

Class Act: Poor children show they can

TOI Catches Up With First Batch Of Students Admitted Under 25% EWS Quota In Pvt & Aided Schools To Find Them Doing Well

Shradha Chetri & Mohammad Ibrar | **IN**

New Delhi: Like all parents with limited schooling, Rajiv Kumar Kushwaha wanted his children to have a good education. Around two decades ago, Kushwaha moved from Palwal in Haryana to Delhi to begin life as a cab driver. His desire to send his children to good schools was uppermost in his mind, but with his income, he could, of course, hardly dream of admitting them to the capital's private schools. Today, however, the 40-year-old's eldest son studies in Ahicon International in Mayur Vihar, an institution much sought after by parents.

Kushwaha did not suddenly come into fortune to preclude an affordable government school education for this son, Daksh. His good fortune was the enactment of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act in 2009. The legislation provided for 25% of the seats in private and aided schools to be reserved for children of economically disadvantaged families, while ensuring free textbooks and school uniforms.

Like Kushwaha Junior, many others have capitalised on their golden opportunity to script success stories. Studying now in classes from VI to IX, the first batch admitted under the Act, which came into effect from April 1, 2010, these children from families struggling to make the ends meet are, according to their school principals, doing commendably well. Daksh, in Class IX now, converses in English and brings home results that make Kushwaha smile contentedly. Ameeta Mohan, principal of Amity International School in Puchp Vihar, said these students are usually hard-working because they understand the background they come from. "A few of them struggle when they reach the higher classes due to problems with comprehension because they get no guidance at home," she observed. But schools often offer the required additional help to such students. As Rima C Allwadi,



AMAN KUMAR YADAV

Living in a 10x11 room with his parents and younger sisters isn't easy for Aman Kumar Yadav. But the Class VII student of Mount Abu School, Rohini, doesn't let such things bother him. He is happy that despite being the son of an X-ray machine technician, he is getting a good education that allows him to dream of becoming a doctor. For Surendra Yadav, who came to Delhi from a village in Bihar around 16 years ago, the RTE Act was a blessing because it facilitated his son's admission to a private school.

Aman's favourite subjects are history and science. But the youngsters, having almost grown up in the West Bahini clinic in which his father works, hopes to go one better than his father and actually become a doctor; a thought that his father is in sync with. He spends hours in the cramped room or at the clinic with his books. "I also take help of my father's employer in clearing doubts I have," Aman says.

Yadav is happy that his son is taking full advantage of the opportunity that RTE gave him. "His school teachers often praise him for being good in his studies and quickly picking up whatever is taught in class," beams Yadav.

DAKSH KUMAR KUSHWAHA

The Class IX student of Ahicon International School, Mayur Vihar, Phase-4, spends a lot of free time in school in the sculpture room, busy moulding the clay in figures of gods and humans. "I don't really have friends as such, so I use my time making figurines in the school's fine arts centre," explains the award-winning boy sculptor. His sculpting teacher, Rakesh Ranjan Dubey, spins it around and laughs that Daksh has few friends because he has been spending all his free time in the sculpture room since Class I.



Photos: Rajesh Mehta, Piyal Bhattacharjee, Sanam Jain

principal of GD Goenka Public School in Model Town, pointed out, "Whenever parents are receptive and understand, they also do something to support our commitment to quality education for the children."

The cab driver recollected, "When Daksh was admitted I had applied to just four schools, but now admission is given to students living in the vicinity of the school." He was told about the free seat by a neighbour. Similarly, Rekha, a single mother struggling to ensure a proper life for her daughter, was informed about the opportunity by a friend. Her daughter, after two attempts, got into Springdales School, Pusa Road. Today there is an awareness campaign before the school session every year, and many families falling under the category know of the facility. Not surprisingly, from the handful admitted under this provision in 2010, Delhi government received 1.5 lakh applications for the 48,000 seats on offer in the 2018-19 session in the city's 1,700 private schools.

Rekha, 35, whose younger daughter too is studying under the Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) quota at Bal Bharti School, Pusa Road, is more optimistic now of her daughters successfully completing their school education. But parents like her have one niggle still at the back of their minds. As these students were admitted under RTE and since the law provides education only till Class VIII, a petition has been pending in Delhi High court seeking an amendment to the Act enabling the selected children to finish their schooling without having to withdraw to government schools. The court had sought the response of the Centre and the Delhi government.

The Union human resource development ministry did discuss extending RTE till Class XII, but nothing has come of it yet. The only amendment to the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act came earlier this year and empowered states to detain students if they failed the school examinations.



HOW RIGHT TO STUDY IS CHANGING THEIR LIVES

WHO COMES UNDER EWS CATEGORY
A child whose parents' annual family income from all sources is less than Rs 1 lakh

WHO COMES UNDER DISADVANTAGED CATEGORY
Children belonging to SC, ST and OBC (non-creamy layer), children with special needs, orphans, transgender, children living with or affected by HIV

Right of Children for Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009, was implemented in 2011
Article 12 (1) (C) of the Act

SCHOOLS PROVIDE FREE BOOKS AND UNIFORM

Govt gives Rs 2,242 for students from nursery to Class V and Rs 2,225 from Class VI to VIII for books
Schools get an annual reimbursement of Rs 1,100 for a student up to Class V and Rs 1,400 up to Class VIII for uniforms

RAIMA GAUTAM

At home in Tigr Extension in south Delhi, Raima Gautam's conservative family usually marry off their women early. Raima, however, has been given the freedom to pursue studies. This is an acknowledgement by her parents and grandparents of her excellent performance in Amity International School, Puchp Vihar. "The money her father earns as a waiter at Country Club in Sainik Farms is enough only for a government school education. I see other children and realise the difference of sending Raima to a private school," smiles 35-year-old Neeru Gautam, her mother. Raima's younger sister also studies as an EWS student at DPS International School, Puchp Vihar.

Raima is clear about what she wants to achieve. "I wish to become an IAS officer," she says. "My father always tells me that if I am scoring 90%, then



I should aim for 100% so I can end up getting 95%. That is my motto."
Money is not easy in the household. "We have only bought Raima one set of uniform. In the summers I quickly wash her shirt after she comes home from school," shrugs Neeru.

RIYA

Rejected for being girls, Riya and her younger sister were thrown out of their Rajouri Garden house along with their mother. Babka sought shelter at her parent's house in New Moti Nagar, and her father paid for the school transport of the two girls. But after he died a few months ago, the family is struggling with finances. "I have taken up a job at Milan Cinema, where I get Rs 3,000 a month," says 35-year-old Rekha. The two girls, the elder a student of Springdales School, Pusa Road and the younger in Bal Bharti School, Pusa Road, are aware of the family's financial situation and know that they are in a private school under the EWS quota. "My children understand the constraints and do not demand anything. They are happy with the little I give them," says the grateful mother. The free



books and uniforms from school are a big help. Riya is an A++ scorer in school and a budding artist, though her ambition is to go for medical studies. The Class VI student has already decided to opt for the science stream once she reaches Class XI. "Every annual day she returns home with a medal. She is a prefect and student-in-charge of the library," says Rekha. The girl, who loves speaks fluently in English, herself says, "Had I gone to a government school I don't think I would have been able to read so many books. Bala Dahi is my favourite author."