

Govt to explore pvt partnership to raise learning standards

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Municipal schools face issues like low learning levels, truancy by students and teachers, high drop-out rates and falling enrolments(HT File)

At a meeting last week between officers from the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) education department and newly elected Member of Legislative Assembly Aaditya Thackeray, one of the items in the agenda was

to explore the possibility of involving not-for-profit groups in creating strategies to improve teaching and learning standards in municipal schools.

A delegate told this newspaper that one of the proposals discussed at the meeting was to boost the BMC's partnership with private groups to enhance learning standards at the schools. The programme, which currently covers around 80 schools, is likely to be expanded.

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This column has discussed issues that municipal schools face – low learning levels, truancy by students and teachers, high drop-out rates and falling enrolments that have threatened the existence of hundreds of schools.

The partnership programme envisages various levels of engagement with private groups. Apart from different funding programmes – ranging from sharing costs to 'full school support.' The scheme also allows private groups to offer a variety of services, including 'full school management' and 'specific services partnerships' where they can provide training for teachers or assist schools in tasks like exam assessments. The programme allows for the work of the private partners to be assessed by a third party.

A study in 2010, which looked at six interventions, including school adoption, training of teachers and curriculum assessment, at municipal schools using private partners, found that the programme has created model schools that provide learning outcomes superior to other municipal schools.

Despite the existence of a well-thought policy and its success, the scheme currently has only 20 schools under the 'full support' programme and around 60 that are partially supported. These are less than 10% of municipal schools.

The schools are in steep decline. Between 2008 and 2019, the number of students enrolling in Class 1 every year has dropped nearly 50%, with 32,218 students joining the class in 2016-17 compared to 63,392 new enrolments in 2008-09 and 67,477 in 2009-10. A recent report from education think tank Praja Foundation, which was published in this newspaper, says that student numbers at the schools continue to decline. Enrolments in Class 1 dropped to 27,918 in 2018-19. Most of these students will drop out of the schools, either to join private government-aided schools or to discontinue education. The report says that the retention rate in the schools was 22.3% in 2018-19, indicating that for every 100 students who join Class 1, only 78 leave the school before they reach class 10, either dropping out from school education or joining a private school. In the last decade, 257 schools have shut down, 41 in the last academic year alone. An earlier report said that 142 schools did not get new students for five years, forcing the municipal corporation to merge them with other institutions in the neighbourhood.

To attract more students, the BMC has announced a school with the Indian Certificate of Secondary Education (ICSE) curriculum. Revival of the school adoption programme is another idea to increase enrollments.

But the school adoption programme has faced resistance from teachers employed by BMC and corporators. A teacher had told this writer that the public education system has been defamed by private groups. This accusation sounds facetious if you note allegations that municipal school teachers do not

send their children to these schools, an observation made by a former additional municipal commissioner a few years ago.

The decision by the BMC to involve private organisations in improving education standards at its schools is being replaced by the state government in its Zilla Parishad (district administration) schools. Education minister Varsha Gaikwad has decided to create a think tank which would help suggest ways and means to improve the quality of education in state schools.

Link:- <https://www.hindustantimes.com/mumbai-news/govt-to-explore-pvt-partnership-to-raise-learning-standards/story-AKGrRXuf24cKywzIqhW4dN.html>