

Trends in Primary Education

What is the issue?

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- Primary education has been universalised with more than 95% of the children below 14 in schools, but the quality of schooling is abysmal.

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- The recent ASER report reiterates the same.

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What are the trends in primary enrolment?

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- The latest Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) was carried out by NGO Pratham.

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- While the “Right to Education Act” came into force in 2010, the current trend towards universal elementary education was well in place before that.

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- As early as 2005, primary enrolment levels were as high as 90%, according to the ASER.

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- For the first time in India, we are beginning to see cohorts of children almost all of whom have completed eight years of schooling.

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- While over a little over 11 million were enrolled in Class 8 in 2005-06, the number has almost doubled to around 22 million in 2014-15.

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- Also, the gender divide seems to have narrowed over the years in the upper primary level, with more girls getting retained in school.

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- While in 2006, 10% of 13-year-old girls and 21% of 15-year-old girls were not enrolled in school, the numbers for 2016 stands at 4.2% and 14% respectively.

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What shows the poor learning levels?

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- For over a decade, the ASER reports have been pointing out that foundational skills like reading and basic arithmetic are worryingly low for kids in school.

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- About a quarter of all children in Class 8 struggle with reading simple texts and more than half are still unable to do basic arithmetic operations.

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- ASER data also suggests a declining trend over time, which means that successive cohorts are doing worse than their previous counterparts.

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- A hint of this decline was also visible in the analyses done on past rounds of the government's National Achievement Survey data.

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What lies ahead?

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- Every year we will be “graduating” a cohort of close to 25 million young and hopeful boys and girls from elementary school.

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- While aspirations run high, learning levels are worryingly insufficient, and are far lower than they should be even based on curricular expectations of Class 8.

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- While moves to universalise secondary schooling and expand skilling are underway, we also need to prioritise quality enhancement in the primary level.

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Source: The Indian Express

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