

Books, teachers, water... school kids present wish list

TENZING LAMSANG

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WE WANT text books so that we can complete our syllabus...good teachers who come to school on time and teach us properly...water and electricity in our schools...strangers should not be allowed into our schools."

These are part of a 10-point 'Charter of Demands' framed for the first time by school children in a unique survey carried out by 11 NGOs to find out the educational status of children among the weaker sections of Delhi.

The survey was conducted in the five districts covering the 10 backward areas of Delhi — Seelampur, Paharganj, Munirka, Okhla village, Sangam Vihar, Shakarpur, Palam, Tughlaqabad, Patparganj and Holambikalan. The survey was conducted among 26,029 children in the age group of 6 to 14 years.

"We talked to children in slums, urban villages and resettlement colonies to find out the number of boys and girls not attending schools and the reasons for dropping out," said Lekha Srivastava of The India Sponsor Foundation.

The survey shows that though poverty is still the leading factor for drop-outs and child illiteracy, other factors

What children want

- ▶ Textbooks to complete syllabus
- ▶ Teachers who come to school on time and teach properly
- ▶ Water, electricity in schools
- ▶ Strangers should not be allowed into schools
- ▶ Clean toilets
- ▶ No discrimination on any grounds
- ▶ Good food in schools (mid-day meal schemes)
- ▶ No extra charges other than fees
- ▶ Playgrounds
- ▶ Teachers shouldn't beat students

like migration, lack of interest in studies, gender bias, shortage of schools in neighbourhood also play a part.

Survey Coordinator Sameen Adeeb said: "Hidden in the data are some facts like migration which would mean child labour, lack of interest in studies and poor educational quality can be construed as there are no textbooks or they come late during the session."

Society for Promotion Of Women And Child welfare (SPOWAC) president Lakshmi Krishnan said: "Text books are a problem. Many schools use old textbooks as the new ones take months to come."

Different areas have differ-

ent problems. For example migration is the reason why many children don't attend school in Paharganj, while in Okhla it is a lack of school nearby and in Seelampur poverty is an overwhelming factor, shows the survey.

The reasons for never attending school as opposed to reasons for drop-outs are also different. While poverty leads to dropout in 60% of the cases, lack of interest in studies, irregularity of teachers, gender bias also play a role.

Survey also find out that although more boys are enrolled in school, more girls complete their education.

Project Coordinator Pallavi Upadhyay said: "We also found that factors as simple as the need to take care of younger siblings and unsafe routes were also discouraging children especially girls from coming to school."

Delhi Education Secretary Reena Ray said: "Once all these NGOs approach me with the data I will do everything in my power to help these children. We are also focusing more on education this year as is evinced in our increased budgetary allocations."

On the children's charter Ray said, "Every child should have the right to a joyful surrounding which we are striving to provide."