

Chapter 2

Individual Paragraph of Compliance Audit

Chapter 2: Individual Paragraph of Compliance Audit

WOMEN & CHILD DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIAL WELFARE, SCHOOL EDUCATION, HIGHER EDUCATION, MASS EDUCATION EXTENSION & LIBRARY SERVICES AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION, TRAINING & SKILL DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENTS

Availability of an inclusive and accessible environment in Educational Institutions for Persons with Disabilities/ Children with Special Needs

Inability of Government of West Bengal in enrolling identified eligible school going Children with Special Needs (CwSN) resulted in CwSN being deprived of access to inclusive education. Further, instances of inadequate number of Resource Centres, shortage of Special Educators and acute shortfall in training being imparted to teaching staff were noticed.

The Constitution of India promulgates equality, freedom, justice and dignity of all individuals and mandates an inclusive society for all, including Persons with Disabilities (PwDs). Article 41 of the Indian Constitution mandates the States to make effective provisions for securing the right to education, work and public assistance for people affected by disability.

In order to reduce inequalities associated with disabilities, different Legislations and Acts¹²² were enacted from time to time. A key development in this regard was the enactment of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (RPwD Act) in 2016. The RPwD Act through its various provisions aimed to ensure equal access to education, employment, healthcare, and other essential services. In order to implement the provisions of the RPwD Act, the Rights of PwDs Rules (Central Rules) were promulgated by Government of India (GoI) & the same came into effect from June 2017. Similarly, at the State level, the Government of West Bengal (GoWB) enacted the West Bengal Rights of Persons with Disabilities (WBRPwD) Rules, 2018 (State Rules) in July 2018.

Women & Child Development and Social Welfare (WCD&SW) Department, GoWB is the Nodal Department for implementation of various schemes meant for PwDs in the State. The implementation of educational schemes in the State is, however, a multi-sectoral and collaborative endeavour where various Departments of the GoWB/ units thereof are involved. Roles/ responsibilities of major implementing authorities are detailed in **Table 2.1** below:

Table 2.1: Roles/ responsibilities of major implementing authorities

Authority	Entrustment/ Responsibility
The State Commissioner (Disabilities), WCD&SW Department	Implementation of various schemes, coordination and monitoring with respect to the implementation of the RPwD Act 2016.
School Education (SE) Department	Implementation of 'Inclusive Education' for PwDs through <i>Paschim Banga Samagra Shiksha Mission</i> (PBSSM). Provision of Braille & Large Print textbooks, Assistive

¹²² Rehabilitation Council of India Act, 1992, PwDs (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995, National Trust for the Welfare of Persons with Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Mental Retardation and Multiple Disabilities Act, 1999, etc.

Authority	Entrustment/ Responsibility
	devices and different allowances/ stipends to Children with Special Needs (CwSN) upto 18 years of age.
Department of Mass Education Extension & Library Services (DMEE&LS)	Providing education, training, and hostel facilities to Children with benchmark disabilities through Sponsored/ Recognised Special schools and extending support to Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO)s. Implementation and monitoring of scholarship for students with Disabilities studying in Class-IX and above.
Department of Higher Education (HE)	Implementing provisions of the RPwD Act through Government and aided higher educational institutions. Implementation and monitoring of scholarship for students with Disabilities pursuing studies at graduate and post graduate levels.
Technical Education, Training and Skill Development Department (TET&SD)	Implementing provisions of the RPwD Act through technical educational institutions and providing skill development training to school dropouts and unemployed youths.

Source: Records of respective Department

An audit was undertaken to assess whether inclusive and accessible educational opportunities were ensured by the State Government/ local authorities to children suffering from disabilities. The audit was undertaken in two phases, during November 2020 to October 2021 and September/ October 2024, covering the period upto 2022-23. Audit was conducted through scrutiny of records at the nodal/ implementing Departments/ unit level as detailed in **Appendix 2.1**. Records at unit level were scrutinised with respect to five selected Districts¹²³, nine blocks and four municipalities¹²⁴.

Audit findings which emanated in course of audit scrutiny are discussed in the succeeding paragraphs.

2.1 Educational opportunities

The RPwD Act, as well as Government programmes on education of children, aim to cover children with disabilities under the umbrella of universal education. As per Section 16 (i) of the RPwD Act, Government and Local Authorities should endeavour that all educational institutions funded or recognised by them provide Inclusive Education (IE)¹²⁵ to children with disabilities (CwDs) and admit them without discrimination and provide education and opportunities for sports and recreation activities equally with others.

2.1.1 Implementation of Inclusive Education

Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009 guaranteed a legal mandate to provide free and compulsory education to every child in a neighbourhood school.

¹²³ Hooghly, Kolkata, Malda, North 24 Parganas and Purba Medinipur

¹²⁴ The selection of Districts/ Blocks/ Municipal establishments was made based on statistical sampling method i.e., Probability Proportional to Size and Without Replacement (PPSWOR)

¹²⁵ A system of education wherein students with and without disability learn together and the system of teaching and learning is suitably adapted to meet the learning needs of different types of students with disabilities.

The *Samagra Shiksha* (SS¹²⁶) Scheme, an integrated centrally sponsored scheme for school education, was launched by the GoI in 2018. In case of West Bengal, this scheme is implemented as the *Paschim Banga Samagra Shiksha Mission* (PBSSM)¹²⁷. The SS scheme was aimed at education of all children {including CwDs also referred to as Children with Special Needs (CwSN)¹²⁸}, from pre-nursery to Class-XII, studying in Government, Government-aided schools and schools under Local Bodies. CwSN are covered through the intervention of IE under the SS scheme. Data related to educational institutions are uploaded in the Unified District Information System for Education (UDISE¹²⁹) by all schools imparting formal education from Class I-XII.

2.1.1.1 Non-enrolment of all identified children with disabilities

The inclusion of CwSN in mainstream and specialized education was an essential benchmark for measuring equitable access to learning opportunities. During the Audit period (2015-16 to 2022-23), number of identified CwSN ranged between 1,32,806 and 1,92,915. Apart from enrolment in regular schools under SE Department, CwSN were also enrolled in special schools (under DMEE&LS) and in private schools.

Data sourced from the Annual Report of the PBSSM, and reply furnished by the SE Department revealed that 3 to 19 *per cent* identified CwSN, of age group between 6 and 18 years, remained deprived of regular education through Government/ Private/ Special schools, during the period from 2015-16 to 2022-23, as shown in **Table 2.2** below:

Table 2.2: Status of enrolment of CwSN

Year	Number of CwSN Identified	Number of CwSN enrolled in Regular Schools under SE Department	Number of CwSN enrolled in Special Schools under DMEE&LS	Number of CwSN enrolled in Private Schools	Total enrolment in schools (UDISE data)	Number of CwSN not enrolled in Schools (percentage)
A	B	C	D	E	F=C+D+E	G=B-F
2015-16	1,92,915	1,57,947	5,479	4,479	1,67,905	25,010 (13)
2016-17	1,69,691	1,26,528	6,426	4,713	1,37,667	32,024 (19)
2017-18	1,58,446	1,31,733	6,392	3,593	1,41,718	16,728 (11)
2018-19	1,61,332	1,42,392	10,211	3,412	1,56,015	5,317 (3)
2019-20	1,32,806	1,18,766	5,451	3,712	1,27,929	4,877 (4)
2020-21	1,49,434	1,22,498	8,761	8,328	1,39,587	9,847 (7)
2021-22	1,58,085	1,36,162	8,761	4,591	1,49,514	8,571 (5)
2022-23	1,59,129	1,35,796	7,212	7,647	1,50,655	8,474 (5)

Source: **a)** From 2015-16 to 2019-20: Annual Report of PBSSM and **b)** From 2020-21 to 2022-23: as per reply furnished by the SE Department. In its reply, the SE Department stated that this data represented 1. UDISE data, 2. Reports shared by District Offices and 3. Data sourced from Department of Mass Education Extension & Library Services (DMEE&LS)

¹²⁶ *Samagra Shiksha* (launched in 2018)-an overarching programme for school education sector extending from pre-nursery to class XII is implemented with the broader goal of improving school effectiveness measured in terms of equal opportunities for schooling and equitable learning outcomes. It subsumed inter-alia the scheme namely Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), which was launched in 2000-01.

¹²⁷ *Paschim Banga Sarva Siksha Mission* after integration with *Paschim Banga Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan* (RMSA) was renamed (September 2018) as *Paschim Banga Samagra Siksha Mission* (PBSSM). PBSSM is registered under the Societies Registration Act, 1860.

¹²⁸ SS referred to Children with disabilities as Children with Special Needs (CwSN)

¹²⁹ UDISE is a database on school education developed by Department of School Education, Ministry of Human Resource Development, GoI and maintained by National Informatics Centre (NIC), GoI. It was launched in 2012-13.

The State Project Director, PBSSM in reply (October 2024) stated that the status of enrolment of CwSN in special schools as reflected in UDISE is less than the number of identified CwSN, as the data covering all special schools is yet to be captured in the UDISE database in a consistent manner. However to support this contention, no corroborative evidence was furnished along with the reply to Audit.

It was further added by Director, PBSSM that the issue of coverage of a greater number of Special Schools during the forthcoming updation of UDISE database, would be taken up with the DMEE&LS along with the office of the DEOs-SSM¹³⁰.

2.1.1.2 Inadequate establishment of Resource Centres

Section 17(e) of the RPwD Act, stipulated that the Government should take measures to establish an adequate number of Resource Centres to support educational institutions at all levels of school education. The major objectives of Resource Centres *inter alia* included remedial assistance¹³¹ required by the CwSN.

In this regard, it was observed that to promote inclusive education, PBSSM had issued instructions (September 2010) to all District Education Officers (DEOs) to construct Resource Centres/ Rooms for CwSN at every Gram Panchayat and ward level on priority basis.

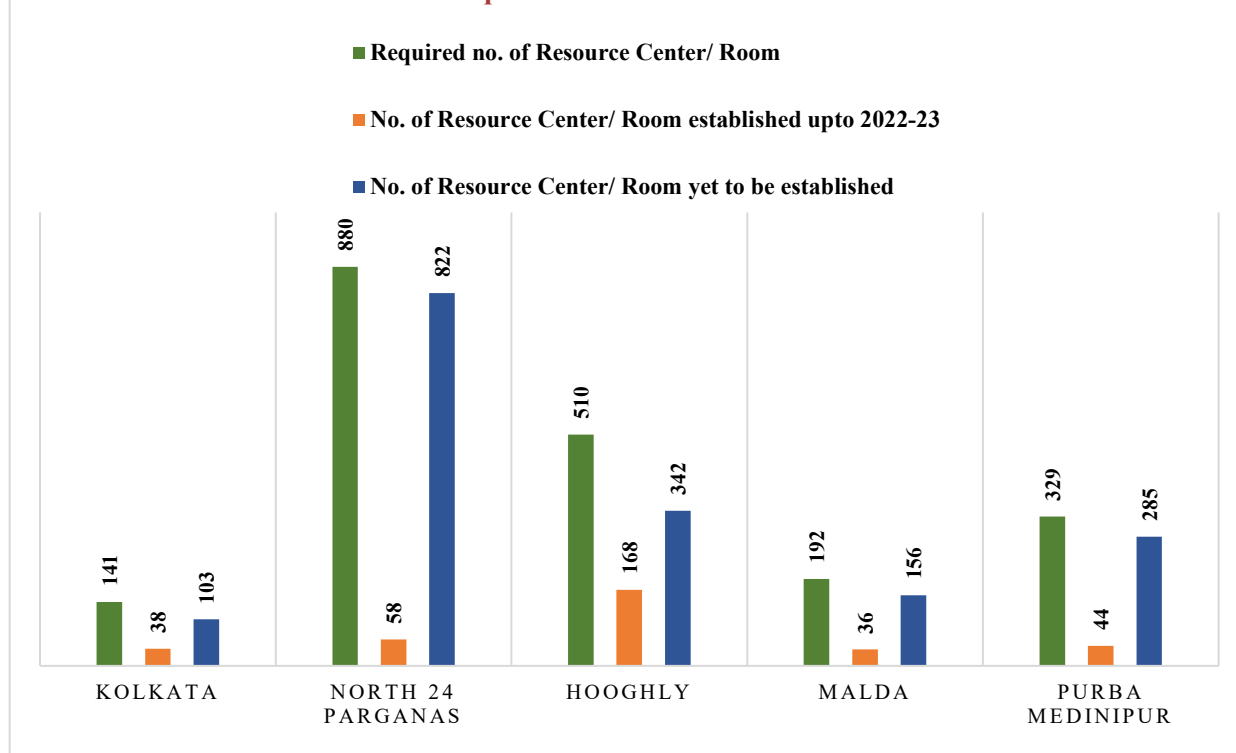
There are 342 Blocks and 127 Municipalities/ Corporations under 24 educational districts¹³², comprising 3,342 GPs and 2,993 wards in the State as of March 2023. Thus, there was a requirement to set up 6,335 Resource Centres/ Rooms in the State, at the level of GPs & wards. However, against this, only 1,799 Resource Centres/ Rooms were constructed upto March 2024 by the DEOs, representing slow progress in the provision of this facility to CwSN.

Status of number of Resource Centres/ Rooms established in the test-checked districts upto 2022-23 *vis-à-vis* requirement, is shown in **Chart 2.1**.

¹³⁰ District Education Officer-Samagra Shiksha Mission

¹³¹ Whenever the child is unable to comprehend the lesson in regular classroom he/ she may be taken to the Resource Centre/ Room and a skilled teacher provides remedial tutorial.

¹³² In the State, there are 23 administrative districts, with Siliguri being an additional educational district

Chart 2.1: Inadequate Establishment of Resource Centers

Source: Data sourced from PBSSM

It may be seen from **Chart 2.1** above that there were inadequate number of Resource Centres/ Rooms in the five test-checked districts. This shortage ranged between 93 per cent in case of North 24 Parganas to 67 per cent in case of Hooghly district, impacting provision of essentially required support services to CwSN in these districts.

2.1.1.3 Shortage of Special Educators / Resource Support

Section 17(c) of the RPwD Act, stipulated that the Government and Local Authorities should take measures to employ and train teachers including teachers who were qualified in sign language and Braille and those who were trained in educating children with intellectual disability¹³³. *Samagra Shiksha* also aimed to provide inclusive education to CwSN by employing Special Educators who would provide resource and technical support to them. PBSSM was supposed to fill existing vacancies by appointment of Special Educators in the State. Special Educators should mandatorily be available for all enrolled CwSN.

It was noticed in audit that no norms regarding number of Special Educators to be employed as per number of CwSN were stipulated by the SS scheme. However, as per The RTE Act, 2009, Pupil Teacher Ratio (PTR) for special teachers in general schools was stipulated as 10:1 and 15:1 for primary level and Upper Primary level¹³⁴ respectively. For sponsored special schools¹³⁵,

¹³³ Intellectual Disability involves problems in general mental abilities such as Intellectual functioning like learning, problem solving, judgement and adaptive functioning like activities of daily life such as communication and independent living.

¹³⁴ As per Notification dated 21 September 2022 of Ministry of Education

¹³⁵ Sponsored Special schools, under MEE&LS Department, cater to children with disabilities in providing specialised education and support services. These schools are funded by the State Government.

MEE&LS Department stipulated a teacher student ratio of 1:10 for Visually Impaired and Hearing-Impaired students and 1:6 for intellectually disabled students and students belonging to multiple categories of disabilities.

It was however observed in audit that:

(i) **SE Department:** There was an overall shortage of Special Educators in the State. There were 1,35,796 CwSN enrolled in 35,658 schools of the State against which the number of Special Educators available for providing support to these children was 1,112, leading to a shortage of 7,941 Special Educators in the State¹³⁶. PBSSM did not take necessary steps to appoint additional Special Educators during the period 2015-16 to 2022-23. As a result, the number of Special Educators gradually decreased from 1,268 in 2015-16 to 1,112 in 2022-23 in the State. Ratio between availability of Special Educators and CwSN ranged between 1:101 and 1:122, during the period 2015 to 2023¹³⁷. Thus, as per the existing status of availability of special educators in the State, effective measures would need to be taken by the SE Department to ensure that the stipulated PTR is met.

(ii) **Special Schools under MEE&LS Department:** As of March 2023, there were 70 Sponsored Special Schools run by the MEE&LS Department in the State. It was observed that as of March 2023 the availability of teaching staff in these Schools was only 384 (50 per cent) against a sanctioned strength¹³⁸ of 775. The number of students enrolled in these schools was 5,204. This resulted in an adverse PTR of 14:1 as against the norms of 10:1 for Visually Impaired and Hearing-Impaired students and 6:1 for Intellectually disabled Students and students belonging to multiple categories of disabilities as laid out by the MEE&LS Department.

In this regard it was also noted in audit that the Persons-in-position as of March 2023 had reduced to 384 from 427 in 2020-21.

Resource and technical support for CwSN through trained and qualified teachers was, thus, adversely impacted by shortage of special educators.

2.1.1.4 Shortfall in training of Teachers and Staff

(i) **SE Department:** Section 17(d) of the RPwD Act specified that Government and the local authorities should take measures to train professionals and staff to support inclusive education at all levels of school education. One of the main objectives of the SS scheme was to sensitize teachers of regular schools and to train them to teach and involve CwSN in the general classroom. The SS guidelines also stipulated undertaking capacity building programmes for existing Special Educators.

¹³⁶ For 2022-23: No. of CwSN enrolled=1,35,796; Available Special Educators=1,112; Shortage: $(1,35,796/15)-1,112=7,941$. As the bifurcation of CwSN in primary and upper primary levels was not available, the calculation has been made conservatively, considering the CwSN to Special Educator ratio of 15:1.

¹³⁷ Calculated on the basis of number of CwSN enrolled in the State against the number of Special Educators for the years 2015-16 to 2022-23.

¹³⁸ As segregated figures for various categories of CwSN (Visually impaired, Hearing-Impaired, multiple categories of disabilities etc.) were not available, the comparison has been made against sanctioned strength

Scrutiny of records revealed that PBSSM undertook training of teachers and existing Special Educators relating to CwSN, as per the approved annual plan. However, it was observed that during the period 2015-23, as against a training target of 2,45,479 Teachers/ Special Educators over three courses¹³⁹, only 1,64,545 could be trained by PBSSM, leading to a shortfall of 33 *per cent*.

In reply (July 2022), the SE Department stated that the training programme had been designed and will be taken up in a phased manner. However, reply with regard to reasons for not being able to meet training targets was not furnished.

(ii) MEE&LS Department: The MEE&LS Department stated that Teaching Staff of Special Schools were being imparted relevant training by the Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI) under the continued rehabilitation education programme.

In this regard it was observed that during the period 2020-21 to 2022-23 no training was imparted to the 384 existing teachers of the 70 Government sponsored special schools, under the MEE&LS Department in the State.

Lack of proper training for teachers could affect CwSN by limiting learning opportunities and access to the latest developments in the field. Addressing this issue through structured training programmes was crucial for better student support.

2.1.1.5 Non-providing of Textbooks in Braille Language

To promote and facilitate inclusive education, the RPwD Act, under Section 17(g), stipulated that the Government and the Local Authorities should take measures to provide books and other learning materials to students with benchmark disabilities free of cost, up to the age of 18 years.

(i) SE Department: The Student-oriented component of IE under SS focuses on specific needs and well-being of students, including those with disabilities. As per this component, SS was to provide free text books in Braille for CwSN suffering from blindness. Accordingly, Braille textbooks were to be provided to students with blindness, studying in Government and Government aided schools as per the annual plans of SS finalised by the PBSSM¹⁴⁰.

It was, however, observed that distribution of Braille textbooks, during the period from Financial Years (FYs) 2015-16 to 2022-23 was not in accordance with the actual number of visually impaired CwSN. As a result, a total of 5,652 such students (21 *per cent*) were deprived of Braille textbooks, during the period covered under audit.

This fact was also corroborated from review of records in the test-checked districts. In the five test-checked districts, no annual targets were set for providing Braille books to CwSN who were visually impaired. During 2019-20, against 592 visually impaired CwSN, Braille books were distributed

¹³⁹ 1. Two/ three days Non-residential Training of Teachers on Curriculum Adaptation, 2. two/ three days Training of existing Special Educators on Curriculum Adaptation and 3. two/ three days Training of Teachers on Sign Language

¹⁴⁰ Plans are approved by the Project Approval Board, Department of School Education & Literacy, Ministry of Education, GoI

to only 121 CwSN. Further, no Braille books were distributed to 326 CwSN suffering from blindness in Malda District (during 2021-22 to 2022-23) and 308 visually impaired CwSN of North 24 Parganas (during 2020-21 to 2022-23).

SE Department in reply (July 2022) stated that directions have been issued to districts to place orders well in advance based on actual requirement, so that targeted children can get textbooks at the beginning of the academic year.

(ii) MEE&LS Department: The Department did not provide any free Braille Textbooks to the visually impaired students enrolled in sponsored schools run by the Department. Physical verification in five test-checked districts showed that all the 647 students suffering from blindness, studying in the seven sponsored special schools, were deprived of Braille Textbooks during 2022-23.

2.1.1.6 Non-distribution of free large print textbook for CwSN with low-vision

Like Braille Textbooks, free textbooks with large prints were also to be provided to CwSN with low-vision, under the IE intervention of SS. Accordingly, these textbooks with large prints were to be provided to CwSN with low vision studying in Government and Government-aided schools upto class VIII (till 2017-18) and thereafter upto class XII as per the annual plans of SS finalised by the PBSSM¹⁴¹.

It was observed from records that against 1,30,312 large print textbooks required to be distributed during the period from 2015-16 to 2022-23, 37,998 (29 *per cent*) large print textbooks could not be distributed during the period. Among the test-checked five districts, such non-distribution was observed in Malda district, where large print textbooks could not be provided to 837 (100 *per cent*) students with low vision, in 2022-23. The reasons for such non-distribution were not ascertainable from the records.

The SE Department in its reply stated (July 2022) that, as per the existing practice, respective districts placed orders for printing and supply of large print textbooks with the West Bengal Textbook Corporation Ltd., based on actual requirement. However, the process of printing the textbooks was getting delayed due to placement of orders from different districts at different times. It was further stated that a centralised approach was adopted to streamline the process from the academic session 2022.

Contention of the SE Department with regard to adoption of centralised approach was however not convincing as Audit had noted non-distribution of large print textbooks to 57 *per cent* (9,288) of eligible 16,280 low vision students in 2022-23 also, highlighting that there had been no improvement in the delivery and distribution system.

¹⁴¹ Plans are approved by the Project Approval Board, Department of School Education & Literacy, Ministry of Education, GoI

2.1.2 Scholarships to students with benchmark disabilities

Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEPwD), under the Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment (MSJE), GoI, provided scholarships for students with disabilities at the Pre-Matric¹⁴², Post-Matric¹⁴³ and Top-Class education¹⁴⁴ levels, through the National Scholarship Portal (NSP). Candidates could apply for any of the scholarships through the NSP based on requisite documents. The participating schools/ colleges were required to verify the documents submitted and the State Commissioner for PwDs (as the State nodal officer), was empowered to carry out final verification of applications and prepare a merit list at the State level for submission to the DEPwD. Payment of scholarships to beneficiaries was made through the Public Financial Management System (PFMS) directly into the bank accounts of the beneficiaries. Scrutiny of these three scholarships, during the period from 2016-17 to 2022-23¹⁴⁵ revealed the following:

Pre-Matric Scholarship: Out of 5,266 applications received during 2016-23 from PwD students, 4,304 applications were found valid. Of these valid applications, 2,439 applications were included in the final merit list. Review of PFMS data for the period showed that payment of Pre-Matric Scholarships was finally made to only 2,332 applicants during the period 2016-23. With regard to the remaining 646 applications, these were shown as pending for verification at the level of State Commissioner for PwD, as detailed in **Table 2.3**.

Table 2.3: Profile of applications in respect of Pre-Matric Scholarship

Year	Number of applications received	Number of valid applications	Actual No. of applications pending for verification	Number of applications in the merit list	Number of applications found in PFMS
2016-17	552	448	53	395	289
2017-18	978	929	38	805	804
2018-19	2,312	2,154	122	919	919
2019-20	863	534	329	188	188
2020-21	NF	NF	NF	NF	NF
2021-22	232	111	66	45	45
2022-23	329	128	38	87	87
Total	5,266	4,304	646	2,439	2,332

Source: Records furnished by the Office of the State Commissioner of PwDs, WB, NF: Not Furnished

¹⁴² Students with disabilities studying in classes IX and X. Under Pre-Matric scholarship an amount ranging between ₹ 1,000 to ₹ 9,600 per annum was paid depending on the category (Maintenance allowance/ Book allowance etc.) of scholarship

¹⁴³ Students with disabilities studying in classes XI, XII, Post-Matriculation Diploma/ Certificates and Bachelor's Degree or Diploma in India and Master's Degree/ Diploma from any University recognised by University Grants Commission (UGC)/ All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE). Under Post-Matric scholarship an amount ranging between ₹ 1,500 to ₹ 1,50,000 per annum was paid depending on the category (Maintenance allowance/ Disability allowance/ Reimbursement of compulsory non-refundable fee allowance etc.) of scholarship

¹⁴⁴ Students with disabilities pursuing studies at graduate and post graduate degree or diploma in notified Institutes of Excellence in education identified by DEPwD. Under Top Class scholarship an amount ranging between ₹ 5,000 to ₹ 2,00,000 per annum was paid depending on the category (Maintenance allowance/ Special allowance/ Purchase of computer etc.) of scholarship

¹⁴⁵ except 2020-21 due to non-furnishing of data by the State Commissionerate

Reasons for 646 applications pending verification at the level of State Commissioner for PwDs during 2016-17 to 2022-23 and non-inclusion of 107 (2,439-2,332) merit listed candidates in PFMS, could not be ascertained from the records by Audit. Also, reasons for large number of applications being found invalid were also not provided to Audit. Further, fate of 1,219 valid applications (4,304-646-2,439) could not be reconciled from records of State Commissioner of PwDs.

Post-Matric Scholarship: Against 15,528 applications received during the period 2016-17 to 2022-23, 9,965 applications were found valid of which 4,593 applications featured in the final merit list as approved by DEPwD. Of these, 4,381 applications were approved for payment in PFMS for Post-Matric Scholarship, while 4,394 applications remained pending verification at the level of State Commissioner for PwD, as detailed in **Table 2.4**.

Table 2.4: Profile of applications in respect of Post-Matric Scholarship

Year	Number of the applications received	Number of valid applications	Actual No. of applications pending for verification	Number of applications in the merit list	Number of applications found in PFMS
2016-17	1,445	1,112	249	863	652
2017-18	3,433	3,106	566	2,156	2,156
2018-19	4,848	3,278	1,974	728	728
2019-20	730	453	295	156	156
2020-21	NF	NF	NF	NF	NF
2021-22	1,077	475	142	333	333
2022-23	3,995	1,541	1,168	357	356
Total	15,528	9,965	4,394	4,593	4,381

Source: Records furnished by Office of the State Commissioner of PwDs, WB, NF: Not Furnished

Reasons for large number of applications (5,563 applications¹⁴⁶) being declared invalid, pendency of final verification of 4,394 applications at the level of the State Commissioner and non-inclusion of 212 (4,593-4,381) merit listed candidates in PFMS could not be ascertained in audit due to non-availability of detailed records. Further, the fate of 978 applications (9,965 - 4,593 - 4,394), despite being found valid, could not be reconciled from records of State Commissioner of PwDs.

Top Class Scholarship: During the period 2016-17 to 2022-23, 121 applications were received from PwD students for availing the Top Class Scholarship. Of these, 108 applications were found valid by the State Commissioner of PwDs and 72 applications were included in the final merit list, as approved by DEPwD. Review of PFMS data showed that payments were made to 71 applicants. The details are given in **Table 2.5**.

¹⁴⁶ 15,528 – 9,965 applications

Table 2.5: Profile of applications in respect of Top Class Scholarship

Year	Number of the applications received	Number of valid applications	Actual No. of applications pending for verification	Number of applications in the merit list	Number of applications found in PFMS
2016-17	2	1	0	1	1
2017-18	8	4	4	0	0
2018-19	8	8	3	5	4
2019-20	17	17	0	17	17
2020-21	NF	NF	NF	NF	NF
2021-22	54	49	2	27	27
2022-23	32	29	0	22	22
Total	121	108	9	72	71

Source: Records furnished by Office of the State Commissioner of PwDs, WB; NF: Not Furnished

As evident from table above, nine applications remained pending for verification at the level of State Commissioner of PwDs during 2016-17 to 2022-23. Further, reasons for 13 applications (121-108) being invalid and one application (72-71) not being forwarded to PFMS for payment, were not forthcoming from the records of the State Commissioner of PwDs. Moreover, the fate of 27 valid applications (108-9-72), could not be reconciled from records of the State Commissioner of PwDs.

2.2 Accessible/ Barrier Free Environment and availability of assistive devices to Persons/ Children with Disabilities

2.2.1 Barrier free environment for PwDs/ CwDs

The Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment, GoI, launched a programme, namely, “Accessible India Campaign (*Sugamya Bharat Abhiyan*)” in December 2015, as a nation-wide campaign for achieving universal accessibility and barrier free environment for PwDs in Government buildings.

Accessibility in Government Buildings: Section 46 of the PwD Act envisaged improving accessibility of PwDs in Government buildings. Sections 40, 44 & 45 of the RPwD Act, read with Rule 17 of the Central Rules¹⁴⁷ *inter-alia* stipulated that permission should be granted for a building plan structure and certificate of completion for buildings may be issued if the construction complies with the rules framed by the Central Government. Further, all existing public buildings should be made accessible for PwDs, in accordance with the rules formulated by the Central Government, within a period not exceeding five years from the date of notification of such Rules.

2.2.1.1 Barrier free environment for PwDs in Government Polytechnic Institutes and Industrial Training Institutes

Regarding accessibility of PwD students in Government Polytechnics and Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) Audit observed the following:

¹⁴⁷ Rights of Persons with Disabilities Rules 2017

Polytechnic Institutes: Physical verification of six¹⁴⁸ Government Polytechnic Institutes by Audit¹⁴⁹ indicated that barrier free access for students with disabilities was yet to be made available. In this context it was observed that

- No ramp was available in two¹⁵⁰ of six test-checked polytechnics, and a lift for attending classes being held on upper floors was available in only one Polytechnic (APC Roy Polytechnic Institute, Kolkata).
- In four¹⁵¹ out of six test-checked polytechnics, toilets suitable for PwDs were not available.

Lack of necessary infrastructure in the polytechnic institutes can be seen from the **Pictures 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3:**



Picture 2.1: No ramp at the entrance to Dr. Meghnad Saha Institute of Technology, Haldia, Purba Medinipur



Picture 2.2: No lift in Birla Institute of Technology, Kolkata



Picture 2.3: Toilets of Hooghly Institute of Technology, Hooghly not disabled friendly

Industrial Training Institutes: During physical inspection¹⁵² of six¹⁵³ Government Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs), in five selected Districts by Audit, it was observed that:

- Ramp was available only in one¹⁵⁴ out of six test-checked ITIs.
- No lifts were available in any of the six test-checked ITIs, for use by PwDs.
- Barrier free suitable toilets for PwDs were not available in five¹⁵⁵ out of six test-checked ITIs.

Lack of infrastructure in the ITIs is evident from **Pictures 2.4, 2.5 and 2.6:**

¹⁴⁸ Kolkata: Birla Institute of Technology and APC Roy Polytechnic Institute; North 24 Parganas: AJC Bose Polytechnic; Hooghly: Hooghly Institute of Technology; Purba Medinipur: Dr. Meghnad Saha Institute of Technology and Malda: Malda Polytechnic Institute

¹⁴⁹ During March to September 2021

¹⁵⁰ Purba Medinipur: Dr. Meghnad Saha Institute of Technology and Malda: Malda Polytechnic Institute

¹⁵¹ Malda: Malda Polytechnic; North 24 Parganas: AJC Bose Polytechnic; Hooghly: Hooghly Institute of Technology and Purba Medinipur: Dr. Meghnad Saha Institute of Technology

¹⁵² During March to September 2021

¹⁵³ Kolkata: Government ITI, Gariahat; North 24 Parganas: Government ITI, Barrackpore and Halisahar Government ITI; Hooghly: Government ITI Hooghly; Purba Medinipur: ITI Haldia and Malda: Government ITI, Malda

¹⁵⁴ Kolkata: Government ITI, Gariahat

¹⁵⁵ North 24 Parganas: Government ITI, Barrackpore and Halisahar Government ITI; Hooghly: Government ITI Hooghly; Kolkata: Government ITI, Gariahat and Malda: Government ITI, Malda



Picture 2.4: Halisahar Government ITI, North 24 Parganas



Picture 2.5: Government ITI, Hooghly



Picture 2.6: Toilets of Workshop, Govt. ITI, Malda

It is evident that accessibility for PwDs in Government Polytechnics and ITIs in the State was not ensured. This not only impacted the objective of achieving universal accessibility for PwDs but also deprived them of the opportunity to lead their lives with full dignity and freedom, in a barrier free environment.

2.2.1.2 **Barrier free accessibility to Children with Disabilities in various Schools**

The RPwD Act, under Section 16 (ii), stipulated that to meet the goal of inclusive education, Government and the Local Authorities should endeavour to provide barrier free access and ensure that buildings, campuses and various facilities are accessible to Children with Disabilities studying in those educational institutions.

Schools under SE Department: The SS *Abhiyan*, under infrastructure development and maintenance, provided for ramps with railings, barrier free access and separate toilets for CwSN in schools. In November 2019, PBSSM also issued directions for the construction of inclusive¹⁵⁶ toilets in schools to achieve the objective of 100 *per cent* barrier free infrastructure in schools.

It was, however, observed in audit that infrastructure like ramps, ramp with handrails for barrier free access and suitable toilets for CwSN could not be developed in 4,083 (*six per cent*), 43,313 (68 *per cent*) and 43,778 (69 *per cent*) schools¹⁵⁷ respectively in the State.

Schools under MEE&LS Department: As of March 2023, out of 70 Sponsored Special Schools under MEE&LS Department it was observed that ramp with handrails for barrier free access and suitable toilets for CwSN were not available in 17 and 32 Sponsored Special Schools respectively.

2.2.2 **Inadequate Assessment Camps for Providing Assistive Devices**

To promote and facilitate inclusive education, the RPwD Act, under Section 17(g), stipulated that the Government and Local Authorities should take measures to provide appropriate assistive devices to students with benchmark disabilities, free of cost, up to the age of eighteen years.

(i) SE Department: The SS *Abhiyan* guidelines mandate providing assistive devices free of cost to students with benchmark disabilities up to the

¹⁵⁶ An inclusive toilet is for use of a person who may require accompaniment of caregiver.

¹⁵⁷ Out of 63,727 Government and Government-aided schools.

age of 18 years, enrolled in Government/ Government-aided schools, by conducting assessment camps. The Artificial Limbs Manufacturing Corporation of India (ALIMCO), functioning under the administrative control of the MSJE, GoI, supplied assistive devices for the CwSN enrolled in Government/ Government-aided schools under the SE Department of GoWB.

Further, as per guidelines of the PBSSM, annual assessment camps were to be conducted at two to three different locations of a Block in the presence of the Medical Officer, Special Educators and ALIMCO officials, for taking measurements and impressions for assistive devices. Accordingly, the State Project Director, PBSSM was to prepare Annual Plans for conducting such assessment camps based on the number of Blocks, Municipalities and Municipal Corporations in the State.

As against the stipulation to organize at least two camps in a year at the Block (342)/ Municipality (120)/ Municipal Corporation (seven) level¹⁵⁸, only 96 to 584 camps were held during 2016-23. Due to non-organisation or organisation of lesser number of camps, all the CwSN could not avail the opportunity of getting screened for assistive devices.

Also, it was observed that, during 2016-23, lesser number of supportive devices (ranging from 1 to 79 *per cent*) were provided to CwSN, in comparison to the targets set (except in 2017-18 & 2021-22) as evident from the **Table 2.6**:

Table 2.6: Statement showing distribution of Assistive Devices to CwSN

Year	Providing Assistive Devices (Aids & Appliances) to enrolled CwSN	
	No. of CwSN to be covered	Achievement
2016-17	13,050	11,803 (90)
2017-18	11,735	12,073 (103)
2018-19	26,811	19,278 (72)
2019-20	18,316	12,700 (69)
2020-21	19,161	4,105 (21)
2021-22	19,161	20,313 (106)
2022-23	25,866	25,586 (99)

Source: Data sourced from State Project Director, PBSSM

During scrutiny of records in the test-checked Districts, it was observed that no assistive devices were provided to the CwSN of Kolkata (2016-17), Hooghly (2017-18 & 2020-21) and Malda (from 2017-18, 2018-19 to 2020-21).

Thus, due to the organisation of lesser numbers of camps, CwSN were deprived of being screened for Aids and Appliances essential for their daily requirements and learning. Further even for those who were screened, the Department was unable to meet the requirements of assistive devices for all of them. This resulted in lack of necessary support to those deprived, potentially hindering their educational and personal development.

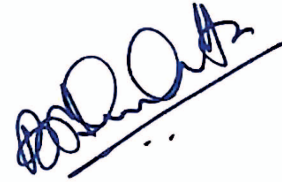
(ii) MEE&LS Department: The Department did not implement this provision of the RPwD Act. Due to such non-compliance, 72,804 CwSN, studying in 110 special schools (sponsored: 70 and recognised: 40), during the period covered under audit, were deprived from receiving the benefit of free assessments and assistive devices.

¹⁵⁸ Considering the number of Blocks, Municipalities and Municipal Corporations as of March 2023

In reply, the MEE&LS Department stated (September 2024) that an initiative had been taken to provide assistive devices to CwSN in collaboration with the WCD&SW Department, GoWB. However, no documents in support of this were produced to Audit.

Thus, CwSN studying in special schools under MEE&LS Department were deprived from the benefit of assistive devices.

The objective of providing free and compulsory education to CwSN remained largely unachieved due to non-enrolment of all identified CwSN, shortfall in establishment of Resource Centres, shortage of Special Educators and inadequacies in imparting training to such staff. There were shortfalls in terms of coverage of CwSN/ PwDs in educational scholarship schemes. The objective of establishing an accessible and barrier free environment for CwSN/ PwDs in educational institutions was compromised due to deficiency in requisite infrastructure and non-availability of assistive devices.



Kolkata
The 29 SEP 2025

(BIBHUDUTTA BASANTIA)
Principal Accountant General (Audit-I)
West Bengal

Countersigned



New Delhi
The 08 OCT 2025

(K. SANJAY MURTHY)
Comptroller and Auditor General of India