This study on 'public' schools in the city of Kolkata is part of a larger on-going project entitled “Achieving Quality of Education through Enhanced Teacher Capabilities” steered by Pratichi (India) Trust and funded by the Tech Mahindra Foundation. With this significant support from the Foundation and drawing on the collaborative spirit of many school teachers in the city, the Pratichi research team has striven to argue in this study that there are reasons to both defend public schools for equity goals, as they cater mainly to underprivileged children, and also demand major improvement in quality of these schools.
Primary Education in Kolkata

Overlapping Barriers and the Need for Collective Efforts
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A Public-spirited Partnership

This report is a result of a valuable partnership between Pratichi (India) Trust, Tech Mahindra Foundation and a sizable section of the school teachers who are teaching in schools run by the Kolkata Primary School Council (KPSC), Kolkata Municipal Corporation (KMC) and in Shishu Shiksha Kendras (SSKs). This study on ‘public’ schools in the city of Kolkata is part of a larger on-going project entitled “Achieving Quality of Education through Enhanced Teacher Capabilities” steered by Pratichi (India) Trust and funded by the Tech Mahindra Foundation. With this significant support from the Foundation and drawing on the collaborative spirit of many school teachers in the city, the Pratichi research team has striven to argue in this study that there are reasons to both defend public schools for equity goals, as they cater mainly to underprivileged children, and also demand major improvement in the quality of these schools.

Pratichi Institute
Kolkata
Acknowledgement

For this study, the Pratichi research team owes a huge debt of gratitude to Sri Kartick Chandra Manna, Chairman, Kolkata Primary School Council, Samagra Shiksha Mission, Kolkata, Nodal Officer, CMDMP, Kolkata, Sri Sundar Banerjee, Consultant, Samagra Shiksha Mission, Kolkata, and Sri Parameswar Sau, Chief Manager, Department of Education, Kolkata Municipal Corporation, for their valuable support. The team also remains most grateful to the respondent guardians of the KPSC and KMCP schools and SSKs that were selected for the survey. The team is hugely indebted to the Head Teachers, Teachers-in-Charge, Assistant Teachers and Para Teachers of the selected 59 schools under KPSC, 15 primary schools and six SSKs under KMC.
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As seen through the lens of the current survey in KPSC schools

KPSC: Kolkata Primary School Council
MDM: Mid-day Meal
CMDM: Cooked Mid-day Meal
Introduction

“For years and years… it has been said that Calcutta was dying… but Calcutta had not died,” Sir V. S. Naipaul remarked. “It hadn’t done much, but it had gone on,” he added in the same breath. The city is indeed going on. Going on with its lights, joys, celebrations, and festivities. However, it also goes on with, as in the Spanish litterateur Carlos Ruiz Zafon’s description, “countless stories… that nobody wants to admit they believe, but which nevertheless survive in the memory of generations as the only chronicle of the past.” The most persistent of the living chronicles of the past include habitations connected through narrow, serpentine, perennially wet lanes devoid of sunlight. The city has not “done much” for the dwellers of such habitations – slums or slum-like localities.

Ways of eking out their living are many, but the choices are pathetically few: Working as domestic helps, at piecemeal hosiery jobs, sewing, driving auto rickshaws, pulling carts, mending shoes, plumbing, cleaning sewers, and so on. They have been living in Kolkata for generations, and for generations, as a woman, say Malati, said, “we have been living like this…my grandmother was a domestic worker, my mother was a domestic worker, and so am I. My grandmother was illiterate, my mother was illiterate, and so am I.” We had spoken to her mother too, and she lived hardly two metres away from one of the earliest schools of Kolkata, Sherbourne School, where Prince Dwarakanath Tagore (1794-1846) had studied. It was the area where, according to a north Kolkata resident, “the history of modern Bengal took shape.” Pointing towards the north and south, and the east, he emphasized, “name any, any of the leaders of the Bengal
Renaissance – Rammohan [Roy], [Iswarchandra] Vidyasagar, Rabindranath [Tagore], [Swami] Vivekananda – you will find them here [they were either born or worked here].”

Across the city we came across many proud residents of the city: in central Kolkata we met a man who directed us, “note it down, it is the area where Calcutta Madrasa [the first school in Kolkata] was established in 1781, and go on for a bit, and you will find the Asiatic Society, established in 1784, and the Fort William College, established in 1800.” There is indeed a rich list: The Hindu College (now Presidency University), established in 1817, the Calcutta University, established in 1857, and many more centres of learning grew and advanced the spread of knowledge in the city. The residents in the city were considered to be among the best educated in the country at the time of the Partition. And, yet the Malatis never got a chance to go to school.

Of late, however, there have been some changes, the most important among them being a qualitative transformation in the aspirations of the parents about their children’s education: The desire is no longer limited to acquiring just the basics – the three Rs (Reading, Writing, Arithmetic) – but focused more on competencies that could take the children’s future on a different, broader path. “I don’t want my daughter to be a domestic help,” says Malati. “So, unlike me, she is going to school, unlike me, she can write her name, read and write. God willing, she will have a better future.” The aspiration has been drawn from many different sources, including increased public attention towards primary education in the city. The attention is reflected in better provisioning of teachers, improvement in infrastructure, launching of the mid-day meals, and several programmatic steps taken by the authorities, especially the Kolkata District Primary School Council (KPSC) on the one hand, and an improved rate of enrolment and attendance on the other.

While one should not miss the advancements reflected in the children’s attending school and acquiring certain basic
learning abilities, it is hard not to take note of the fact that many of the children attending school are yet to receive the kind of education that could actually prepare them for the competition in the larger world. Many of them can write their names but cannot write a few lines on their own, can read some parts of the text that they have rote-learned but not a page from a different text, can identify the numbers and even solve some of the sums practiced in the classrooms but not similar ones chosen from other sources. Although the Malatis invoke God to train their children for a better future, they actually depend more on supplementary material actions, like out-of-school assistance given to the children, than on divine intervention. Since most of the parents belonging to the lower rung of society are either illiterate or barely literate they have to look for paid assistance, ie, private tuition (or, simply ‘private’ in popular parlance). Many of the parents told us that they had to spend more than one-fourth of their monthly income on the fees for private tutors.

The demand for private tuition which evolved from the inadequacy of learning within the regular school system has now become so widespread that even the best performing schools, however small in number, that impart high quality education, find it difficult to convince parents that their wards do not require any after-school assistance. Many of the parents said, “Schools are doing well, but some additional assistance [in the form of private tuition] would make the children’s education even better.” In other words, a practice born out of the historical inadequacies of public policies on education has not only taken a gigantic form but has also become a major barrier in implementing better policies because of lack of parental support.

For example, in some of the performing schools teachers were seemingly losing their motivation because of the parents’ imagined need for private tuitions: “There is no need for private tuition; yet parents rely on it. It often becomes counter-productive, as often the methods of teaching
the private tutors adopt are in direct conflict with ours.”

The loss of motivation, a very hard-earned achievement, can give way to weakening the process of schooling and pulling the momentum of educational progresses back. Put differently, the process of correction of a historical wrong – the exclusion of a major section of the society from decent educational facilities – must take into account the nuances of societal dynamics while formulating and implementing policies on public education. Extra coaching on paid basis beyond school hours seems to have been internalized by Kolkata society. For a section of parents, even the traditional private tuition practices seem to have become out-dated; their children are being catered to by a large number of ‘modern’ private tutorial ‘institutes,’ flourishing in the city. Fees charged by such institutes are reportedly much higher than even the fees charged by private schools.

Nearly a decade and a half ago, Professor Amartya Sen, in his foreword to the Pratichi report on Public Delivery of Primary Education in Kolkata, underscored the possibility of “an efficient and equitable system of primary education for the children of this large – and wonderful – city [Kolkata].” His hopes entailed certain urgent tasks. “We have to break the combined barriers of old customs, fixed habits, ancient resistance to change, and traditionally limited visions,” he insisted. There was indeed a “need for a radical change in Kolkata’s arrangements for educating its young children.”

Changes have indeed occurred for the better. A clear sign of improvement in schooling is reflected in the enrolment pattern: The Age Appropriate enrolment (Net Enrolment Ratio, or NER) was found to be 97 per cent. Another important achievement was the relatively better rate of attendance (75 per cent). This has perhaps resulted from a combination of factors including larger social and public action on the one hand and a qualitative change in the aspiration of the parents on the other. The level and quality of education parents wanted their children to achieve was much higher than what
parents wanted a decade ago. The amenities in government schools have also improved. This has been achieved in part, through efforts from the government, and in some cases by CSR activities of private agencies.

That the task of enhancing primary education in Kolkata has received public attention is clear from the data on provision of teachers in the schools: the average Pupil Teacher Ratio (PTR) in the KPSC schools was 17. Nevertheless there appear to be some problems in the distribution of teachers as the range of PTR varies from 3.5 to 27.2. The variation in the PTR however did not seem to be a problem of rationalization. Rather, it appeared to be linked with the particular geographical and demographic constituencies of the schools. A school of a particular instructional medium might need to be set up for a particular linguistic population, even though the population to be served by the school was low. In such a situation, the option of merging such schools with other neighbouring schools could pose serious accessibility and other problems for the children. Other than the linguistic distribution, the issue of distance wise accessibility of a particular population to its feeder school was found to be a reason behind the variation in PTR.

Given the initial inertia and huge resistance from a part of the society with regard to the provision of mid-day meals, particularly in the primary schools of Kolkata, the success in making it possible to universalize the scheme cannot but be seen as a remarkable achievement. It is also heartening to see that 90 per cent of the children are taking these meals regularly, though acceptance of it by all has yet to be accomplished.

Aside from improvement in material resources, there have been some important progresses in terms of actual school functioning. For example, all the schools under the survey were reportedly using teaching learning materials (TLM) and more than 80 per cent of the teachers were using teachers’ diaries and preparing lesson plans. The dynamism of school
functioning was also reflected in the preparation of wall magazines by children – guided by teachers – in 93 per cent of the schools. In 90 per cent of the schools, students took part in different literary programmes. Cultural programmes and sports were organized in 85 per cent of the schools. Importantly, Child Cabinets had been formed in 98 per cent of the schools.

Nevertheless, gaps still exist between what has been achieved and what is reasonably achievable. One painful reflection of the weakness in school functioning is the perceived unavoidability of private tuitions: Of the total children enrolled in KPSC schools, 70 per cent were reported to be receiving private tuitions. Those who were not doing so was not because of their considering it unnecessary; it was because either they could not afford it or they had family members at home to support them in studies regularly. The need for private tuition, which originated from the fragility of school functioning, is now all pervasive and has found a deep root in social subjectivity. Even children of many well-functioning schools were found to take private tuitions – not because there was no teaching in the school, but because their parents believed that it would help them do better.

Artificially constructed as it is, the prevalence of private tuitions has to be linked with the functioning of schools in all its effectiveness. As our field level interactions suggest, there is much scope for improvement in this area, especially in the professional orientation of the teachers. For example, although 98 per cent of the Head Teachers or Teachers In Charge (HTs/TICs) reported that they had the requisite understanding of Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE), only 54 per cent of them had reasonable knowledge about the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2005. Then, although a decade had passed since the implementation of the (Right to Education) RTE Act 2009, which made the presentation of the birth certificate during admission redundant, in 58 per cent of the schools it was still
There are other issues related to teachers’ orientation. For example, about one-fifth of the HTs/ TICs had not undergone any Special Training as stipulated in the RTE Act 2009. Again, there is a gap between the community setting and the functioning of the schools: Although our observations show that regular visits to the homes and localities of the children exert positive impact on school functioning, teachers of only 53 per cent of the schools actually reported to have done so while 86.4 per cent parents said that teachers never visited their homes. That there existed further gaps between the teachers and communities at large was corroborated by certain responses of the parents: only 46 per cent of the parents said that regular Mother-Teacher Association (MTA) meetings were organized, and 42 per cent reportedly did not have any idea about the MTA. More intriguingly, only one-fourth of the parents reported to have some knowledge about any functional School Development Committee (SDC).

The orientation problems seemed to have at least some links with the policy initiatives. Many of the regular activities of the schools could not be scheduled properly by the teachers because of unforeseen tasks thrust upon them by the department. The teachers complained not so much about the tasks they were asked to perform but the manner in which they were asked to do the same; Often orders to do certain assignments at very short notice appeared extremely detrimental to the performance of regular activities planned through the SDC and MTA. Long vacations in the academic sessions were reported to be a major problem hindering children’s academic achievements.

Some major infrastructural paucities were also observed during the study: in 59 per cent of the schools, classrooms were not in good condition; 30 per cent of the schools did not have separate classrooms for all the classes; 83 per cent of the schools had no separate room for the library; 40 per cent of the schools had no proper boundary walls; and as
much as 81 per cent of the schools had no dining hall. Provision of material support is important, but what is more important is to motivationally energize both the teaching community and the parents. As our collaborative intervention programme in Kolkata, “Achieving Quality of Education through Enhanced Teachers’ Capabilities” – carried out by Pratichi Institute and the Tech Mahindra Foundation, with whole-hearted support from the KPSC – suggests, an open minded, context-sensitive approach on the one hand and recognizing and valuing the central role of teachers and the local communities on the other can result in big changes. Our interactions with the children, teachers, parents and others in the communities were quite encouraging. Despite several problems, some of the teachers have taken the onus of changing the schools for the better by involving the children in various classroom and extra-classroom activities in a creative manner. The activities were often found to encompass the parents and communities. Lively school functioning carried out in innovative ways were found to influence not only the children’s learning achievement but also their propensities for being more curious, expressive and socially oriented. The urgency of making the school system more equitably functional cannot but involve the task of making use of these examples.

1. Background Characteristics of the Study Area

Kolkata is a thickly populated political, commercial and educational centre of eastern India. With a population of 4.5 million, the city has the highest population density (24,000 per square kilometer) in the country. It is the 15th most densely populated city in the world. It is the third largest city in the country (it used to be the most populous until 1961). The way the city had developed since the colonial times, it had become home to different social groups and classes. It was one of the most popular destinations for several different kinds of migrants – from day labourers to merchants – from
across the country. The outgrowth of the city led to the expansion of dwellings of various forms – pucca houses, slums, and make-shift abodes on the streets, by the river and the canals, open lands here and there, and so on. According to the Census 2011, slum dwellers account for one-third of the total population of Kolkata (4.5 million). More than 40 per cent of these people have lived in slums for two generations or longer.¹ The most vulnerable sections of the population, however, are the homeless. Of the top five megacities in India, the proportion of the homeless to the total population is highest in Kolkata (1.6 per cent, followed by 0.8 per cent in Mumbai). About 70 thousand people live in “the open or roadside, pavements, in hose-pipes, under fly-overs and staircases, or in the open in places of worship, mandaps, railway platforms, etc.”² Often they are treated as inter-state migrant labourers, drawn from the neighbouring states or poverty-stricken districts of West Bengal. On the contrary, a study found that an overwhelming percentage of the homeless population in Kolkata have been living in the city for generations. To quote the study, “While 64 per cent of the homeless population was born in this city another substantial proportion has been living here for many decades.”³ The multiple deprivations that the homeless populations have to face includes, most importantly, the lack of access to education. Indeed, these are the sections which keep the average educational achievement of the city low – 14 per cent shorter than the desired 100 per cent level.


² The Census of India, 2011

³ Rana, Kumar (2006), Being with Nothingness, The Calcutta Samaritans, Kolkata
Table 1. Comparison of Literacy Rates: India, West Bengal and Kolkata (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>80.8</td>
<td>64.6</td>
<td>72.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Bengal</td>
<td>81.6</td>
<td>70.5</td>
<td>76.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kolkata</td>
<td>88.3</td>
<td>84.0</td>
<td>86.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Census 2011

Aside from being short of the desired 100 per cent level (none of the municipal wards has achieved that level) the literacy scenario of Kolkata tends to follow a skewed pattern: while 119 municipal wards fall in the category of 80-97 per cent literacy rate, 24 fall below 79 but above 51, and one of them has a literacy rate below 50 per cent. The highest recorded literacy rate is in south Kolkata’s KMC Ward number 96 (97 per cent) covering Jadavpur and Baghajatin neighbourhoods whereas the lowest recorded literacy rate is in Central Kolkata’s KMC Ward No. 60 (44 per cent) covering parts of Park Circus (Beniapukur) neighbourhood.

Figure 1. Literacy Divide in the Kolkata District (KMC area)
With the passage of the Municipal Act of 1899, the onus of arranging primary education in Kolkata fell largely on the Calcutta Municipal Corporation. But, over the decades, the schools run by the Calcutta Municipal Corporation (now KMC) have substantially decreased (to only 16 per cent of the total).

In both KPSC and KMC schools Bengali was found to be the dominant medium, followed by Hindi, Urdu, Oriya and English.

Table 2. Authority-wise Distribution of Primary Schools in Kolkata (excluding all private unaided schools)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authority running the schools</th>
<th>Number of schools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Central Government Departments</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Government Department of Education (Kolkata Primary School Council)</td>
<td>1150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local bodies (Kolkata Municipal Corporation)</td>
<td>355</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Government Department of Education (Madrasa Board)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DA getting schools (unaided)</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The main responsibility of the delivery of primary education in Kolkata is that of the Kolkata Primary School Council (KPSC). Nevertheless, Kolkata Municipal Corporation (KMC), which was the main caterer of education in the colonial period, continues to share some responsibilities. It also runs Shishu Shiksha Kendras (SSKs), the low cost schools set up to serve underprivileged children.4

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4 The Government of West Bengal felt in the last years of the last millennium, “Due to various reasons a considerable number of children across West Bengal are not able to access the opportunities of institutional education delivered through the primary schools, whereas, like other children, acquiring education by them [the underprivileged children] is urgent; at the same time it is their birth right.” (See its memo, No. 3116(17)PN/O/Cell 1/O4 dated 4.8.1997; translation from Bengali by us. It was the recognition that there was a gap between the commitment and its implementation that made the government find ways and means for achieving
Though, Kolkata has a large number of private schools, yet the main responsibility of delivery of education, as the Unified District Information System for Education (UDISE) data shows, is largely shouldered by the government run schools. Although, the UDISE data allegedly suffers from incompleteness of information on private schools, our general observations suggest that despite not being absolutely accurate the trend of educational delivery in Kolkata is tilted much more towards the government than the private institutions. Perhaps it is due to the constitution of the city (with large sections being slum dwellers and homeless as mentioned earlier), that a large number of parents cannot afford the cost of paid education leading to the city’s dependence on government schools.

The UDISE shows a declining trend in the total enrolment at the primary level. The rate of decline in 2016-17 compared
to 2011-12 was 33 per cent (from 267,732 to 178,223).\(^5\) While many attribute this decline to the growing number of students enrolled in private schools, the main reason is perhaps linked with the changed demographic pattern of the city, where children of the 10-14 age group form only 7.5 per cent of the total population while the corresponding figure for the state average is 10 per cent. The feature is essentially related with the lower birth rate in the city (for the state as a whole it is 1.7, but for the city it is only 1.2). Again, students enrolled in the private schools – as the UDISE suggests – form less than 20 per cent of the total.

In other words, despite some problems of headcount, Kolkata’s children have to rely upon government schools to a great extent. Nevertheless, there is a substantial inter-institutional variation in public schools in terms of the economic backgrounds of the students. This is in spite of the fact that most of the students in public schools tend to be from somewhat economically backward households. This variation can be explained partly by the fact that different schools are perceived to be for different sections of the people. This leads to segregation of schools according to the section of students already studying there.

There seems to be some major discrimination on the basis of class or occupational pattern of the parents of the children attending different institutions. The economic stratification of society appears to have made a major impact on the public schooling facilities. Schools under KPSC had a higher proportion of children from higher economic groups than in the SSKs and KMC schools. In fact, some of the KPSC schools visited were found to be quite elite in nature both in terms of infrastructure and the economic background of students.

In most of the KPSC schools parents were found to be daily wage earners, domestic workers, construction workers, factory workers, rickshaw or van pullers, vegetable sellers, 

\(^5\) Calculated from several rounds of UDISE
sweeping staff, etc. There were however some parents belonging to the non-manual earning groups. They included teachers, government employees, managerial workers in private firms, and small businessmen, etc. They however have diverse perceptions of the performances of the KPSC schools.

“We trust the standards of our child’s school. It is one of the best and renowned schools of the city and a heritage one. I have seen children of this school achieving very good results in the Madhyamik and Uchcha Madhyamik examinations. I believe that my child is in good hands,” said the mother of a child studying in one of the most elite of the 59 government schools.

“My child’s school needs to improve a lot. I know that there are better schools in Kolkata but I cannot take my child to those elite government schools because they are located faraway. And I cannot afford a private school due to its fees,” said the mother of a child studying in a poorly performing government school.

The composition of the children in the schools depended on not only the schools’ identity or income class of parents but also the levels of literacy of the parents. Most of the students of our sample group in KMC or SSKs were first generation learners.

The variation in literacy rates and the level of educational achievement among the selected households together with other socio-economic factors indicate that the public schools in general are attended by the so-called “underdogs” of society.

Among circumstances and compulsions that made the children’s environments hostile to education, were the following:

- being made to do compulsory domestic chores that alienate them from the necessary academic focus;
being used as child labour;

- being exposed frequently to domestic violence against them and other family members;

- being subjected to an undesirable ambience created by addicted adult family members;

- getting no protection of any kind;

- living without a roof over their heads;

- being deprived of quality support from the adults at home;

- receiving low quality private tuitions to keep them engaged as parents cannot look after them after school hours due to their livelihood commitments.

2. Methods Followed for this Study

As the study aimed to understand the dynamics of the delivery of education in public primary schools in order to enhance the quality of education, the research team began the study with a collection of different public primary schools under the KPSC and the KMC across the city. The samples included both elite and poor schools so as to capture an objective picture of educational delivery in the public primary schools in the city. The list of public primary schools was collected from the KPSC and KMC records. After collating the list the schools were selected on the basis of the stratified random sampling method (incorporating the plurality of medium, social-geographic, development geographic and natural geographic features of the circles). The number of sample schools was determined on the proportionate strength of the schools in each educational circle. Out of the 1150 primary schools under the KPSC, 59 schools were chosen for the study. Out of 251 KMC primary schools and 104 SSKs, 16 primary schools and five SSKs respectively were brought under the purview of research.

Of the total 144 municipal wards of the city, our study chose a sample of 318 households.
### Table 3. Distribution of Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of School</th>
<th>Management</th>
<th>No. of Schools</th>
<th>No. of households</th>
<th>Teachers Interviewed</th>
<th>Parents Interviewed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Govt. Primary Schools</td>
<td>KPSC</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>236</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary Schools</td>
<td>KMC</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSKs</td>
<td>KMC</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>80</td>
<td>318</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>318</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Two sets of surveys were designed for teachers and parents. Teachers and parents were interviewed in each of the selected schools. Teachers’ surveys were filled up in the school. The Head Teachers or Teachers-in-charge of a total of 80 schools and SSKs were interviewed. The survey sought information on infrastructure, enrolment, attendance, subjects taught, cost of schooling, governance, and communication with parents about different aspects of school functioning, perception about private schools, private tuition, and the like. Parents were interviewed for their responses about the quality of cooked MDMs, cleanliness of toilets, drinking water, school fees and so on.

Four parents from each school were selected for interviews, using the stratified random sampling method vis-à-vis the total enrolment of the particular school. Stratification was done on the basis of the academic levels of the children (Pre-Primary to Class V), social identity (SC, ST, Muslim and others) and gender. The total sample consisted of 236 parents from KPSC schools and 82 parents from the KMC schools and SSKs. A structured survey that included questions on caste, occupation, total members of the household, number of school going children, cost of schooling, subjects taught, parent-teacher communication, need for private tuition, its reason, its expenditure, and so on was used for the interviews.

Apart from the household and school interviews the
opinions of several other people concerned with education were registered. Three community interaction sessions were also conducted in the locality of every surveyed school. The members of the research team kept detailed field notes which were invaluable for the report.

3. Views from the Field

3.A. Infrastructure:
Infrastructure is extremely important when it comes to schools. Children perform better when they get the proper tools for learning, in a safe, conducive environment. Separate classrooms for all standards, clean rooms, playgrounds, and other facilities in the school go a long way in shaping a child’s responses to and performance in school.

Table 4. Infrastructure at a Glance
(in KPSC Schools surveyed)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Infrastructure</th>
<th>Number of Schools</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Schools with separate classrooms for each class</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>71.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classrooms used for other purposes</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>27.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classrooms with blackboard</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classrooms with electricity</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open space or verandah used for teaching</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>49.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall condition of classrooms: Good</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>40.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>42.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bad</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Bad</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separate room for HT/ TIC</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>28.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staffroom for teachers</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>64.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separate office-room</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>20.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assembly hall</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>37.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separate room for TLM</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Books for library</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>96.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separate room for library</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>16.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table continued to next page
### 3.1 Premises and Classrooms

A significant number of KPSC schools were found to be situated in rented buildings. It was very difficult to carry out repairs and routine maintenance as one had to take special permission from the landlords which was, reportedly, a lengthy process and was at times unattainable. A visit to Sree R. P. Institute in Burrabazar Katra Lane yielded the following experience:

The state of the school was a stark depiction of the derelict conditions prevalent in several schools. It was hardly possible for a stranger to locate this school. The school consisted of a single room in a small passageway of a ramshackle old building in a market in the by-lanes of Burrabazar, tucked away between a lassi shop and a stationery shop. The school was in such a rundown condition that one would not have believed the description had one not seen it in person. The passageway leading to the school door was wet from water leakage from the toilet located on the floor above. The staircase leading to the toilet was decayed and broken, and the ‘toilet’ itself was barely functional. There was also no source of water in the toilet. Teachers said that they never used the toilet, and that one student (a girl) who had once gone to use it had returned terrified that there was a ghost inside and refused to come to school for a few days after that. The Head Teacher told us that this was the toilet that had to...
be listed in DISE reporting, despite the fact that it was non-functional.

**Figure 2. Overall Condition of Classrooms**

*in KPSC schools surveyed*

There were many schools that needed roof repairs and treatment. In some of the schools, the roofs were in an even riskier condition while a few schools had the problem of water seepage from the roof during the rains.

There was an almost universal demand for high and low benches for children. In some schools, children could not even be offered seats due to scarcity of benches; in some other schools, furniture and other equipment were found to be broken and not in a usable condition.

In many schools attached to high schools, teachers discussed the “insoluble” problem of using the building. Many high school authorities did not let the primary section utilize the classrooms as per their requirements. They were prohibited from setting TLMs, putting charts on the wall, and keeping story books in proper spaces.

On the other hand, a few schools were found to be situated
in palatial buildings. These schools were established on the land gifted by certain local people interested in education. Some were situated in new buildings funded by Samagra Shiksha Mission.

Funds allotted for infrastructural development of schools need to disbursed regularly and on time. Without this, schools are struggling to carry on. Differences between the high schools and primary schools need to be sorted out, and a solution needs to be reached, so as to benefit both. Legal avenues need to be explored to carry out maintenance and repairs of schools located in rented buildings. Proper infrastructure can achieve far superior outcomes in education.

The conditions of the KMC schools and SSKs were found to be particularly poor: only a handful of KMC schools and SSKs had separate classrooms for all the classes. Again, just about half of all the schools had classrooms that were in a good condition. In a large number of schools, the verandas had to be used for teaching. Separate rooms for libraries were a rarity and were found in just a few schools.
3.A.2. Toilets and Drinking Water

The state of infrastructure in the KPSC schools was particularly bad with regard to the provisions of toilets, particularly for the girls. While there were 165 usable toilets for 5065 boys (one toilet for every 31 boys on an average), the corresponding number for 5017 girls was 142 (35 girls on an average to use a single toilet)! The ratio of usable toilets to students ranged from 1:13 to 1:300. In 11 schools, toilets were common – to be used by both boys and girls. Several schools had toilets without either direct supply or other arrangements of water.

As regards running drinking water, all but four of the KPSC schools had this facility. Nevertheless, in some schools the water available for drinking was reported to be impure.

Figure 4. Source of Drinking Water in School Campus

(in KPSC schools surveyed)

In short, the requirement of infrastructure entailed the following:

- Construction of toilets for both girls and boys following the expected ratio. Repair and renovation of existing toilets;
- Furniture for both children and teachers, especially benches for children;
- 100 per cent safe and running drinking water in each and every school;
- Need based arrangements for separate staff rooms.
- Addressing the issue of getting No Objection Certificates smoothly from the owners of school buildings (in case of rented premises) with a Government Order, to facilitate the sorting out of civil work issues without any impediments.

3.A.3. Funds to Run the Schools:
Many of the teachers raised the issue of shortages of funds to run the school smoothly. They demanded that adequate funds be provided for development and maintenance requirements (including repair, extension, furniture, etc.) and procuring teaching learning materials (TLMs) for improved learning achievements of children.

3.B. Progresses in Enrolment
Enrolment is one of the primary factors used to understand the state of education in any setting. While a high enrolment ratio in primary education is essential for any community to develop, it is not the only factor responsible for a good education. High enrolment ratios have to be coupled with quality teaching and a host of other related factors to achieve a good outcome.
Table 5. Enrolment and Attendance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Number of Children</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total enrolled in 59 schools</td>
<td>10082</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>5065</td>
<td>50.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>5017</td>
<td>49.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC category</td>
<td>1153</td>
<td>11.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ST category</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OBC category</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslim category</td>
<td>1762</td>
<td>17.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other*</td>
<td>6906</td>
<td>68.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children with Special Needs</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age Appropriate Enrolment in Pre-primary</td>
<td>1605</td>
<td>98.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age appropriate enrolment in class I</td>
<td>1809</td>
<td>97.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age appropriate enrolment in class II</td>
<td>1924</td>
<td>96.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age appropriate enrolment in class III</td>
<td>2044</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age appropriate enrolment in class IV</td>
<td>2132</td>
<td>94.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age appropriate enrolment in class V</td>
<td>291</td>
<td>95.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily average attendance (April 2019)</td>
<td>7370</td>
<td>73.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Pratichi Baseline Survey on Primary Education in Kolkata, 2019

*This does not reflect the population share of the district as discussed in the paragraph of ‘Problems Related to Enrolment’.

The survey found the enrolment to be equally distributed among boys and girls. As reported by the teachers and local people, the proportion of girls enrolled has risen quite significantly to the current number. It was reported that special enrolment drives (Bhartikaran Karmasuchi) were organized by some schools to ensure the enrolment of local out-of-school children.
Figure 5. Genderwise Enrolment

Gender wise Enrollment

- Boys 50.2%
- Girls 49.8%

Figure 6. Social Categorywise Enrolment

Social Category wise Enrollment

- Children belonging to SC category: 11.4%
- Children belonging to ST category: 2.2%
- Children belonging to OBC category: 66.5%
- Children belonging to Muslim category: 0.4%
- Children belonging to Other category: 17.5%
Teachers of these schools had included in their time-tables, their visits to the surrounding areas as part of the enrolment drive. Teachers said that the community-based action had increased enrolments in their schools.

3.B.1. Problems Related to Enrolment
Although the RTE Act 2009 has clearly stated that no age proof was needed for enrolment, it was found that in 58 per cent of the KPSC schools and 19 per cent of the KMCP schools and SSKs, the submission of copies of birth certificates of enrolled children had been made mandatory. Whether any child had been denied enrolment on this ground was not the main issue here, the real concern was the denial of children’s rights as guaranteed by law.

![Children learning poems in the syllabus through dance drama](image)

Most of the enrolled children were from the general category, with a few being from the Scheduled Castes. Children from the Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes had even lower representation. It was found during
the survey that many children were not aware whether they belonged to the SC, ST, or OBC categories. In case of these children, no relevant documents were found to have been submitted to the schools, as the parents of the respective children could not reportedly procure them from appropriate issuing authorities. Conversations with teachers and parents indicated a different kind of problem related to the deprivation of some sections of the population from the constitutionally guaranteed right of being counted under a special constitutional category, namely Scheduled Caste or Scheduled Tribe or Other Backward Classes.

3.B.2. Age-appropriate Enrolment: Reality Confronts Myth

It was observed that for the KPSC schools, almost all of the children were admitted in their respective age-appropriate classes. In case of KMC primary schools and SSKs, the corresponding figures were a little lower, but they too showed substantial improvement.

The objective findings on age appropriate enrolment in the schools however contrast sharply with the subjective considerations of some of the teachers. Some teachers believed that the concept of age-appropriate admission made classroom teaching and learning difficult. They stated that a child was supposed to go through a baseline assessment prior to his/ her admission in a “competency-appropriate” class, rather than an “age-appropriate” class. For them age-appropriateness cannot be a determinant of educational progress. Instead they insisted that the qualification of a child to be in a particular standard must be decided on his/ her particular competencies. On the other hand, a significant number of teachers stood firmly in support of age-appropriate enrolment, stating that age-wise heterogeneity of learners in a classroom influenced their learning negatively. “Same age,” according to them, “is a key factor of children’s comfort in a classroom. In school, communication with classmates of same age made a huge difference in the holistic
development of every child.”

Favouring ‘competency-appropriate’ enrolment over ‘age-appropriate’ enrolment might have been drawn from some conceptual ambiguity among some school teachers with respect to the discussions on these issues in the National Curriculum Framework 2005. The ambiguity, again, might have found its way through the lacklustre approach to the Special Training for ‘Out of School Children’ in school, as prescribed in the RTE Act 2009. Some of the teachers seemed to have undermined the importance of the inference of plausibility of age-appropriate admission to ensure quality education: even if they had dropped out they had had different experiences while remaining out of school. The ‘Special Training’ idea was preceded by a number of programmes, namely, Remedial Classes, Residential and Non-Residential Bridge Courses carried out by the Education Department of the government of West Bengal through the Sarva Shiksha Mission.

With the advent of the RTE Act 2009, these programmes of alternative and innovative schooling had gradually stopped. Yet, the need for carrying out such programmes has been as pertinent as before. The Education department experienced the success of the non-residential bridge course that had been continued for two years with more than 100 children of Kolkata. Among them a significant number of children had never gone to school and the rest were drop-outs for more than one year. The course was designed as a two-year programme (two hours a day, six days a week) to prepare the children for age appropriate classes in formal schools. The programme was reasonably successful, and showed the possibility of age appropriate enrolment of children irrespective of their background. The lessons of

6 “Provided that where a child is directly admitted in a class appropriate to his or her age, then, he or she shall, in order to be at par with others, have a right to receive special training (ST) in such manner, and within such time limits, as may be prescribed.” - Chapter II Para 4 of RTE Act 2009
the programme can be profitably utilised to enhance the knowledge base of the teachers and the actual delivery of education.

3.B.3. Children with Special Needs
In KPSC and KMC schools the ratios of Children with Special Needs were 1.7 per cent and 0.4 per cent respectively. It was learnt from the KPSC teachers that though children were attending the schools regularly they received facilitation from Special Educators only once a week in case of KPSC schools. This seemed to be a serious limitation that impeded children’s learning. Further, some of the teachers demanded that all teachers (Head Teachers, Teachers-in-Charge, and Assistant Teachers) be imparted reasonable orientation on Special Education, so that they could help children with special needs.

3.C. The Enigma of Free Education
In the KMC schools and SSKs no child needed to pay any fee for admission. But, the case was different in the KPSC schools: in 29 KPSC schools (about 50 per cent) Rs 240 per annum (as per the circular of government of West Bengal) was charged during children’s enrolment. It was however mentioned again and again that paying the fee was not mandatory – those who could not pay should not pay. Aside from fees nearly half of the parents (45 per cent) said that they needed to purchase books other than the free text books provided by the government.

It was found that some schools which are quite prosperous and consider themselves to be “elite schools” as compared to most of the schools in the city feel that the RTE Act 2009 is actually disadvantageous for them. This is because admission is based on the lottery system due to which students from all backgrounds can be admitted. They feel that such students might be detrimental to their “elite” status. It has been observed that in Muslim-minority schools, new Muslim applicants are advised to enroll in Muslim-majority schools.
just so that they don’t have to go through the paperwork required for minority scholarships and other related welfare schemes. These kinds of cases are extremely dangerous as they pose a threat to the very concept of inclusive education.

Peer-group learning

3.D. Rate of Attendance: Progresses and Further Action

Children attending school regularly is pivotal to the effective functioning of schools. Aside from being a centrally important determinant of children’s learning abilities it also has its bearing on other – interlinked – aspects of schooling, including teachers’ attendance and motivation, association and attention of the local communities, departmental authorities, media, and others interested in education. We are glad to report to the public that compared with the past there has been some substantial improvement in this regard. The average rate of attendance in the month of April 2019, according to the school register was found to be 75 per cent in the KPSC schools and 63 per cent in the KMCP schools and SSKs. The rate of attendance shown in the school register was largely corroborated by our headcounts done on the days of visits to the respective schools. Our conversations with the children and parents added further approval to the
finding on the rate of attendance. As a mother told us:

We cannot hold our child back at home, even when she is sick or we need her to assist us in some domestic work. She does not want to miss school even for a day. She says, ‘if I don’t go to school, I will fall behind others in terms of the lessons taught in class.’ We are illiterate and cannot help in her studies at home. We don’t have money to pay for private tuitions. She is a child, but she understands that lessons taught in the school are very important, and if she does not do well in her studies she will have to follow in my footsteps in life – working for others as domestic help.

Another mother however had a different understanding. She thought that it was the fear of domestic chores that drives her daughter to school, where,

‘She will not have to clean the utensils or sweep the floor or look after her younger brother. I don’t know what or how much she is learning in the school. But, it gives her the opportunity to play, befriend other school mates, and have fun.

Nevertheless, the child instantly protested, and said, “Of course I learn in the school. Certainly I play, but I also study.” As if to prove her point she took out a book from her bag and started reading aloud.

Multiple stories highlighted multiple truths. While for Rakib, a student of grade 3, the opportunity of playing in the school was the main reason for not missing school (even “when I am sick or on a rainy day”), Swati, a student of grade 4, attended school regularly in order to do well in tests (“If I don’t come to school I will not be able to write the examination properly and my results will suffer”). Again, for children like Soma, the reason is different: “If I don’t go to school I will miss the mid-day meal [provided in the school].” She is fatherless and her mother goes out to work very early in the morning and comes back in the evening. If she stays back at home she
would have nothing to eat. On Sundays or holidays or days when the mid-day meal was not provided, “I buy something from the shop if my mother gives me some money or don’t eat anything [the whole day].”

Our interactions with the teachers also indicated that a combination of factors influenced the rate of attendance of the children. While some said that it was a result of the changed nature of the parents’ aspirations concerning their children’s education, some felt the main attraction was either the mid-day meal scheme or children getting the opportunity to play in school or the lure of escaping the drudgery of domestic chores. The plurality of reasons behind the enhanced rate of attendance of the children seemed to be linked with the class backgrounds of the children: those who came from the most vulnerable backgrounds – the families of daily wage earners or other manual workers facing tremendous livelihood insecurities – tended to have the inclination for attending school often to escape laborious tasks and hunger, while for children coming from relatively well-off households the joy of camaraderie that the school offered was the main incentive for not missing school. Again, differences in functioning in different schools did play an important role with regard to the rate of attendance. For example, in a school in south Calcutta, many of the children from a very poor background were found to be very regular in school as they were very keen to see their teacher, who was very loving and caring, and “tells us lots of stories, plays with us, and organizes many functions. The whole year round we take part in some programme or the other – drama, recitation, drawing competitions or sports.” In a school in the same neighbourhood, however, children attended school mainly due to factors other than studies. “The school is closed after the mid-day meal,” said a child.

In other words, despite there being several reasons behind enhanced attendance rates, improved functioning of the school (a friendly environment, regularity of the teachers,
innovative and joyful learning opportunities, the improved scope of participation in extra-curricular activities, and community association) played a central role in this matter. This in turn resulted in the improvement of learning achievements: Children in schools which had a better rate of attendance were found to be far ahead in their studies than children enrolled in schools with unsatisfactory rates of attendance.

Having acknowledged the improvement in the rate of attendance we cannot but underscore the distinction between the improved status and the desired status. Improved as it was, the average rate of attendance (75 per cent for KPSC schools and 63 per cent for KMCP schools and SSKs) was still shorter than what was desired (near 100 per cent). That more than one-fourth of the children missed school, was a problem in itself. Moreover, the issue was made even more complicated by the pattern of absence, which showed that some of the children, mainly from the vulnerable families, were absent from school for longer time spans. While in some cases the absence was involuntary – when children accompanied their parents to their native places or to places where parents worked as temporary migrant labourers or were held back at home to take care of their siblings or perform other household chores – in some cases they just chose not to attend school as they did not find it enjoyable. The reasons varied from “He scolded me,” “She insulted me in front of my fellow students” to “The teacher hit me with a stick.” Again, some other responses related to their not being able to follow the lessons.

The absentee children, in most cases, were those who needed to complete the process of learning in school, since they neither had anybody at home to assist them with studies nor could their parents afford private tutors. Therefore it is imperative for the Kolkata schools to take the successes in students’ attendance further and ensure that every child
completes his/her studies while they are at school. The gap in attendance is cause for concern, and even the better attended schools need to strive to increase attendance to near 100 per cent.

3.E. Teachers

3.E.1. Healthy Ratios

The average Pupil Teacher Ratio (PTR) in the surveyed KPSC schools (17:1) was quite good. (Teachers included Head Teachers, Teachers-in-Charge, permanent Assistant Teachers, and Additional Para Teachers.) The ratio, however, varied from 4 to 27. Even in KMCP schools and SSKs the average ratio was 26 (ranging between 11 and 46). Among the KPSC schools 68 per cent of the teachers were female. The corresponding figure for the KMC schools was 51.3 per cent in the surveyed schools. Since only females could be appointed as teachers (called Sahayikas) in the SSKs (barring some rare exceptions), all the SSK teachers were female.

Of the KPSC teachers, only a handful (12 per cent) were not graduates. One-third of them were graduate, while one-fifth had post graduate degrees. Three of them had done M.Phil or Ph.D.

3.E.2. Trainings

As regards professional trainings, while 58 per cent of the KPSC teachers had undergone some pre-service course or the other (like Diploma in Basic Teachers’ Training, B. El. Ed, B. Ed. and M. Ed), the rest were yet to comply with such training requirements. Nevertheless, 90 per cent of them had gone for some in-service training or the other (such as National Curriculum Framework 2005, RTE Act 2009, Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation, Teaching-learning Methodology, Learning Outcomes, Special Education, Orientation on Child Psychology, Early Grade Literacy and Numeracy Programme training on ‘No Corporal Punishment,’ and so on). ‘Special Training’ was received by 80 per cent of the Head Teachers (HT)/ Teachers-in-Charge (TIC) of the KPSC schools. In
many schools the HTs and TICs had deputed the Assistant Teachers for Special Training.

Among the teachers of surveyed KMC schools and SSKs, 50.7 per cent teachers received different in-service trainings. But none of the teachers in the KMCP schools and SSKs had reported to have received any Special Training.

Teachers’ training programmes, both pre-service and in-service, were criticized as being too technical and hardly pragmatic or application based. Many of the teachers said that they often found themselves at their wits ends while trying to apply such techniques in the classroom in particular and in the school in general. Usually such helplessness occurred because the teachers’ on-ground realities and requirements were hardly ever kept in mind while designing the content of training programmes. The viability of content for teachers’ training vis-à-vis varied practical domains needed continuous and repeated interaction and discussion with the teachers. It was reported that a one-way rigid system of training was in place, where teachers found themselves at the receiving end of sermonising lectures by the administrators, coordinators and even resource persons. Teachers were bogged down with their day-to-day responsibilities of running the schools, managing the classrooms, extracting the desired learning outcomes from the children. This often tended to lead to mental fatigue among the teachers that restricted their ability to think differently and to solve the problems innovatively. Despite lip service being offered in favour of modernizing things, in most cases teachers were reduced to following the old path traversed by generations of teachers. Therefore they often failed to receive the resource persons’ facilitation flexibly and try those out in their schools. This might be seen as a problem of reaching the ‘general’ (teacher’s own schools) from the ‘particular’ (sample mentioned in training content). On the other hand, the training providers tended to fail in reaching the ‘particular’ from ‘general.’ If teachers felt clueless about applying the training contents, then there
is a case for a thorough scrutiny of the training content and processes.

Self-financed teacher education has become a well-established business in many parts of the country.7

3.E.3. Non-teaching Duties

A standing problem mentioned by almost all Head Teachers and Teachers-in-charge, was ‘Election Duty.’ This allegedly created severe problems in running the school effectively, by reducing the teacher-strength of the school. While the official statistics showed no shortages of teachers in the schools, in reality it was otherwise: a substantial number of teachers were not taking classes due to their engagement in ‘Election Duty.’ These selected teachers were deputed as both Designated Officer (DO) and Booth Level Officer (BLO) by the Election Commission. Their duties included both office works (by DOs) and door to door errands (by BLOs). On an average the office work took almost 30 days (including holidays) and door to door jobs took almost 27 days (including holidays). It meant selected teachers were bound to get engaged for almost 40 to 50 days a year for their election duties replacing school duties, recurrently hindering the academic planning and operations of schools.

3.E.4. Inspiring Teachers

Despite several problems, we saw many teachers who were leading the way in providing a good primary education to all. Starting with spending money from their own pockets for school expenditures to staying back at school till late, teachers were often doing all they could do for the school. They have been fighting against huge odds including inadequate

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infrastructure, poor training, shortage of funds, and so on. It is high time teachers get their due and are recognized as the key to reforming the education sector. Their concerns need to be addressed and the problems related to non-teaching duties must be eradicated. Suggestions and comments from teachers could be invaluable at every step, and this has particular bearing on policy.

3.F. Teaching and Learning

“Mera koi gaon nehi, mera koi desh nehi. Hum to sirf rehenwale bain, jahan jagah milta bain reb jatein bain (I don’t have a village, I don’t have a country. I am just the one who stays, I stay wherever I get space).” That’s how one mother – we could call her Maya – identified herself. She and her ilk form the major component of the parent community of the public schools in Kolkata – like in most cities. Their socio-economic settings put their children in a situation not quite conducive to learning. On the one hand, they are forced to work as child labourers or to stay home to take care of siblings or to go back to their villages with their parents for long periods. On the other hand, they face several cognitive and other difficulties in their studies.

With this comes the issue of gender inequality. “I have many responsibilities at home; I help my mother in cooking, wash utensils and fetch water from our roadside tap, chop vegetables and prepare dough for roti,” said a nine-year-old “inattentive” girl. When we asked her whether she was upset doing all this work at home and if that made her inattentive during classes, she astonishingly replied, “Not at all, I do not mind helping my mother at home. I am upset because I don’t understand why my elder brother does not need to do any domestic work, but I have to do all.” We found such varied and almost unpredictable causes behind the inattentiveness of children in classrooms.

Many teachers, while recognising the difficulties involved in learning, attributed the problems to the socio-economic
conditions, like residential ambience, poverty, lack of food and nutrition, addictions of adults and their distressing behaviour, domestic violence against the children or their mothers, child labour, domestic labour by the child, frequent migration, seasonal migration and sexual abuse. While many of the parents’ statements reiterated the teachers’, many parents were found to be very determined to get their children educated well. Similarly, there were teachers who, while recognizing the gloomy reality, were trying their best to make the teaching-learning processes acceptable and joyful, and trigger in the children a sense of ownership.

An Environmental Science class in progress in a primary school under KPSC

Like many others in her migrant community, Maya wants her daughter to be educated and lead a decent life. Even though she was enrolled in a school where a group of sincere teachers followed almost all ‘norms’ of the prescribed teaching-learning methodology, as well as implemented ample innovative teaching techniques, the child had been
facing difficulties in terms of her learning outcome. Almost all the children who were facing problems in reading, writing and arithmetic belonged to similar communities. The main problem concerned the socio-economic adversity. Even if they attended school regularly, the school system was such that, despite many proclamations of no-need-to-study-outside-school, children actually did require something extra to aid their studies. It was not necessarily about studying at home with a family member or going to a private tutor. It was more in the form of, say, storytelling, reading books, magazines, newspapers, attending a music club or drawing school, and so on. But, most of the children did not have the fortune of growing up in such circumstances. As a result some children were not getting any educational supplement; others who could manage to find some way – in the form of private tuitions from the local professionally deficient private tutors – were getting not only a placebo but also a counter-productive placebo (we will discuss this presently). A combination of factors, including the perceived benefit of private tuition, good scores, learning in English medium schools – even if they taught nothing – has resulted in a peculiar blend of educational concepts and delivery.

As mentioned above, a major change in the quality of aspirations of the parents was observed by the study. To quote a mother,

I don’t want my daughter to become a domestic worker like me. I am illiterate, working hard to provide my child with education so that she gets a good job that gives her social prestige. In my occupation I don’t get respect from either my employer or from the society. I cannot afford a private English medium school, but I really want this school [the government run school her child was enrolled in] to teach my daughter good English, so that she gets a good job.

This aspiration led many parents to demand Spoken English classes in schools. According to the teachers, such
parental insistence came from the expectation of a “smart” development of their children. This resulted in a tremendous inclination towards English medium schools, which, as perceived by the parents, facilitated the children to speak, read and write in English. Moreover, the computer aided teaching and learning methods and the children’s learning of computer operations and applications were well appreciated among their parents.

These led the teachers to develop some mechanisms to meet the parental demand, alongside the regular deliveries. Many teachers suggested that all teachers must learn how to facilitate the learning of children through computer aided methods. In addition they proposed that the worksheets, which were developed by the teachers, needed to be colourful, attractive and printed, so that children could take the sheets back home and show their parents. Teachers maintained that this social demand for Spoken English among parents had developed due to the current trend of the job market; it had been found that parents believed that their children would be able to get jobs only if they learnt to speak English fluently and become ‘smart’ as per the norm of the ‘market’. We found teachers saying that many children even from vulnerable socio-economic backgrounds, despite all financial miseries and struggles, were quitting government schools to get enrolled in private English medium schools of uncertain quality.

But there were other experiences as well. A mother, who was an ICDS worker, remarked:

My daughter always pressures me to put her in a private English medium school. I clearly told her that it’s not possible for me to meet her demands. She is growing up; she needs to understand her mother’s struggle and our financial condition. Moreover, I don’t believe that only a private school can give her quality education. It’s an increasing “fashion” of our neighbourhood to send all children to private English medium schools. This fashion
is influencing her choice.

The situation was really challenging for the teachers. Amidst a growing social demand for education manifested in many different forms – high enrolment, increased demand for private tuition, imitating the elite English medium schools and so on – teachers who had kept the flame of sensitivity alive, but had very limited resources, were found to be hard pressed. Yet, many of them were trying innovatively, vigorously and tirelessly to help children learn the basics. Many teachers were found to take extra classes for children who needed extra academic support beyond school hours. These sessions were not organized by any order of any government departments, but were completely voluntary.

Children in a ‘Know-your-Locality’ session organised by a primary school under KPSC

Teachers’ initiatives in KPSC schools included use of handmade and readymade teaching-learning materials (TLM) both inside and outside the classroom. Similarly, most of the teachers were regularly using teachers’ diaries and preparing
the lesson plans on a regular basis. However, except for using TLM, the other practices were largely absent in the KMC schools.

Students and teachers present an Environmental Science project in a school under the KPSC

Pedagogy cannot be discussed in isolation from the socio-economic, political, cultural and psychological conditions of individual learners and teaching-learning practices must be helped by advantageous public policy. But while public policy needed to create a friendly environment for the teachers to carry out their work in such a hugely difficult situation, it often played a contrary role. For example, a majority of teachers spoke of a major confusion they faced with regard to preparation of the academic calendar. The departmental orders for carrying out several activities, observances and celebrations were often circulated abruptly with very little time for implementation. There were several occasions when such orders were communicated to the teachers via WhatsApp texts, insisting that the same be done within a day. These previously unscheduled activities often messed up the planning of teachers, Mother-Teacher Associations and School Development Committees. To come to terms with this situation, teachers proposed a weekly or biweekly calendar instead of a yearly, quarterly or even a monthly one.
A session of ‘learning by doing’ in a primary school under KPSC

3.F.1 Conceptual Clarity

A major problem of teaching and learning seemed to arise out of the lack of appropriate levels of conceptual clarity among the teachers. More than half of the KPSC Head Teachers said that they did not know about the NCF 2005. This speaks volumes about the need for teachers to be updated about the latest developments. Lack of knowledge about the NCF 2005 not only indicated a lacuna between teachers’ own ideas of curriculum and the state-proposed curriculum framework but also pointed towards the departmental deficiency in terms of developing the teachers’ competent understanding vis-a-vis the child’s psychology of learning, the concept of the child’s holistic development, the significance of attention, cognitive level, learning process, and competency in the child’s learning. Blurred knowledge of the NCF 2005 at times resulted in the poor understanding of the science behind the concept of age-appropriate admission, no detention, continuous and comprehensive evaluation, classroom management and behaviour management of the child. This could weaken the confidence of teachers in the child-centric educational process. It could lead to some teachers’ not accepting that corporal punishment and mental
harassment were never necessary to bring up a child, even if he/she was ‘naughty.’ Or that such behaviour had negative effects in the holistic development of a child.

Figure 7. In-service Training for Teachers in KPSC Schools Surveyed

![Bar chart showing the percentage of teachers trained on various topics]

Table 6. In-Service Training for Teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Training Topic</th>
<th>Teachers (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers received training on Special Training (RTE Act 2009)</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers thoroughly aware of RTE Act 2009 through in-service training</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers thoroughly aware of NCF 2005 through in-service training</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers thoroughly aware of CCE through in-service training</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers received the guidelines of CCE</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Pratichi Baseline Survey on Primary Education in Kolkata, 2019

It appeared to be a puzzle to us when almost all the KPSC teachers and more than half of the KMC teachers said that they had proper understanding of the Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE) scheme. Head Teachers (HTs) and Teachers In Charge (TICs) of 1.7 per cent (1 out
of 59) of the KPSC and 48 per cent (10 out of 21) KMCP schools and SSKs needed theoretical orientation on CCE, although CCE was seen to be practiced according to the guidelines in the concerned schools. In most of the schools teachers were facilitating the activity-based learning method amongst the children. They strongly believed that through this method children learnt faster and more intensely. They also stated that prompting children’s imaginativeness, inquisitiveness, reasoning, expression and language skills through this learning method, helped very much in the development of their writing skills and skills of mathematics. On the other hand, keeping a vibrant library in school helped develop their reading skills. It had also been experienced that in some of the schools children were reading story books in groups, which had improved their reading ability substantially.

It was found that all teachers expected a prearranged calendar at the beginning of the session from the department, so that the school level academic and other calendars could be reasonably prepared and compiled after comparing the same with the departmental calendar.

Teachers discussed the problems of long vacations in an academic session that tended to delink children from the classroom. This disconnection often hampered children’s attention in class and led to low retention of what had been taught before the commencement of the vacation.

Teachers did not form a homogenous community. While some appeared to be genuinely concerned – in their cognitive understanding – about the child’s dignity and made it explicit in their expressions regarding corporal punishment and mental harassment, some others took these ‘newer introductions’ as mere legal directions rather than moral bindings. Again, some blatantly clung on to traditions. Those that take the child-centric measures as legal interventions believe:

Mild and moderate levels of hitting, scolding children is needed to discipline children, manage their behaviour,
and even facilitate their learning. Disciplining children is necessary, if we don’t scold a child to restrain him/her from doing unacceptable or dangerous things, how will untoward consequences be avoided? Even if we stop thinking about making the child behave, what about the consequences?

The refusal to understand that unacceptable behaviour could be avoided through modifying its antecedent was found to have a deep and complex root. Sections of teachers refuse to accept that even mild or moderate levels of hitting, and scolding, in effect violated the child’s dignity. This attitude was well supplemented by society at large:

During a survey in one of the big schools, a mother who came to take her child home after school, was speaking to one of the teachers regarding her child’s behaviour management. She insisted that the teacher be strict with her child, who was being “disobedient”. She appealed to the teacher to cane the child as and when necessary. This belief that there was no education without caning was widespread in society – only among the poor.

Teachers had gone through a number of trainings, workshops, sensitization programmes on “No corporal punishment” organized by both the government department and others. But the efforts, owing to the lack of a comprehensive planning, yielded mixed results.  

Interestingly the rationale of such trainings, workshops, sensitization programmes following Section 17(1) of RTE Act 2009 on prohibition of corporal punishment and mental harassment had been received with appreciation by some of the teachers, there were teachers who were unwilling to accept that one significance of Sub-section 17(1) bore direct relevance to the Antecedent-Behaviour-Consequence (ABC) model of human behaviour science. The approach of not considering ‘punishment’ detrimental to children’s future could be fatal; consequences could range from serious physical injury to suicide, clinical depression, to developing ‘aggression.’
The Head Teacher of Sarada Vidyapith told us the stories of Mrinmay, “a very naughty” child. Every other day children from Mrinmay’s class or other classes used to complain against him for hitting them or pushing them. Other children were bothered by him. In the mean time one day suddenly the Head Teacher found Mrinmay doing something on the street. She saw that he was making some sculptures with road-side mud. “You are supposed to study now at home. What are you doing Mrinmay?” asked the Head Teacher. “I am doing some school project works for my friend, he needs to submit the sculptures by tomorrow,” he replied. The Head Teacher told us that she found him in a new role – not hitting anyone, not disturbing anyone, but helping his friend. According to the Head Teacher, this incident made her realize that a child who was always branded as “naughty,” might also have an opposite trait to help others. From the next day the teachers decided to channelize Mrinmay’s energy in a positive way. They stopped punishing him and made him the class monitor. And that was a grand decision which stopped Mrinmay doing mischievous things and made him a responsible child. While talking about Mrinmay the Head Teacher specifically pointed out that behaviour of every child had to be
assessed meticulously, and then to decide about teachers’ responses to his/her behaviour. Punishing could not be a solution to any “problem behaviour.”

3.F.2. Co-curricular Activities
Co-curricular activities are instrumental in capturing children’s imagination and in nurturing their interest in the school. These activities provide an outlet for their creativity and ingenuity.

The survey found that while almost all the KPSC schools were involved in preparing and putting up wall magazines and carrying out other literary programmes too, such enthusiasm was hardly present in the KMC run schools. However, almost all the KMC run schools had reportedly organized cultural programmes and sports of various kinds. The KPSC schools were in fact a little behind than the KMC schools in this regard. The children’s excitement about these programmes was obvious during our visits when they were competing with each other to show us their works. In schools where the primary section had to share the building with the secondary section, children were not allowed to put up drawings, magazines and the like. A space needed to be provided to the children for such purposes. This required urgent policy attention.

Active Child Cabinets were found in almost all the KPSC schools, but not in any KMCP schools or SSKs. Not only the members of the cabinets but also other children were found to be spontaneous and very communicative even with strangers like us.

Sports are often a very important part of a child’s overall development and well-being. Sadly, most of the schools did not have provisions of playgrounds for students. Physical activity was mostly limited to irregular yoga classes in the corridors. Sports days were organized in some schools but a child ought to take part in physical activities more regularly.
A tour of the Indian Museum, Kolkata, organized by a primary school under the KPSC

Table 7. Common Activities of Public Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Regular activity based classes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Special Training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Special Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Excursion/ education tours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Child Tracking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Cooked Mid-day-meal programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Library session</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Literary festival</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Wall magazine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Cultural programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Sports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Observance of special days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Home and community visit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Community based programmes organised by school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>School Development Committee meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Mother-Teacher Association meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Activities as directed/ organised by managing authorities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Activities as organised by community and different organisations other than Government run organisations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Pratichi Baseline Survey on Primary Education in Kolkata, 2019
Private tuitions, at least in this part of the country, are a common public reality: no observer of the process of education in West Bengal can miss the point that large sections of the students – enrolled both in public and private schools – resort to private tuitions. All of Pratichi’s previous reports on education had reported this phenomenon in detail, which in Professor Amartya Sen’s language, is an “artificially created necessity.”

Following the general pattern the present study found that 70 per cent of the children in the survey had private tutors. Various reasons were supplied for why children were sent for private tuitions. It was widely felt that academic support outside school was essential for children to perform well. Parents who could not provide such support, either because of their not being adequately educated for doing so or because of tight work schedules sent their wards for tuitions to get this extra support. Some parents said that children got nervous or scared in the classroom and thus were not able to learn properly in school. A large section of the parents complained that children did not want to study at home but private tuitions kept them busy.

As mentioned earlier, we have come across many committed teachers who have been trying their best to ensure quality and equity in education. Yet, large sections of parents strongly believe that children must be provided with extra-school support. Part of this belief has come from the changed quality of aspiration – children need to prepare for competitive education – and part of it came from parents’ real inability or socially constructed unwillingness to find ways to spend quality time with their children. In many cases children were sent for private tuitions so that they did not disturb the elders at home or did not waste time playing around.

The social problem of private tuitions has another important dimension: many children enjoy private tuitions. “I love going

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for tuitions, because my friends go there,” was a common statement. This additional internalization of private tuition by society might be a special feature of Kolkata. Children attending public-run schools in the city often do not have much scope for socialization outside their homes. And in most of the homes there was hardly any space for decent living. Moreover, the generally poor physical environment outside the shelters was further spoiled by the repugnant social environment – drinking, violence, abuse, and so on.

Had the setting been different, where parents could help children with their studies or at least spend with them some quality time, things could have certainly been otherwise. Few as they were, the cases of children not attending private tuitions amply proved this: while in some cases children’s not attending private tuition was due to their parents’ inability to pay the charges, in other cases the reason was parental help at home.

Here, it may be relevant to draw on some personal experiences of the researchers involved with this study. Even some of the government run schools with residential facilities for underprivileged children had made provisions for additional tuition for five to six days a week. The intention was undoubtedly good – children availing such residential facilities were from very poor educational backgrounds and required to be adequately prepared to catch up. The learners who were residing in that residential school were essentially from the most vulnerable section of society; some children were living in the streets before they were admitted there, some were never enrolled in school, and some were homeless. For them the ‘extra school support’ was helpful. It is of course not wise to make a generalization of a particularity-driven necessity, and the free additional supports provided by trained teachers cannot be equated with paid private tuitions given by ill-equipped tutors. Yet, when talking of a concerted effort to make private tuition redundant, the example of the government residential schools might bear some friendly
fire. In general, it may be morally right and practically feasible to take note of the amendment of the RTE 2009 on Special Training (to be organized for all children who need it), and follow a line which could be more equitable and help to gradually eradicate the practice of private tuition.

The overarching practice of private tuition tended to cause frustration among many of the teachers. In their view, what children learned in school with their regular teachers often got lost due to the lessons given by inefficient private tutors. In many cases they observed frequently erroneous tutoring by some of the private tutors, as well.

Teachers were also concerned with the connection of absenteeism of children and private tuition. Many parents were allegedly not taking school seriously as a learning institution; instead they considered it merely as an organization for supplying ‘academic certificates.’ Therefore, the schools had become an institution where their children’s names were enrolled, but they were not made to attend school regularly, for they were being sent to private tutors. This, teachers believed, was making the school insignificant. During our discussion some of the teachers added that the big private tutorial homes had changed the attitude of the society. Students belonging to well off families were availing the services of such big tutorial houses even from the middle school stage, paying huge fees, which were at times more than that of their private schools. They did so to prepare for different entrance examinations to well-known institutes of higher education as getting through them would mean a better career opportunity. This practice had changed the concept of ‘quality education.’ People belonging to poorer sections had recognized this change, but could not afford it. As a result they had been trying to cope with this change constantly with low cost services – as mentioned above.

Almost all the teachers talked about their endeavours of sensitizing parents and children in this regard. They had been trying to motivate parents so that they stop sending
their children to private tutors, but the efforts were yet to bear fruit. The parents’ baseless fear and insecurity about their children’s education and performance made them depend on this artificial necessity. A mere governmental order on ‘no private tuition’ for government schools teachers won’t help much, for (a) most of the private tutors were not from the pool of government teachers but from the army of unemployed youths, and (b) with active support from parents even government teachers providing private tuition could easily conceal this from the government’s knowledge – since it required evidence! Some radical changes are seriously needed, and some of the paths, including taking extra classes or making the schools interesting for the children to spend extra time in, paved by some of the teachers could give valuable lessons on this.

Table 8. About Private Tuition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Children taking private tuition (%)</th>
<th>69.9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average Number of private tutors (per child)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average expenditure for private tuition (per child, per month)</td>
<td>300-1000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Pratichi Baseline Survey on Primary Education in Kolkata, 2019

3.H. Cooked Mid-day-Meal Programme:
The cooked mid-day meal programme (CMDMP) has proved to be one of the landmarks in the field of educational reforms. Not only has it gained acclaim from all over the world, but has also delivered on its promise of effectively keeping students in school and sustaining their interest in education. Efficient implementation of the mid-day meal programme goes a long way in enhancing students’ performance and in building a sense of companionship between classmates. A mother, who was bringing her two children up alone and living hand to mouth, said:

When will we think about quality education? We spend 24 hours thinking about our stomach. This mid-day meal has at least ensured one meal for my children. Now we
cannot even think about our school without the mid-day meal; it’s our fundamental need. The food I can give them would never meet their hunger. I have seen my children studying when they used to be hungry and now I understand that they can pay attention to studies because their stomachs are full.

Teachers seemed to be quite attached to the programme as well. Said one:

The Cooked Mid-day Meal Programme (CMDMP) has become an essential part of all schools, not only because it attracts our children to school, but also because the state would never be able to ensure the right to education without acknowledging the right to food and nutrition. Both are complementary. We feel it every day.

Our study found that cooked mid-day-meals were served in all the schools, but there were some variations in receiving the meals -- 90 per cent of the KPSC school children and 85 per cent of the KMC schools and SSK children were taking it. The variation was a bit odd, since the KMC schools and SSKs were generally attended by the poorest children, and yet more children in these institutions were found to be reluctant to taking the meals. The issue needed some more investigation. Nevertheless, as a general picture, aside from enjoying the much required food to assuage hunger children enjoyed the camaraderie while eating together.

In most of the schools (75 per cent of the KPSC and 95 per cent of the KMC schools and SSKs) food came from outside prepared by Self Help Groups (SHGs) or delegated NGOs. The responsibility of preparing the MDMs was varied: ranging from SHGs to NGOs to individual schools. So the quality was also found to be different in different schools. When the meals were provided by the SHGs or NGOs, there almost always occurred disputes between the schools and the MDM supplying agencies. Schools often complained about corrupt practices, for the records kept lacked probity. This
must be investigated and corrected with immediate effect.

Only in 10 per cent of the surveyed KPSC schools and five per cent of the KMC schools and SSKs materials for cooked mid-day meal had been purchased by the teachers. In other words, unlike in the rural areas, the teachers in Kolkata were less involved in purchasing material for the cooked mid-day meals.

Only in 19 per cent of the KPSC schools and 33 per cent of the KMC schools and SSKs was the meal served in the dining hall; in 37 per cent and 43 per cent cases respectively it was served in the classrooms.

Kitchen gardens were found in one-fifth of the KPSC schools. Schools using vegetables grown on the same premise had added special value for the children.

The responsibility of supplying the MDM to many schools was delegated to certain religious groups, which provided only vegetarian food. While this raised the question of nutritional insufficiency in the food supplied, students were also found to be resentful about it since they were not habituated to vegetarian food.

Teachers, students and parents alike reiterate how the CMDMP has improved performance of the children and has renewed their interest in school. So, there was need for improvement in the implementation of the programme.

53 per cent parents expressed that the food served in CMDMP was ‘Good’ in terms of quality, 28 per cent said that it was ‘average’ and according to almost 4 per cent the food was ‘excellent’. A few parents said that the food, in terms of quality of material and cooking, needed improvement.
Table 9. Quality of Cooked Mid-Day Meal Programme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Children</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Child taking CMDM regularly (out of selected 236 children)</td>
<td>212</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Guardians</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quality of CMDM as per guardians’ opinion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bad</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not know</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>212</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Pratichi Baseline Survey on Primary Education in Kolkata, 2019

Figure 8. Quality of CMDM as per Guardians’ Opinion According to the Current Survey in KPSC Schools
Figure 9. Purchasers of CMDM Materials
(in the current survey of schools under KPSC)

Figure 10. Cooks of CMDM
(in the current survey of schools under KPSC)
Figure 11. Servers of CMDM
(from the current survey in KPSC schools)

Figure 12. Cooking Space for CMDM
from the current survey in KPSC schools
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 9.1. Operational Aspects of CMDMP</th>
<th>Number of Schools</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CMDM materials purchased by teachers</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMDM materials purchased by both teacher and cook</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMDM materials purchased by cook</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>23.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMDM materials purchased by others</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>62.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMDM materials purchased by designated person</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMDM prepared by cook</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMDM prepared by others</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMDM prepared by Self Help Group</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>30.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMDM served by teachers</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>27.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMDM served by cook</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>30.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMDM served by others</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>42.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMDM is cooked in school kitchen</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>23.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMDM is cooked in non-functioning classroom</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMDM is not cooked in school</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>74.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMDM is served in classroom</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>37.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMDM is served in dining hall</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>18.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMDM is served in playground/open space</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>16.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMDM is served in spacious kitchen-shed</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMDM is served in verandah</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>16.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Pratichi Baseline Survey on Primary Education in Kolkata, 2019

3.I. Community Connection
A strong connection with the community was essential to understand the children and their needs and for ensured delivery of quality education. Global experiences showed that when communities were consulted about the curriculum, teaching methods, and other school related issues, it almost always resulted positively.10

10 A recent example of a public debate successfully improving the quality of education was reported from Vietnam. [https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED588856.pdf](https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED588856.pdf)
In almost all the KPSC and KMCP schools and SSKs, School Development Committees were formed. However, the degree of taking part in planning and monitoring the development activities was varied, and KPSC schools showed better involvement of the community than that found in the KMC schools and SSKs. A little more than half of the KPSC teachers were found to be visiting the houses and localities of the children almost on a regular basis for several purposes, such as to know about children’s problems, bringing children to school regularly, and to get an idea of the needs and strengths of the families. This actually improved children’s attendance as well as the relationship among communities and the concerned schools. Child Tracking, a programme taken up by the government of West Bengal, involved teachers visiting the community to track children who were out of school or were enrolled but not attending school regularly. This programme was supposed to ensure that the community joins
the school education system to improve universalization of enrollment and retention. In Kolkata district public schools, where children were enrolled almost essentially from the most socio-economically vulnerable sections of the city, essential bonding between the school and community seemed to play a pivotal role in ensuring enrolment, retention and quality education. This also lessened the distance between teachers, who were likely to be privileged in terms of socio-economic status, and the members of the community, which included the underprivileged people. In a teacher’s understanding:

Unless we enter the homes of a child we would never understand what is happening there, what is actually hindering their reading, writing skills development. The families know well about the economic gap between them and us; at times they do not believe that we can have reason to be worried about their child’s development. They find it just a protocol that we teach their children. I can feel that the constant personal contact with them has developed among them some trust and bonding with us. The community has become our strength now. They talk about their children’s needs with us. They actually become serious about the importance of education in their children’s lives.

A number of schools were found to be doing excellent work through their constant connection with the community. Ensuring enrolment, checking absenteeism, handling the issue of out-of-school children effectively were some of the areas where the cooperative endeavour of the school authorities, teachers, non-teaching staff and the people of the community could bring some improvement. Some schools were working directly with the mothers, and the most important of their activities was the literacy drive among the mothers. According to a Head Teacher, the literacy drive had also brought a significant change in the personalities of the mothers:

They are much more confident nowadays, after our
literacy drive. Mothers can read their own bank passbooks, and important papers. Some of the children used to get engaged in different sorts of occupations, such as selling flowers or *dhupkathis* (incense sticks). Now mothers are rethinking their decisions of engaging children in earning. This has resulted in stopping long absenteeism and drop-outs. Now we, the teachers, school authorities and parents are working together on reducing absenteeism. Initially the attendance rate was 10-15 per cent, now it has increased to 60 per cent. We hope that this togetherness will ensure 100 per cent attendance one day.

Another Head Teacher narrated stories of their attempts at involving mothers in school activities. They organized programmes to collect and exhibit the writings of the mothers on display boards of the school. They also organized a programme on ‘International Woman’s Day’ on 8 March 2019, where mothers gave speeches to observe the occasion. “Mothers started realizing that they also had ownership. The sense of belonging has been helping us run the school far more easily.”

Keeping the school gate open during the serving of mid-day meals was another important move taken by a Head Teacher. “We open the gate so that parents can come inside and monitor the quality and quantity of the meal. Now they take this as their own responsibility,” he said.

An assistant teacher of an Urdu medium school had been visiting the children’s huts regularly. His mission was to bring back to school the children engaged in child labour:

We all track the children almost every day. It is very effective in checking child labour too. We need to be very cautious about children here in terms of their regularity in school, as their families are very poor, and pursue the age-old practice of child labour. Without the active participation of this community, we would not be able to run the school.
These examples, however, were just germinating. There was a long way to go to find a universal picture of fully bloomed community involvement in the functioning of the primary schools of Kolkata. Even though performances of the KPSC schools were found to be better than that of the KMC schools and SSKs, large sections of the parents of KPSC schools said that teachers never visited their homes. A little less than half of the parents remembered about the Mother-Teacher Association (MTA) meetings, and 42 per cent had no idea about the MTA. Only 25 per cent of parents reportedly knew about a functional School Development Committee (SDC). It was only in some of the schools that parents were always welcomed and encouraged to get involved in school activities even on a daily basis. And there is a strong case for taking such examples further ahead – towards universalization.

**Table 10. Community Connection with School**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number of Schools</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Functioning SDC</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>94.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDC participates in planning and gives recommendation for school development</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>94.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDC monitors fund utilization and other issues of school</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>94.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Cabinet</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>98.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers visit children’s homes and/ or community</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>52.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers participate in community development programmes</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>74.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Pratichi Baseline Survey on Primary Education in Kolkata, 2019

**4. Moving Forward**

The findings of the study were interesting – some parts were in tandem with some popular notions, others sharply contradicted popular beliefs. In line with the popular experience our study found myriad problems creating obstacles to the possibility of education for all. However,
contrasting sharply with the inescapable cynicism, our inquiry found enormous possibilities of realizing the goal of universal primary education in this magnificent city. The experiences of some of the most reasoned and encouraging examples set by some schools in collaboration with the local societies and government wings, and our quantitative and qualitative interactions with diverse agents of education – teachers, parents, children, officials – suggest that the beginnings made in some schools can be expanded to cover the entire city. Of course the possibility needs to be supplemented with some robust and immediate measures from the government as well as by the teachers and the local communities.

First, financial allocation is certainly an important requisite, but many of the modifications required concern changes of attitude rather than increased funds. For example, insistence on producing birth certificates during enrolment violates the rule of RTE Act 2009, and it can immediately be done away with. The school level programmes that are to be organized by the order of the department need a planned schedule or calendar, so that those do not disturb the regular academic calendar prepared by the schools. Circulation of an annual programme calendar or a half yearly calendar from the department may work in this regard. This systematic way should help the teachers to prepare the academic calendar following the central calendar circulated by the department at the beginning of an academic session or on a half yearly basis. There are many such small but important areas of modification.

The issue of lengthy election duties for school teachers needs to be settled by the Department of School Education, government of West Bengal, to ensure that the essential school duties of teachers are never hampered. These duties are hampering the smooth running of schools and stealing the academic hours that the children are entitled to get from their teachers.
Second, there is an urgent need for making substantial resources available to the teachers. The resources do not always call for material inputs but often demand cerebral stimulation, which can easily be provided with some of the most readily available and oft-cited resources, like the NCF 2005, and the RTE Act 2009. A scientifically designed thorough orientation on the NCF and RTE can be immensely useful in developing the requisite understanding and clarity on the philosophy and vision of the RTE Act, the concepts of no detention, age appropriate admission and Comprehensive and Continuous Evaluation (CCE). This is central to fight the lack of academic understanding, at least among a certain section of agents of education at both the policy and the implementation levels, on the philosophy and psychology of learning, normal human development and child development. The programme needs to be organized in a way as to make the teachers embrace the child-centric learning in its essence. As part of this, regular orientation programmes and workshops on child psychology and child behaviour can be planned and organized for the teachers. The workshops have to be planned to be organized in fully participatory manner so that teachers get a chance to make their points clearly and also get an opportunity to clear the doubts in their minds.

Third, the social, economic, cultural, and environmental settings of the children and their schools, which pose a major challenge to the possibility of universal education, must be taken into consideration. As described in some detail in the previous sections, children are often challenged so heavily by the local settings that the purpose of schooling often gets defeated. The school can be the best space and can provide the best tools to overcome the challenges. Of course this requires some important changes, prospective among which can be elongating the school hours – so that children can be protected from the disturbing local environment, to some extent, and be offered a more friendly, fearless, and refreshing
environment. The extended hours can be planned to meet the specific requirements of the specific schools: need-based extra academic support, playing, doing creative activities, and spending leisure time creatively. Education Volunteers may be engaged from the school locality to run the extended school hour programme.

Fourth, community based programmes, especially regular visits to children’s residences and child tracking, need to be ensured by the school teachers. As mentioned earlier, teachers who visit the community regularly, can help to prepare their plan of action regarding community based activities.

Fifth, the training programmes in general, the special training (to facilitate beyond school support to learners for coping effectively with age appropriate classes), and the special education (to facilitate the CWSN) in particular have to be regularized and designed in a meaningful way. Besides a rationalized planning of recruiting more Special Educators for more support to the children, all the school teachers need to be given basic trainings on Special Education. The general training programmes have to be more interactive and participatory in nature. Our experience of the programme, “Achieving Quality of Education through Enhanced Teachers’ Capabilities” showed that teachers are keen to take part in the academic exercises: what they need is the dignified opportunity to participate.

Sixth, it would be essential to come to terms with the issue of English teaching – a surging demand from the parents. To meet the demand effectively, teachers need to be imparted specific training on effective methods and practices.

Seventh, the issue of infrastructure has to be addressed. In short, the requirement of infrastructure entailed the following: construction of toilets for both girls and boys following the expected ratio; repairing and renovation of existing toilets; furniture for both children and teachers, especially benches for children; 100 per cent safe and running drinking water
for each and every school; need based arrangement of separate staff-rooms; and the issue of getting No Objection Certificates smoothly from the owners of school buildings (in case of rented houses).

Finally, as mentioned earlier, owing to lack of information many of the parents had failed to procure caste certificates. The issue has to be addressed so as to protect the entitlements of the constitutionally defined social categories (SC, ST, OBC), including the provision of 25 per cent reservation of seats in private unaided schools for children belonging to economically weaker sections and disadvantaged groups.

Initiation of a process of change has already begun. What is needed is to stimulate the process through a collaborative social effort. With some policy supplementation the strength in the form of community aspiration and teachers’ motivation can bring forth some wonderful changes in the educational scenario of Kolkata. The great city just needs that.