

# Coaching classes cash in on Std IV board exams

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TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Mumbai: The ink has not yet dried on a government circular announcing board exams for standard four students but publishing houses and coaching classes have already started plotting strategies to help eight-year-olds cope with testing times.

At least one publisher has brought out a guidebook for standard four students, while a coaching class has promised that the board exam will be a breeze if children sign up for its lectures. Several others are busy fine-tuning their plans to spin profits from the exam phobia, despite the fact that the state government has not even come out with a detailed syllabus for the tests.

"We feared this would happen," said Vandana Lulla, principal of Anandilal Podar high school, Santa Cruz. "All this special coaching is just a farce, it has nothing to do with the development of a child." It's a statement echoed by most education-

ists, who feel that the board exam—which the government announced in June—will only add to the students' burden.

Try telling that to academic consultant at Paramount Academy at Chembur, L.V. Krishnamurthy, who conducts special coaching for standard four students. The academy now grooms eight class four students, putting them through a gruelling regime of monthly tests and mock board exams. The training sessions, spread over eight months, cost each parent Rs 3,000.

Mr Krishnamurthy, a former college principal, has an explanation for why children need special coaching. "The question papers for the board exams are set in a multiple-choice format. Students have to be trained on the method of answering, they have to be taught how to tick-mark the correct answer."

That's why Jayanti Kumar (name changed on request) thought it best to send her son to the academy "I had no idea what to teach him," said

Ms Kumar, a housewife. "The standard of teaching at the institute is better than at the school. It will help my son fare well in the board exams and he will also find it easier to understand the tougher standard five lessons next year."

Her son treks to the coaching class every Thursday and Sunday, which is conducted from 11 a.m. to 12.30 p.m. It's unnecessary pressure on the eight-year-old, said Ms Kumar, but she's thankful that the lessons are held only on two days. "His classmates have to attend coaching classes five days a week and they are literally running there as soon as school gets over."

Given their age, academicians say that students are unlikely to actually learn anything from all the coaching. But Mr Krishnamurthy thinks otherwise. "The board exam is an attempt by the state to search for excellence

and it will go a long way in building a strong foundation to the younger generation," he said.

The benefits of the board exam can be debated, but there is no doubt that it has brought in business for coaching classes and publishing houses. Dynamic Publishing House, for instance, has already brought out a guidebook for Rs 110, listing questions and answers that is likely to be posed in the board exam. The absence of a government guideline on the syllabus doesn't seem to have deterred the publisher.

"We read in the papers about the subjects and as soon as the syllabus is announced, we will revise the book," said I.D. Pawar, manager of the publishing house. Around 1,000 copies have been printed so far.

These guides will be a big hit among parents, said Dinesh Shah, manager of Pragati book store in Pune. "There are many enquiries for guides and we are sure

sales will be high."

Chetna publications is also looking at bringing out books for the board exams. "We are ready with the material and are waiting for the government to say something definite about the exams," said Anil Rambhia, director of the publications. There is a huge market for such books, considering an estimated 24 lakh students will appear for the board exams, he added.

These guides and specialised coaching will only promote an unhealthy competitive spirit among children, say academicians. "We told education department officials that we will soon have standard four students thinking of killing themselves, just like class ten students," said Ms Lulla.

The only gain for the government will be that it will earn over Rs 25 crore from students by way of, exam fees, say principals. The other beneficiary will be coaching classes and publishing houses. "And all this at the cost of students," said Ms Lulla.

