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**IT'S TIME TO THINK
BEYOND THE
ENROLMENT NUMBERS
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PRIMARY LESSONS FOR MCD SCHOOLS

IT'S A long march ahead before India's capital can boast of a good primary education system. The present inadequacies are too many. Consider just one: Over 3 lakh children in the 6-11 age-group don't go to school at all. Every year there's an enrolment campaign. But there's no effective policy for retaining the students who are enrolled.

This year, the Municipal Corporation of Delhi has registered a record-breaking enrolment figures 1.1 lakh as against the usual 20,000-25,000 students. Introduction of English as a subject in MCD schools for the first time - that's the reason for this quantum jump.

But only 80,000 from the 1 lakh plus will, hopefully, be retained. This means a vast number in the primary school-going age would be deprived of their basic right to education.

As for the need for a proper retention policy, it's only now that MCD has woken up from its slumber - to realise that learning by rote should be replaced with "joyful, inventive school activities and satisfactory learning experience."

The mid-day meal, meant to be a major incentive for retaining primary school children, is still not properly distributed - especially in the far flung areas. For example, in G-block Sultanpuri MCD school, mid-day meal was distributed on just four days in October. In adjacent F-block school, the mid-day meal was distributed on just nine days in October and eleven days in August.

The importance of mid-day meal in retaining school students is reflected in the remark made by Pradeep Kumar, a school teacher of B-1 Sultanpuri primary school. "The students inquire before classes start

whether biscuits will be distributed that day. If the answer is 'no,' most of them don't turn up," the school teacher said.

The prevailing education scenario is all the more disturbing when one notes that 90 per cent of the primary school students - totalling a whopping 9 lakh students -- are educated in the 1818 schools run by the Corporation. The rate of absenteeism is highest in MCD schools, about 18-20 per cent. The drop-out rate stands at about 8 per cent.

The achievement scores of learners in MCD schools was also found to be less by 10 to 15 percent, as per a study by NIEPA (National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration). But education department officials justify this low score by pointing out that they have to teach children from the lower strata of society ~ who have to be literally dragged from their homes and made to sit in the class rooms.

To make good citizens out of them is a bigger challenge and Government teachers are doing a commendable job, officials and elected members of the Corporation unanimously agree. But the distressing factors were still too many, as this correspondent found while visiting some MCD schools in rural Northwest Delhi.

The morning shift students knew their recently published English primer by heart and knew multipli-



cation table upto 13, but the afternoon shift students of the same school were unable to answer simple questions like "why we breathe through our nose?" They were yet to learn the learn all the 26 alphabets. Their class work books too had not been checked for months together.

Councillors Tarsem Bansal and Shabnam Parvin said that in most

schools in their respective wards, morning teachers are very good and hold proper classes, but that many of the afternoon shift teachers are negligent and 'manage' the inspectors by getting them to give 'excellent' remarks.

In all fairness to MCD, it must be said that the agency - for the first time in its history - took stock of

the condition of its primary schools this year.

A comprehensive list of shortcomings in each and every school was prepared. And a time bound action plan was prepared - to repair roofs, floors, walls, electrical fittings and provide adequate water supply as well as toilet facilities.

"Development of basic facilities is

a prerequisite for long term development of primary education," an education department official pointed out. MCD's Education Committee member Atma Ram Gupta, however, said that problems still persist in schools in rural areas, slums and resettlement colonies - where over 40 per cent of the city's population lives.

"Though there has been some improvement in infrastructural facilities in schools, the situation is far from satisfactory. Toilets in almost all schools in poor localities are still not usable. Septic tanks are choked. Children still have to go out of the schools to drink water as water tankers come only a few days a month. Fans may have been repaired but switchboards have not been installed in individual class rooms," Mr Gupta said, after visiting numerous schools in recent weeks.

He said that increased enrolment had resulted in shortage of class rooms and students of two to three sections are seated in one class room. Many are seated in the corridors by spreading 'durries' bought with

PTA funds.

Students this correspondent spoke to, in various MCD schools in Piragarhi, Sultanpuri, Rajinder Nagar and Beadenpura, said that they either fetch water from home or go outside the school to drink water. To relieve themselves, they go behind their class rooms and not to the toilet blocks.

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DROPOUT/ENROLMENT GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS