

RTE headache for budget schools in slums

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NEW DELHI, DHNS: The 25 per cent admission quota for children from poor families in Right to Education Act (RTE) has thrown up an avoidable headache for budget private schools in underprivileged areas.

Managements of such schools say the regulation is not required as far as they are concerned. Budget private schools are low-cost private schools providing education to children from slums and rural areas.

"We welcome the RTE Act; I think it should have happened long time back. But what is the use of the EWS quota in schools like ours which cater to the less privileged? All the students in our schools come from the economically weaker section of society," says Rajesh Malhotra, who runs a recognised private budget school till standard 8 for the slum kids of



Tigri Extension in the city.

Malhotra's father started the one-floor school 20 years back with the objective of educating poor children in the area.

"Yes, I know my school is not lavish. We have basic facilities and safety standards. There is always a water crisis in the area. There is a fire hose but there is no water in the tank. But we have fire extinguishers in our school. Sometimes there is no water in the drinking water tank, and we have to manage with two or three buckets of water. These are the harsh realities to live with. But the parents have never com-

plained," says Malhotra.

The RTE mandates closure of budget private schools in three years if they fail to meet the eligibility conditions stipulated in the Act.

The budget schools are often unrecognised, and have only the most basic facilities. Section 19 of the Act mandates that all private schools meet recognition norms such as all-weather building, at least one classroom for each teacher, separate toilets for boys and girls, drinking water facilities, kitchen, playground and library. It also has detailed specifications for classroom size and hiring, firing and salaries of staff and teachers.

Principals of such schools feel that the EWS quota creates unnecessary tension between the students. "All students in these schools come from the same economic strata, but we are forced to admit students under EWS. The gov-

ernment reimburses their fees and provides other privileges like mid-day meal. That creates unnecessary divide among students who may even be each other's neighbours and their fathers earning equal amount of salary," said Mohammed Anwar, director of the Hyderabad-based MA Ideal High School.

Another major concern raised by the managements of budget schools is the condition of admitting children as per their age and not the ability.

"We cater to a section where the child may not have gone to school earlier. Under the RTE no school can refuse admission to a child which is a progressive idea, but we should have the discretion to choose the class the child should be admitted to, depending on her/his knowledge level," said Reema Aggarwal, who runs a small school in the slums of Nizamuddin area.