

Govt to frame norms to make schools inclusive for transgender students

After this workshop we will collect feedback on how to make school education accessible to transgender and gender nonconforming students. Based on their feedback we will lay down guidelines and policies. SANJAY GOEL, director, Delhi govt's Directorate of Education

NEW DELHI: The Delhi government's Directorate of Education (DoE) said that within a year it will come up with guidelines to make its 1,100 schools "inclusive" for transgender students. The department plans to "train" principals of all government-run schools on handling issues relating to transgender students.

On Tuesday, the DoE organised a workshop for 25 government school principals in collaboration with an NGO.

DoE director Sanjay Goel said the project, a first of its kind, hopes to eliminate "stigma" that transgender students face. "We first need to train our principals and teachers to identify transgender students. If they come across anyone, they should know how to deal with them. They should know how to reach out to them and understand their special needs and challenges. And for that they need some training and sensitisation," he said.

The workshop was organised in collaboration with a Delhi based non-governmental organisation SPACE (Society for Peoples' Awareness, Care and Empowerment).

Anjan Joshi, co-founder of SPACE, said they are currently working on an anti-bullying policy with schools. "We are currently working with 30 schools — 25 government and five private — to come up with anti-bullying policies to safeguard the rights of transgender students, as well as to make fellow students aware about the transgender issues. We need to work together to remove this 'trans-phobia' from educational institutions," she said.

While there are no accurate numbers of how many students in the country are transgender identified, there are many academic reports that detail the discrimination and abuse that transgender persons face at school. Experts say a majority of transpersons drop out of school on account of sustained harassment.

Since 2014, after the Supreme Court's judgement which granted the right of self-identification of gender, many universities have taken steps to include transgender students. In July, for instance, Kerala announced that it will reserve seats in its state university. Last month, Uttarakhand High Court directed the state to provide scholarships and financial assistance to transgender persons. However, no such reservation exists at the primary, secondary or high school level.

Goel said that absence of transgender students in higher education is a testimony of the "adversities" they face in schools.

"A few years back there was a transgender student in my school, whose parents disowned him despite several counselling sessions imparted by the school. However, I should have reached out to that student and talked to him, but most of us are not aware

of how to handle this,” said a principal of a South Delhi school, who spoke to HT under the condition that they remain anonymous.

By next year, the government plans to complete the training for all principals and teachers across its 1,100 schools in Delhi.

Shashikant Singh, the principal of a senior secondary school in Dwarka Sector-2 suggested that there should be a provision that children need not mention gender at the time of admission. “Students do not know their gender identity when they enrol in schools. They understand themselves gradually,” he said.