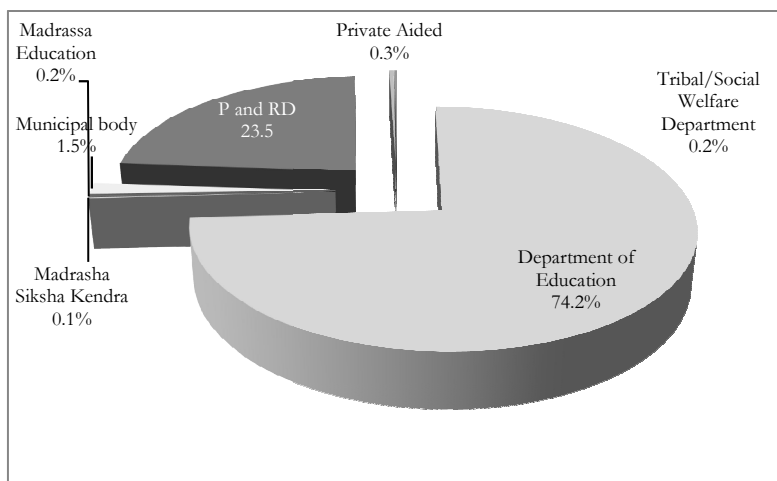
Source: U-DISE 2015-16

was actually adjudged better than that of the regular primary schools in the neighbourhood. The SSKs were attended mainly by children from disadvantaged backgrounds; in some cases, the very *Sahayikas* (SSK teachers) were found to nurture a contemptuous attitude towards them.[8]

Temporarily effective as the SSKs were, the programme faced several problems including paucity of infrastructure and staff. The root of the problems lay in the very conception of low-cost education for the disadvantaged. SSKs were established to accommodate underprivileged children: the privileged sections avoided these schools. The Pratichi Education Report I highlighted the initiative as a stopgap arrangement. In Amartya Sen's words, "the alternative route cannot be a long-term solution, given the

8. Pratichi Research Team (2002), The Pratichi Education Report I, Delhi: TLM Books in association with the Pratichi Trust, p.24

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limited facilities of these alternative schools and the difficulty of expecting that the alternative system, with its ad hoc structure, can really become the principal mainstream for educating Indian schoolchildren. The SSKs are a plausible stopgap solution, but the basic issue of having an adequate number of standard schools–and being able to afford expansion–has to be addressed."[9] Unfortunately, the stopgap arrangement has continued, seemingly as a "permanent solution" for the schooling of children from the most disadvantaged sections of the state's population.

Analysis of recent data reveals that SSKs form a substantial part of the total number of primary schooling institutions in some districts with thick population density, namely North Dinajpur, South Dinajpur and Murshidabad (see figure A.3. These are also the districts with the highest share of disadvantaged population (along with some other areas like Jangal Mahal and the Sunderbans). There is no reason why the SSKs should not either be upgraded to or placed at par with regular schools in terms of infrastructure and human resources. Besides the lack of infrastructure, the Sahayikas of the SSKs are paid a meagre amount as honorarium, that too quite irregularly. They also lack proper training and orientation. This policy neglect, amounting to nothing short of exclusion, has perhaps been exacerbated by the lack of public discussion on this issue.

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9. Sen, Amartya (2015), Sunlight and other fears in The Country of First Boys, New Delhi: TLM Books and Oxford University Press, p.103

Figure A.2: Share of SSKs out of Total Government Primary Institutions
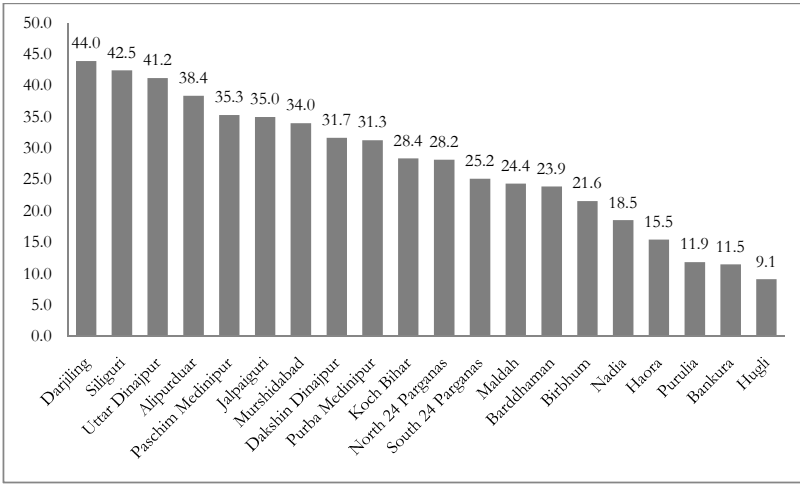
Source: U-DISE, 2015-16

U-DISE (2015-16) reports school related information about 37,222 villages and 2,681 urban wards (total: 39,903) across the state. It appears that there are 847 villages that have no publicly-run primary school; the population therefore is compelled to depend upon privately-run institutions.

While 847 villages of the state do not have any publicly-run primary school, there are several localities with more than one. In fact, the claim that SSKs under the Department of Panchayats and Rural Development were established to cater to areas that do not have other school facilities does not stand scrutiny. A detailed analysis of the present U-DISE data shows that of the total SSKs in the state, only 18 per cent are the sole primary schooling institutions in their localities. This figure (being the only school in a village) is much higher in case of schools under the

Department of Education (29%). One-third of the SSKs co-exist in their respective villages with at least one other SSK. In two villages, the number of reported SSKs is 12 each. In other words, there is a strong case of rationalizing the distribution of primary school facilities.

3.B. School Size and provisions

Total primary enrolment demonstrates a relationship with the school categories: schools with higher sections have greater enrolment in the primary section. This clearly shows the parents' preference for composite schools (though number of such schools in the state is very low: see Table A.1). Only in some cases (2.8% of all schools with a primary section) is the average enrolment in primary classes higher than the recommended limit of 300, as enjoined in the official circular mentioned earlier. While higher density of population may provide some rationale for greater enrolment in schools in those areas, it is surprising that the same set of districts–namely Maldah, Murshidabad and North Dinajpur– which record a very high percentage share of SSKs among government schools (see Figure A2) have the largest number of over-subscribed schools, with an enrolment of more than 300 students at primary level. In fact, these three districts together constitute 47 per cent of such schools in the state

What is intriguing is not the actual enrolment but the direct relationship between over- enrolment and paucity of the most essential provisions like classrooms, teachers, and amenities like toilets.

Table A.2: Average Enrolment in Primary Section according to School Management and Category

School Management	Primary Only	Primary with Upper Primary	Primary with Upper Primary, Secondary and Higher Secondary	Primary with Upper Primary and, Secondary	All
Central Government	81.5	NA	396.6	185.0	312.3
Department of Education	87.1	120.0	389.6	123.4	87.4
Madrassa Siksha Kendra	168.9	209.8	NA	178.0	195.4
Madrassa Education Board	98.3	172.4	333.5	217.8	273.8
Municipal body	68.1	192.3	628.8	25.0	73.4
Dept. of Panchayat & Rural Development	60.2	NA	NA	NA	60.2
Private (unrecognised) Madrasa	78.4	129.7	160.4	120.2	91.4
Private aided	149.4	106.7	340.6	197.0	166.2
Private unaided	92.1	121.0	350.6	187.0	106.6
Tribal/Social Welfare Department	78.0	51.1	49.8	73.1	63.3
Unrecognized	73.4	125.0	123.3	121.7	79.6
All	81.5	124.3	335.0	178.0	84.5

Source: U-DISE 2015-16

Let us examine the case with the help of data on the distribution of teachers and classrooms according to enrolment. For the purpose of analysis,, we divide the schools in six different categories depending upon their total primary enrolment, following the same norms that the Right to Education Act 2009 recommends for calculating the number of teachers required for a particular school (see Table A.3).

Table: A.3. Distribution of Teachers and Classrooms according to Enrolment

Schools with total primary enrolment	Average number of class-rooms	Average number of teachers	Total number of teachers	Total number of class-rooms	Total primary enrol-ment	Pupil-teacher ratio	Student-class-room ratio
<=60	2.9	2.6	84386	94250	1209947	14.3	12.8
>60 and <=90	3.6	3.5	50907	52686	1068711	21.0	20.3
>90 and <=120	4.1	4.2	35080	34104	870659	24.8	25.5
>120 and <=150	4.6	4.8	23523	22499	660162	28.1	29.3
>150 and <=200	5.1	5.3	19359	18675	631466	32.6	33.8
>200	6.5	6.6	22190	22095	970359	43.7	43.9
All	3.6	3.5	235445	244309	5411304	23.0	22.1

Source: U-DISE 2015-16

As the table shows, though the overall Pupil-Teacher Ratio (PTR) and Student Classroom Ratio (SCR) appear to be at the desired level, both increase along with increasing total enrolment in the schools–in other words, no provision is made for additional teachers or classrooms to cater to the additional students. These two figures, as also the average number of teachers and classrooms in schools with enrolment greater than 150, do not match the RTE recommendations. Moreover, these figures (PTR, SCR and average number of classrooms and teachers) are averages for a particular group of schools in terms of enrolment: there is huge variation within the group. Higher enrolment in a school depends mainly on two factors: first, non-availability of alternative schools in the area; and second, even if other schools exist, the popular ones draw a

larger share of pupils. In both cases, the students and teachers fail in their efforts for no fault of their own. The official data clearly shows that while the physical infrastructure is improving, the equitable distribution of teachers has actually deteriorated. While the percentage of schools with single teacher was 3.3 per cent in 2014-15, it increased to 4 per cent in 2015-16. The same report, however, mentioned that the number of single-classroom schools has declined from 7.6 to 6.5 per cent; the proportion of schools with girls' toilets has increased from 86 to 98 per cent, and of schools with electricity from 51 to 71 per cent.

Considering the RTE recommendation, which clearly defines the requirement of teachers based on the total enrolment of a school (see schedule 19 of the RTE Act), the state required a total of 2,17,320 teachers, whereas the actual number, including para-teachers and instructors, is 2,35,445: in other words, there are almost 8.3 per cent more teachers than the minimum requirement according to RTE. Despite this substantial excess margin, administrative failure in rationalizing their distribution has resulted in a shortage of teachers in almost 20 per cent of government primary schools, Yet again, it is the same set of districts, namely Maldah (46%), North Dinajpur (44%) and Murshidabad (34.4%), along with South 24 Parganas (34.6%), that have the highest share of primary schools with fewer teachers than required. The policy oversight in addressing this palpable inter-district disparity in public provisioning calls for urgent attention.

There is another dimension to the handicaps suffered by populous primary schools: in recent years, the shortage of teachers is often solved by appointing para-teachers (contractual teachers). Hence schools with a smaller number of regular teachers have a higher number of contractual teachers (figure A.3). Yet once again, the districts of North Dinajpur, Malda and Murshidabad not only have the lowest number of teachers, but also the highest percentage of para-teachers.

Table A.4: Distribution of Schools according to Enrolment (Primary) Category and Available Teachers

Number of teachers	<=60	>60 and <=90	>90 and <=120	>120 and <=150	>150 and <=200	>200	Total
1	2422	230	61	28	19	14	2774
2	14652	1938	555	201	119	109	17574
3	9962	5133	1687	649	383	241	18055
4	4146	4976	3230	1434	877	573	15236
5	811	1475	1698	1196	732	545	6457
6	208	476	740	831	725	494	3474
7	66	98	241	378	430	380	1593
8	23	39	92	134	208	317	813
9	14	13	44	45	91	222	429
10	10	13	15	30	87	482	637
No teacher/ incomplete information	83	5	0	2	0	4	94
Total	32397	14396	8363	4928	3671	3381	67136

Source: U-DISE 2015-16

The second strand of deprivation of the schools with greater enrolment comes in the form of school grants. It should follow logically that a larger school in terms of enrolment requires more funds for its maintenance. Unfortunately,

Figure A.3: District-wise Percentage of Inadequacy of Teachers and Percentage of Contractual Teachers to Total Teachers

DARJILING
ALIPURDUAR
MURSHIDABAD
N DINAJPUR
MALDAH
SILIGURI
JALPAIGURI
W MEDINIPUR
S 24 PARGANAS
E MEDINIPUR
S DINAJPUR N 24 PARGANAS   KOCH BIHAR
NADIA   BARDDHAMAN
PURULIA
BIRBHUM
HAORA
BANKURA
HUGLI
KOLKATA

Percentage of schools having inadequate number of teacher

• Percentage Contractual Teacher   —— Fitted values
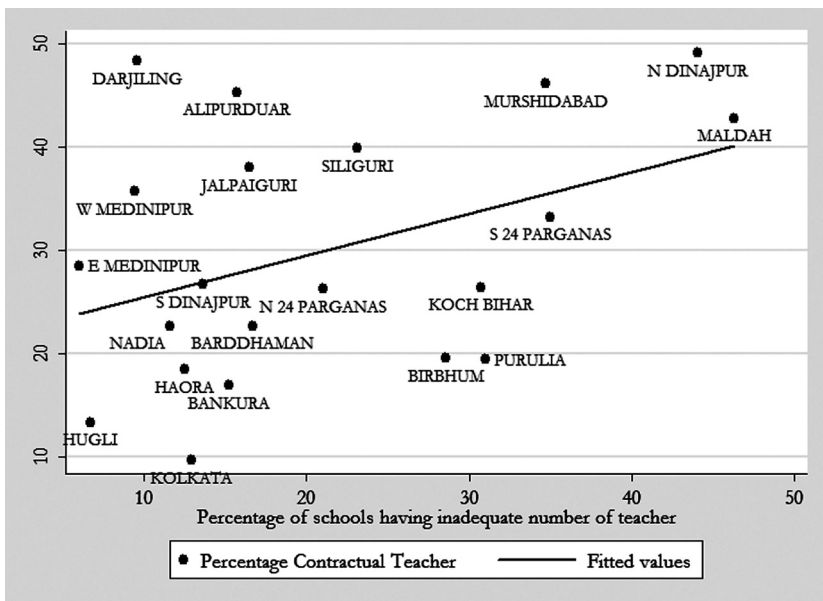
however, the grants provided to primary schools do not depend on the number of children enrolled in them. Unlike in case of the Cooked Mid-day Meal programme, where both the quantum of ingredients and the number of cooks depend on the enrolment, the grant for maintenance and development of the schools has no parity with the overall enrolment. Greater enrolment obviously demands more classrooms, hence extra electrical equipment like fans and lights, which leads to extra consumption of electricity; likewise, there are various other requirements that go on increasing with the enrolment, calling for greater funds for maintenance. As per U-DISE 2015-16, primary schools on average were granted an annual sum of Rs 17,496, reportedly varying between Rs 16,032 and Rs 20,567 according to

Table A.5: Distribution of Teachers and Classrooms in Government Primary Schools in West Bengal

Number of teachers	Number of classrooms										10 or more	Total
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9		
1	54	405	959	608	593	99	36	9	5	2	4	2,774
2	91	2,144	5,721	4,291	4,118	836	252	71	22	14	14	17,574
3	46	1,039	3,332	4,683	6,407	1,804	503	130	65	22	24	18,055
4	71	661	1,982	3,222	5,819	2,265	781	225	117	54	39	15,236
5	1	33	214	690	2,547	1,826	698	226	125	50	47	6,457
6	0	12	66	216	1,104	1,081	574	211	120	45	45	3,474
7	0	2	26	60	352	501	316	151	104	34	47	1,593
8	0	2	11	26	140	218	164	107	83	37	25	813
9	0	3	2	8	46	93	91	65	56	26	39	429
10 or more	0	3	2	8	51	70	77	57	86	62	221	637
No teacher/ incomplete information	35	14	14	9	14	4	0	1	0	0	3	94
Total	298	4,318	12,329	13,821	21,191	8,797	3,492	1,253	783	346	508	67,136

enrolment strength (see Table A.6). Nevertheless, teachers in the schools reported that they had received an standard sum of Rs 12,500 per annum (Rs. 7,500 as school development grant and Rs. 5,000 as school maintenance fund). The grant for Teaching and Learning Materials (TLM) has already been stopped.

Table-A.6 : Average School Development Grant, School Maintenance Grant and Teaching and Learning Materials Grant received by government primary schools* in West Bengal

Enrolment category	School Development Grant	School Maintenance Grant	TLM grant
<=60	10135	5744	153
>60 and <=90	9870	6649	186
>90 and <=120	12671	7205	162
>120 and <=150	13237	7320	257
>150 and <=200	12766	7489	214
>200	12647	7705	215
All	10892	6429	175

Source: U-DISE 2015-16

* Schools having primary sections only

3.C. Attendance, Grade Repetition and Learning Achievement

There is a paucity of reliable information about enrolment and attendance. As Amartya Sen put it: "The schools have built-in incentives to exaggerate school registration and to inflate attendance even more (by confounding registration with attendance, for example). Independent findings, such as the Census of India, or the National Sample Survey, still show that a significantly large proportion–about one out of five–of Indian children are not in school on a normal day".[11]

11. Sen, Amartya (2015), 'Sunlight and other fears', The Country of First Boys, New Delhi: TLM Books and OUP, p.100. The 2014-15 NSSO data reveals that across India

A large portion of children aged 13 and above leave school prematurely (see Figure A4). The proportion of boys who leave school in the age bracket 14-16 is huge, and much larger than that of the girls. This information is also corroborated by U-DISE data. The data reveals that these children leave school at such an early age

FigureA.4: Age and Gender-wise Attendance of Children of 6 to 16 Years in Educational Institutions

Boys

Age	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
Currently attending	88	94	99	98	94	92	92	93	82	73	55
Once attended, currently not attending	2	0	0	2	4	3	7	4	14	19	42
Never attended	10	6	0	9	2	5	1	3	3	8	3

■ Currently attending   ■ Once attended, currently not attending   Never attended

Girls

Age	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
Currently attending	92	99	94	95	95	99	91	93	98	82	78
Once attended, currently not attending	0	0	2	3	1	0	4	7	1	13	19
Never attended	8	0	4	2	4	0	5	0	1	6	4

■ Currently attending   ■ Once attended, currently not attending   Never attended

as also in West Bengal, around 13 per cent of children between the ages of 6 and 17 have either never enrolled in school, or if they at all have attended, are currently not attending. However, the percentage of children who have never been enrolled in a school is somewhat higher in the country as a whole (5%) as compared to West Bengal (3.6%).

Boys and girls

mainly to help their families financially, or they find education to be too expensive to continue. It is no surprise that percentage of children not attending any school in the age group is much higher among the lower economic classes. In fact, unlike the national trend, West Bengal shows much greater parity in attendance among various social categories (see Table A.7).

With respect to government schools with primary section only, U-DISE 2015-16 reported the overall rate of repetition was 1.9 percent of total primary enrolment that year. Considering the social categories separately, the rate of repetition among Scheduled Tribes was higher at 3 per cent. Surprisingly, the rate of repetition does not show any significant relation to vital requirements like teachers and classrooms. However, except for Darjeeling, the northern districts reported very high figures: Siliguri 7.3%, Alipurduar 7.2%, Koch Bihar 6% and Jalpaiguri 5.1%. Further

Table A.7: District-wise Mean Years of Schooling by Sector and Gender

District	Rural		Urban		Total	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Bankura	3.0	1.8	4.4	3.3	3.1	1.9
Barddhaman	3.0	2.0	4.2	3.3	3.5	2.6
Birbhum	2.8	1.8	4.3	3.3	3.0	2.0
D-Dinajpur	2.4	1.6	4.4	3.7	2.8	2.0
Darjiling	2.9	2.2	4.5	3.9	3.6	3.0
Haora	2.8	2.2	3.9	3.3	3.5	2.9
Hugli	3.0	2.3	4.3	3.7	3.5	2.9
Jalpaiguri	2.4	1.6	3.9	3.3	2.9	2.2
Koch Bihar	2.5	1.7	4.5	3.8	2.8	2.0
Kolkata	N/A	N/A	4.6	4.2	4.6	4.2
Maldah	2.3	1.4	3.7	3.1	2.5	1.7
Murshidabad	2.3	1.6	3.4	2.6	2.6	1.8
Nadia	2.6	1.9	3.8	3.2	3.0	2.3
N-24 Parganas	2.8	2.1	4.5	4.0	3.9	3.3
Pas-Medinipur	2.9	2.0	4.4	3.6	3.1	2.2
Pur-Medinipur	3.1	2.3	4.0	3.2	3.2	2.4
Puruliya	2.8	1.3	4.1	3.0	3.0	1.6
S- 24 Parganas	2.7	1.9	3.8	3.2	3.0	2.3
U- Dinajpur	2.1	1.2	4.0	3.3	2.4	1.6
West Bengal	2.8	1.9	4.2	3.6	3.3	2.5

Source: Calculated using Table 8 of Census of India 2011

investigation reveals that the rate of repetition among primary students was much higher in the SSKs in these districts (22.2, 11.6, 10.6 and 7.9 per cent respectively). These four districts were responsible for 70 per cent of total repeaters in the SSKs in the state, and 14 per cent of total repeaters at primary level in the state. This phenomenon calls for a separate study. However, the NSSO (2014-15) data reports the rate of repetition at primary level to be 3.7 per cent, almost double compared to the U-DISE data.

Inspection and School Management Committee (SMC)

Lack of an adequate number of school inspectors, and the huge load of administrative responsibilities laid on the available inspectors, have resulted in a skeletal school inspection system in the state. Though this report does not offer data on the actual number of school inspectors currently in place, previous records show that the number is much less than required. A 2011 report reports the shortage of Sub-Inspectors of Schools (SIS) and Assistant Inspectors of Schools (AIS) in the state as around 38 per cent each[12]. A more recent report one states that 19 out of 41 sanctioned posts of SISs remained vacant in the district of Murshidabad, for example.[13] There is a serious lack of effort from the administration to fill up the vacant posts. Our own information (to be verified) suggests that at present, 15 out 52 posts of SISs in North 24 Parganas are vacant; the post of chairperson of the District Primary School Council (DPSC) has remained vacant in the district for quite a long time. The situation may be the same in many other districts of the state.

The foregoing analysis in this section is only a partial stocktaking of the available secondary material on school education in the state. A more exhaustive analysis of such data will be part of our future line of enquiry.

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12. Banerjee, A. et. al (2011), Restructuring of school education system in West Bengal, Kolkata: IIM Kolkata, http://www.wbsed.gov.in/wbsed/readwrite/55.pdf

13. Nath, S (2014). 'Problems of school education in rural areas of West Bengal', International Journal of Educational Research and Technology

Appendix II

A Partial* List of the Primary Schools Advancing Quality of Schooling

Name of the Schools	Circle	District
Sagarpara Primary School	Jalangi North	Murshidabad
Baromashia Primary School	Jalangi North	Murshidabad
Raoshan Nagar Primary School	Jalangi North	Murshidabad
Baromashia (West) Primary School	Jalangi North	Murshidabad
Narasinghapur Primary School	Jalangi North	Murshidabad
Kajipara, Guripara Primary School	Jalangi North	Murshidabad
Katabari Primary School	Jalangi North	Murshidabad
Baliadanga Primary School	Jalangi North	Murshidabad
Napukuria Natunpara Primary School	Beldanga	Murshidabad
Andiran Primary School	Beldanga	Murshidabad
Manindranagar Nigarbala Primary School	Beldanga	Murshidabad
Tangramari Primary School	Hariharpara	Murshidabad
Rajanagar Primary School	Raghunathgunj	Murshidabad
Amdahara Primary School	Bhagabangola Soth	Murshidabad
Kandra Mallickpara Primary School	Bharatpur South	Murshidabad
Satighata Primary School	Sargachi	Murshidabad
Shisubharati Primary School	Murshidabad	Murshidabad
Lalbag Boys Primary School	Murshidabad	Murshidabad
Radhakrishnapur Primary School	Raghunathgunj East	Murshidabad
Lakshmi Janardanpur Primary School	Raghunathgunj East	Murshidabad
Gafurpur Primary School	Raghunathgunj	Murshidabad
Tia Bayenpara Primary School	Bharatpur South	Murshidabad
Matiara Primary School	Bharatpur	Murshidabad
Chatna Kandi Rajarber Primary School	Kandi	Murshidabad
Baikuntahpur Primary School	Ragunathgunj	Murshidabad
Naopara J.B. School	Hili	South Dinajpur
Laskarpur Primary School	Hili	South Dinajpur
Hili U.B. Girls F.P. School	Hili	South Dinajpur
Parpara F.P. School	Hili	South Dinajpur
Hili 2 No. Primary School	Hili	South Dinajpur

Name of the Schools	Circle	District
Tiwor J.B. School	Hili	South Dinajpur
Chakdapat Primary School	Hili	South Dinajpur
Ferusha Primary School	Hili	South Dinajpur
Dabra Primary School	Hili	South Dinajpur
Basudebpur Primary School	Hili	South Dinajpur
Shyampur Primary School	Hili	South Dinajpur
Aptoir Hindi Primary School	Hili	South Dinajpur
Banora Primary School	Hili	South Dinajpur
Chapahat Primary School	Hili	South Dinajpur
Panjulgarh Dholpara Primary School	Hili	South Dinajpur
Ajlahar Primary School	Hili	South Dinajpur
Kunjodungi Primary School	Hili	South Dinajpur
Dharanda Primary School	Hili	South Dinajpur
Sahapur Primary School	Hili	South Dinajpur
Patiram Primary School	Balurghat East	South Dinajpur
Bonhat Primary School	Balurghat East	South Dinajpur
Patiram Girls School	Balurghat East	South Dinajpur
Nichabondor Primary School	Balurghat East	South Dinajpur
Borkoil Primary School	Balurghat East	South Dinajpur
Roba Primary School	Balurghat East	South Dinajpur
Monipur Primary School	Balurghat East	South Dinajpur
Dang Birol Primary School	Balurghat East	South Dinajpur
Monipur Primary School	Tapan East	South Dinajpur
South Jajiyar Primary School	Tapan East	South Dinajpur
Chenchai Primary School	Tapan East	South Dinajpur
Hashnagar Primary School	Tapan East	South Dinajpur
Sibpur Primary School	Tapan East	South Dinajpur
Madanpur Primary School	Tapan East	South Dinajpur
Naighati Primary School	Tapan East	South Dinajpur
Arjunpur Primary School	Tapan East	South Dinajpur
Nimpur Primary School	Tapan East	South Dinajpur
Chaksib Primary School	Tapan East	South Dinajpur
Raipur Primary School	Gangarampur North	South Dinajpur
Ashokgram Primary School	Gangarampur North	South Dinajpur
Palashi Primary School	Gangarampur North	South Dinajpur
Sankarpur Primary School	Gangarampur North	South Dinajpur
Chalun Primary School	Gangarampur North	South Dinajpur
Nitpur Primary School	Gangarampur North	South Dinajpur
Rampur Primary School	Tapan	South Dinajpur
Dahaghat Durgo Primary School	Balurghat North	South Dinajpur
Chingishpur J.B. School	Balurghat North	South Dinajpur
Bangalipur Primary School	Balurghat North	South Dinajpur
Pirijpur Primary School	Balurghat North	South Dinajpur
Badamail Primary School	Balurghat North	South Dinajpur

Name of the Schools	Circle	District
Koigram Primary School	Balurghat North	South Dinajpur
Bhawanipur Primary School	Balurghat North	South Dinajpur
Amrail Primary School	Balurghat North	South Dinajpur
Shibrambati Primary School	Balurghat North	South Dinajpur
Kashipur Primary School	Balurghat North	South Dinajpur
Buridighi Primary School	Balurghat North	South Dinajpur
Sanapara Primary School	Balurghat North	South Dinajpur
Munil Primary School	Balurghat North	South Dinajpur
Baril Praimary School	Kushmundi East	South Dinajpur
Enatullapur Manjury Primary School	Kushmundi East	South Dinajpur
Kadamdanga Primary School	Kushmundi East	South Dinajpur
Kushmandi Primary School	Kushmundi	South Dinajpur
Poinala Mohagram Primary School	Kushmundi	South Dinajpur
Aminpur Primary School	Kushmundi	South Dinajpur
Tejhar Primary School	Kushmundi	South Dinajpur
Angariban Putohori Primary School	Kushmundi	South Dinajpur
Bagduma Primary School	Kushmundi	South Dinajpur
Chousha Primary School	Kushmundi	South Dinajpur
Raghobpur Primary School	Bongshihari	South Dinajpur
Kushkari Primary School	Harirampur	South Dinajpur
Tildanga Primary School	Harirampur	South Dinajpur
Debipur Primary School	Kumarganj	South Dinajpur
Mollapara Primary School	Balurghat Sadar	South Dinajpur
Monimala Primary School	Balurghat Sadar	South Dinajpur
Raghabpur Primary School	Gangarampur Sadar	South Dinajpur
Khamrua Primary School	Itahar	North Dinajpur
Koarpur Primary School	Itahar	North Dinajpur
Bhuihara Primary School	Kaliaganj	North Dinajpur
Debinagar GSFP School	Raiganj	North Dinajpur
Chandanpur Part Basic School	Nakashipara East	Nadia
Chorchakundi Primary School	Kaliganj	Nadia
Abhoynagar Primary School	Tehatta New	Nadia
Chalitatali Primary School	Chakdaha Town	Nadia
Baronaldaho Primary School	Tehatta New	Nadia
Moyna Primary School	Hashkhali	Nadia
Bogula Station Para Primary School	Hashkhali	Nadia
Sree Ramkrishna Vivekananda Sikshaniketan	Krishnanagar Town	Nadia
Hatgobindo Paschimpara Primary School	Krishnanagar Town	Nadia
Umapur Primary School	Kalyani-II	Nadia
Durganagar Sishu Vidyapith	Chakdaha Town	Nadia
Srikrishnapur Primary School	Tehatta New	Nadia
Bhawanipur GSFP School	Chakdaha Town	Nadia
Purbachal Vidyapith GSFP School	Chakdaha Town	Nadia

Name of the Schools	Circle	District
Tantla Sarojini Primary School	Krishnanagar I	Nadia
Kantabelia Primary School	Kalyani	Nadia
Dangamath Colony GSFP School	Nakashipara East	Nadia
Kumari Primary School	Jhargram East	Jhargram
Netura Primary School	Jhargram East	Jhargram
Joalbhanga Primary School	Jhargram East	Jhargram
Sirshi Primary School	Jhargram East	Jhargram
Kolaboni Primary School	Jhargram East	Jhargram
Aguiboni Primary School	Jhargram East	Jhargram
Amtolia Primary School	Gidhni	Jhargram
Kuldiha Primary School	Sankrail	Jhargram
Thengamara Primary School	Rohini	Jhargram
Mirjapur J.B. School	Kotulpur	Bankura
Kangshaboti Sishu Vidyalaya	Khatra East	Bankura
Tyangrakhali Primary School	Kotulpur	Bankura
Lonkajol Primary School	Kotulpur West	Bankura
Menkapur Umaprasad Primary School	Dantan South	West Medinipur
Bejda Primary School	Dantan	West Medinipur
Nayagram Primary School	Sadar Village	West Medinipur
Bhetiamla Board I Primary School	Dantan South	West Medinipur
Palashi Primary School	Sadar East	West Medinipur
Salikotha Primary School	Dantan South	West Medinipur
Singhaghai Primary School	Narajole	West Medinipur
Kuldiha Primary School	Debra	West Medinipur
Pathrisala Primary School	Garhbeta East	West Medinipur
Rupnarayanpur Primary School	Sadar West	West Medinipur
Binduidihi Primary School	Neturia New	Purulia
Bonra Primary Schhol	Neturia New	Purulia
Lalpur Primary School	Neturia New	Purulia
Baruipara Primary School	Neturia New	Purulia
Neturia Primary School	Neturia New	Purulia
Gobindpur Primary School	Manbazar I	Purulia
Jharbagda JB School	Manbazar I	Purulia
Doladanga Primary School	Manbazar I	Purulia
Charki New Primary School	Manbazar I	Purulia
Manbazar Uparpara Primary School	Manbazar I	Purulia
Madhupur Primary School	Manbazar I	Purulia
Bankanali Primary School	Manbazar I	Purulia
Kelyardih Primary School	Manbazar I	Purulia
Manbazar Board Primary School	Manbazar I	Purulia
Patharmahara Primary School	Manbazar I	Purulia
Parashya Parimary School	Manbazar I	Purulia
Bankata Primary School	Manbazar I	Purulia
Gopalgunj Primary School	Neturia	Purulia

Name of the Schools	Circle	District
Banglani F.P School	Swarupnagar	North 24 parganas
Sharapul Hatkhola F.P. School	Swarupnagar	North 24 parganas
Gokulpur Uttarpara Colony FP School	Swarupnagar	North 24 parganas
Gokulpur F.P. School	Swarupnagar	North 24 parganas
Harishpur Paschimpara F.P. School	Swarupnagar	North 24 parganas
Barogharia 2 No. F.P. School	Swarupnagar	North 24 parganas
Sharapul F.P. School	Swarupnagar	North 24 parganas
Gopalpur F.P. School	Swarupnagar	North 24 parganas
Taranipur F.P. School	Swarupnagar North	North 24 parganas
Chhatrakalyan Vidyapith	Swarupnagar North	North 24 parganas
Nimtala F.P. School	Swarupnagar North	North 24 parganas
Bagghata F.P. School	Swarupnagar North	North 24 parganas
Ghoshpur GSFP School	Baduria North	North 24 parganas
Vivekananda JB School	Baduria North	North 24 parganas
Jasaikati FP School	Baduria North	North 24 parganas
Ghoshpur Nimtalapara FP School	Baduria North	North 24 parganas
Paschim Shimla Nivedita FP School	Baduria North	North 24 parganas
Dakshin Shimla FP School	Baduria North	North 24 parganas
Kotalber FP School	Baduria North	North 24 parganas
Baluigachi Palpara Primary School	Banipur	North 24 parganas
Shibnath Uccha Vidyalay (primary Section)	Khardah	North 24 Parganas
Ruia Patulia FP School	Khardah	North 24 Parganas
Milan Vidyapith FP School	Khardah	North 24 Parganas
Palladaha FP School	Naihati East	North 24 Parganas
Bhabagachi FP School	Naihati East	North 24 Parganas
Talpukur Girls FP School	Barrackpur	North 24 Parganas
Aharampur GSFP School I	Panihati	North 24 Parganas
Shahid Nitya Datta GSFP School	North Dumdum	North 24 Parganas
Pratapgarh GSFP School	North Dumdum	North 24 Parganas
Baluigachi Palpara AFP School	Banipur	North 24 Parganas
Bagrol FP School	Kotulpur	Bankura
Mirjapur JB School	Kotulpur	Bankura
Kangshabati Shishu Vidyalay	Khatra East	Bankura
Tangrakhali Primary School	Kotulpur	Bankura
Lankajole Primary School	Kotulpur	Bankura
Laugram Paschimpara Primary School	Kotulpur	Bankura
Manora Primary School	Taldangra	Bankura
Paschim Jagacha Primary School	Jagacha	Howrah
Jagacha Board Primary School	Jagacha	Howrah
Dharsa Panchanantala Primary School	Jagacha	Howrah
National Place Primary School	Jagacha	Howrah
Chandi Vidyapith Primary School	Jagacha	Howrah
Howra Homes Primary School	Jagacha	Howrah

Name of the Schools	Circle	District
Radharani Vidyamandir	Jagacha	Howrah
Baliktikuri Housing Estate	Jagacha	Howrah
Adarsha Primary School		
Ranitola Primary School	Tulsihata	Malda
Borashoulmari Debsinghpara	Mathabhanga IV	Coochbehar
5th Plan Primary School		
Paschim Dauaguri	Mathabhanga IV	Coochbehar
4th Plan Primary School		
Ichchheganj G.P. School	Mathabhanga III	Coochbehar
Barovita 4th Plan Primary School	Mathabhanga III	Coochbehar
Ambari No. III S.C. Primary School	Baneswar	Coochbehar
Bholanath Halder Smriti G.S.F.P	Behala West	Kolkata
Sarada Vidyapith (Primary Section)	Behala West	Kolkata
Parnashree Shiksha Parishad JB School	Behala West	Kolkata
Kolkata Anath ashram Primary School	Kolkata III	Kolkata
Khoshkadambapur Paruldanga	Bolpur Intensive	Birbhum
Nndarani J.B. School		
Moldanga Primary School	Bolpur West	Birbhum
Gobra Primary School	Sadar East	Birbhum
Maliha- Mukhuriya Primary School	Sadar East	Birbhum
Haripur Primary School	Sadar East	Birbhum
Kalipur Primary School	Sadar West	Birbhum
Suri- Sibdaspur Primary School	Rampurhat West	Birbhum
Borsal Primary School	Rampurhat South	Birbhum
Porasia Primary School	Rajnagar	Birbhum
Tantipara Hahttala Primary School	Rajnagar	Birbhum
Nachansaha Primary School	Illambazar (New)	Birbhum
Jagadish Chandra Vidyapith	Siliguri West	Darjeeling
Swami Swarupnanda Vidyapith	Siliguri West	Darjeeling
Madanjyoti JB School	Batasi	Darjeeling
Ramkrishna Urban JB School	Naxalbari	Darjeeling
Sebdella Jote FP School	Naxalbari	Darjeeling

*Many other schools have been involved in various school-transforming activities. Shiksha Alochana has been trying to come in contact with them and learn.