

RTE in for a revamp

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NEW DELHI: A government committee drafting India's new education policy has proposed a raft of amendments to the UPA-era Right to Education Act, calling for flexible area-specific guidelines to replace a nationwide framework.

The proposed changes include a dilution of norms for recognising private schools as the TSR Subramanian committee feels the present guidelines threaten the closure of institutions doing stellar work in poor neighbourhoods.

The RTE stipulates benchmarks such as a play ground, a minimum teacher-pupil ratio and number of classrooms for according recognition — and thereby government funds — to any private school.

But the committee disagreed with the uniform national guidelines and said norms should be evolved for "alternate schools" in line with local conditions.

Lauding the initiative of an NGO running schools in the slums of Ahmedabad, the committee observed, "After the RTE Act, such centres become illegal as they cannot satisfy the norms, their funding under the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan has been stopped and they can be closed any time by authorities."

The committee said instead of parameters such as infrastructure, the government should look at "learning outcomes" and amend the RTE Act.

See page 14

From page 01 "Infrastructure norms for recognition of private schools should also be applied to government schools. There should be no discrimination," the report said.

The RTE Act was passed in 2009 and implemented from April 2010.

The committee called for reviewing exemptions to minority institutions from admitting 25% poor students for free under the economically weaker sections (EWS) category.

"The committee feels larger national obligations to meet the rights of economic weaker sections should extend to all institutions, including minority (religious and linguistic) institutions," the report said.

It rued the fact that the RTE Act was only partially implemented in most states, six years after it was passed, calling for "greater flexibility" to evolve norms that factor in local conditions.

"India is a vast and divergent country and one set of norms cannot be applied rigidly and uniformly," the report said, in apparent criticism of the Act that was in the making for nearly a decade.

In other proposed amendments, the committee suggested dilution of the "no-detention policy" that prevents schools from detaining students in a class till the age of 14. It said it had heard a number of views for and against the policy before drawing up its recommendations. "Promoting laggards drags down the standard of the whole class and handicaps the teacher's ability to teach the curriculum at the expected pace," the report said.

The committee recommended that from Class 5 to 8, for children between the ages of 11 and 14, "the system of detention of children who are below the requisite minimum standard should be reinstated. This will require a suitable amendment to section 30 (1) of the RTE Act."