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Govt pry schools in Bangladesh lose students

Mohiuddin Alamgir | Updated at 01:46am on July 14, 2018



Kalirsthan Junior School in Aditmari upazila in Lalmonirhat. — New Age file photo

Over 5,000 government primary schools across the country are running with less than 100 students, a figure that tells how low quality of classroom teaching, inadequate teachers, lack of monitoring and supervision, unplanned establishment of schools have pushed a lot many students to kindergartens.

To turn the tide, educationists call for primary school mapping, considering a policy of shifting schools having less than 50 students from their current location to needs-based locations.

They think that many schools are established or in the process of being established on political consideration and in many cases these schools are not on the need-based approach, which account for the dwindling number of students in government schools.

They also suggest increasing facilities in government primary schools like quality of classroom teaching, adequate teachers, proper monitoring and supervision for creating scope for bringing back students to these elementary schools.

Against this backdrop, the government is planning to set up 1,000 primary schools in both rural and urban areas.

'We immediately need school mapping, to know where these schools are and whether it is necessary or not' Campaign for Popular Education executive director Rasheda K Choudhury said.

'After mapping, a decision is needed for merging schools where necessary', she said

'There are some schools which have small number of students,' director general of Directorate of Primary Education Abu Hena Mostofa Kamal admitted.

'We cannot merge them,' he said, adding, 'Many of these schools have been founded by influential quarter.'

Final draft of Bangladesh Primary Education Annual Sector Performance Report – 2017 of DPE says that there are 5,036 government primary schools now having less than 100 students. Of them 677 schools have less than 50 students.

The report also shows that the average number of students in government primary schools is 208 at 64,122 government primary schools.

The report shows maximum 3,768 student at a government primary school while the lowest three students in one of the government primary school under Barisal.

'There is a need to consider a policy for shifting these schools (having less than 50 students) from their current location to need-based locations,' said the ASPR report prepared by the government.

'BANBEIS should do the exercise to identify the needs-based locations using a GPS modem, as well as considering the school age population (6 to 14 years) of the location,' it suggests.

Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and

Statistics director general Md Fashiullah said that they were going to prepare a primary school map and work would begin soon.

'We would try to locate where these schools are and how many students and teachers are there in these schools,' he said.

Shortage of teacher was another reason behind the lesser number of students, said educationists.

Six out of ten government primary schools in Bangladesh are running with fewer than needed teachers and of them 8,560 such institutions in hard-to-reach areas are facing acute shortage of educator as only three teachers are imparting lessons in each of these schools.

ASPR 2017 report shows that 8,564 government primary schools are facing acute teacher shortages as 79 of them are running with only one teacher, 721 with only two teachers and 7,764 with just three teachers.

The report says that at least four working teachers are required in each school, otherwise 'it is not possible to deliver quality education'.

'It is true that we are facing shortage of teachers and we are recruiting teachers to address the shortage,' Abu Hena Mostofa Kamal said.

UNESCO recommends one teacher for each class, so there should be at least six teachers as primary schools now have six classes — pre-primary to class V.

On that account, 38,856 out of total 64,122 government primary school are running with less than six teachers, according to the APSC report 2017.

The report says that 8,564 government primary schools are running with up to three teachers, while 22,527 schools are running with four teachers and 7,765 schools are running with five teachers.

'It is evident that there is a shortage of teachers in the remote area schools. Incentives are needed to attract teachers from urban to rural areas to address the situation,' the report suggests.

As per the report, 6,546 government primary schools have only one classroom and 2,809 have two classrooms, which hampers classroom teaching and learning.

BRAC University's Institute of Educational Development professor emeritus Manzoor Ahmed said that the government primary schools also lacked supervision and accountability of teachers who remained absent from classroom most often.

Bangladesh Primary Teachers Association adviser Abul Bashar said that unplanned establishment of schools, too many school in an area as well as increasing number of kindergartens were some of the reasons why so many schools were running with less than 100 students.

'Government should analyse the reason and take steps like merging schools keeping in mind the need,' he said.

According to ASPR 2012, there were 10537 kindergartens in the country with 12.27 lakh students and APSR 2017, there were 20,601 kindergartens with 22.37 lakh students.

Kindergarten officials estimate that there are about one lakh unregistered kindergartens in the country while it was 63,000 as per a survey of 2009.

Bangladesh Kindergarten Association joint secretary Mizanur Rahman said number of kindergarten was rising every year as its coverage now reached remote union level. 'I cannot say whether this kindergarten is getting students of government primary schools but number of students in kindergarten is on the rise,' he said. Finance minister Abul Maal Abdul Muhith in his budget speech for 2018-19 fiscal announced that 1,000 new primary schools would be established.



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