

## Inclusive Education and CWSN — Parental Concerns and Expectations

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### Abstract

*There has been an increase in awareness advocacy regarding inclusion in education by various stakeholders, including organisations at the national and international level. Policies and initiatives across the globe have addressed the issue of introducing and implementing measures to facilitate meaningful participation of Children with Special Needs (CWSN) in regular schools. The Central and State governments in India, too, have been implementing programmes and policies for the inclusion of CWSN in regular schools. The Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2009, also guarantees free education to every child in the age group of 6–14 years. But a reality check at seven government and municipal schools in two districts of Delhi (East and North East Delhi) reveals that these children are still amongst the most disadvantaged in terms of access to schooling and completion of education, as their basic needs are not yet being met. This paper highlights some of the concerns and expectations of parents of CWSN, studying at primary government or municipal schools in East and North East Delhi.*

### INTRODUCTION

*The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education, 1994, to which India, too, is a signatory, endorses inclusive schools by introducing practical and strategic changes to education. India has also agreed to follow the recommendations of several conventions*

*of the United Nations (UN) with regard to the education of Persons With Disabilities (PWDs) in regular schools. Several policies by the Government of India, such as the *National Policy for Persons with Disabilities–2006*, underline the urgency of providing inclusive education. The RTE Act, 2009, guarantees free education*

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to every child in the age group of 6–14 years. However, there exists confusion and ambiguity regarding the practice of inclusive education with respect to children with disabilities (Singhal, 2012). This has led to misinterpretation, and consequently, uneven implementation of policies at the grass-roots level.

### OBJECTIVES

- To highlight the concerns of parents of CWSN on the existing condition in government schools of Delhi
- To highlight the concerns of parents of CWSN regarding the future of their wards

### SAMPLE

A total of 17 parents were randomly selected as sample for the study from seven government and municipal schools in East and North East Delhi.

### METHODOLOGY

The paper represents qualitative research that focuses on understanding concepts, opinions and experiences. Narrative approach has been followed, i.e., obtaining information through open-ended and conversational communication (interview). Thematic analysis, a qualitative data analysis technique, involving reading through a data set like transcripts of interviews, has been followed to conduct the study.

### FINDINGS

#### **Inclusivity boosts children's confidence**

Most parents shared that CWSN displayed greater confidence and better social skills in an inclusive set-up. They said their wards shared incidents that took place at school regularly like friends and teachers helping them perform classroom activities, and mingling with neighbours after returning home, etc.

#### **Mockery, taunts and jibes**

Three parents shared their wards were often subjected to jibes and taunts, especially, name calling, which lowered their morale. They said many a time, their children were addressed as 'mad' by classmates. A parent shared that his child was labeled 'deaf', while another lamented that her child was called 'lame'. As a result, many children with disabilities developed inferiority complex. Most of the time, they were often seen angry and frustrated, or scared.

But neither the parents, nor their children complained about these unpleasant incidences to the school authorities. Besides, the parents did not even approach any social organisation or a counselor.

#### **Schools must empower children**

The parents shared that they wanted the schools to empower their children.

Talking about the importance of school, a parent quipped, “It is a place, where our children get education, which helps them earn livelihood, become independent and empowered when they grow up, thereby, earning them respect.”

### **Regular schools a preferred choice among parents**

Most parents preferred regular schools to those specifically meant for specially abled children. In fact, many shared that their children had been studying in regular schools right from Class I. Almost all of them shared that their children participated in all activities, including classroom learning, just like their peers, at regular schools. Moreover, regular schools are more easily available than special ones. Also, many parents were unaware that special schools for CWSN, especially, those with intellectual impairment, actually existed. This is all the more important as these parents live in the national Capital.

However, it needs to be realised that education can benefit CWSN only when they feel they belong to the common ‘mainstream’ education system. Inclusive education is, thus, one of the most effective ways to promote an inclusive society.

### **Lack of accurate and timely information**

Most parents interviewed came from weak financial backgrounds and were not aware of government initiatives and policies regarding PWDs. To

them, the only source of information was the ‘school’ or a family member of a disabled student studying in the school.

### **Social adjustment problems**

Parents’ responses regarding sending their wards with special needs to inclusive schools were varied. Some of their main concerns are as follows.

- Many expressed concern about the academic and social adjustment of their wards in regular schools. CWSN, generally, faced difficulty in adjusting with their environment unlike others. The physical environment at most government and municipal schools surveyed is not conducive for CWSN. As a result, these children are unable to actively participate in many activities at school and are often teased.
- Many parents expressed concern that their wards had to use common toilets, which lacked basic infrastructure required for PWDs.

### **CORROBORATION WITH INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH FINDINGS**

Researches indicate that all learners benefit from inclusive classrooms (Wilms, 1999). Further, studies suggest that a family’s socio-economic condition also significantly influences the chances of a student completing high school, and in turn, get employment opportunities (Gollnick and Chinn, 2009).

This corroborates with an international finding, indicating that pupils with special education needs in mainstream schools are less socially accepted and more socially rejected than mainstream pupils (Frederickson, et al., 2004).

### **WAY FORWARD**

Some innovative initiatives may be adopted by schools to ensure better facilities and environment for the education of CWSN.

As schools are the primary source of information to parents, they must provide accurate and timely information about the latest government policies, benefits and redressal mechanisms for CWSN, apart from guiding them on how to avail those facilities.

In situations, where CWSN are subjected to taunts and jibes, parents should immediately inform the school authorities as the RTE Act, 2009, ensures prompt redressal of grievances related to PWDs.

A self-help group for parents of CWSN must be constituted in each school. These groups must consist of teachers as members, apart from parents and student volunteers.

The group must share vital information regarding CWSN with parents and help them in case a need arises. Research studies indicate that such groups involve the active participation of parents, offer information on vocational training and production centres for individuals with mental retardation (Rao and Sivakumar, 2003). Moreover, access to organisations and agencies that work and employ differently abled people must be ensured as it will allay concerns among parents regarding job prospects for their wards.

### **CONCLUSION**

Inclusive education is one of the major interventions of the *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan*, RTE Act, 2009, and many other government schemes and policies. From the findings, it may be inferred that measures to facilitate meaningful participation of parents (of CWSN) and schools must be initiated at the grass-roots level to achieve inclusive education in its true spirit. Schools must also work towards providing an inclusive environment to all students, including CWSN, in order to achieve their overall and holistic development.

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## WEBSITES

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