

# **Chapter-3**

## **Access to Education**



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### Access to Education

#### 3 Access to Education

Samagra Shiksha aims to provide universal and equitable access to education, with a focus on inclusivity for all children from pre-primary to Class XII. The RTE Act mandates free and compulsory education to children in school till completion of their elementary education. In line with this, the Samagra Shiksha scheme not only aims to provide support for the implementation of the RTE Act but also to align with the recommendations of NEP 2020 to ensure that all children have access to quality education with an equitable and inclusive classroom environment.

#### 3.1 Comparative view of the indicators related to education

In line with NEP 2020, SSIF's objective is to increase enrolment and retention of students from pre-school to senior secondary level. It focuses on enhancing student access, retention and transition while minimising dropout rates. To assess the effectiveness of the scheme, measurable performance indicators include Gross Enrolment ratio (GER), Net Enrolment Ratio (NER), retention rates, transition rates and dropout rates, ensuring that States meet their educational targets. The SSIF aims at 100 *per cent* retention of students from pre-school to senior secondary level and to attain the target of 100 *per cent* GER in school education by 2030.

##### 3.1.1 Gross Enrolment Ratio

GER is the total enrolment in a particular level of school education, regardless of age, expressed as a percentage of the population of the official age group which corresponds to the given level of school education<sup>19</sup>. In West Bengal, the Sub-Inspectors of Schools were responsible for maintaining records of children up to 14 years through annual household surveys, as mandated by Rule 5 of the WB RTE Rules and Section 9 of the RTE Act.

The GER across different education levels for the years 2019-20 and 2023-24 was recorded in the UDISE database and PBSSM reports. Comparative GER picture of All India and the State are shown in the **Table 3.1** below:

**Table 3.1: GER at different levels of education**

| Level of Education | GER         | Year    |         | Percent of Growth (+) / decline (-) |
|--------------------|-------------|---------|---------|-------------------------------------|
|                    |             | 2019-20 | 2023-24 |                                     |
| Primary            | All India   | 102.70  | 93.00   | -9.44                               |
|                    | West Bengal | 113.30  | 109.60  | -3.27                               |
| Upper primary      | All India   | 89.70   | 89.70   | 0.00                                |
|                    | West Bengal | 88.60   | 102.20  | 15.35                               |
| Secondary          | All India   | 77.90   | 77.40   | -0.64                               |
|                    | West Bengal | 86.30   | 101.30  | 17.38                               |
| Higher Secondary   | All India   | 51.40   | 56.20   | 9.34                                |
|                    | West Bengal | 55.20   | 66.10   | 19.75                               |

Source: UDISE Plus report

<sup>19</sup> Example: GER primary = Enrolment in class I to V divided by projected population in age group of 6-10 years.

It is evident from the **Table 3.1** above, that the GER of the State (2023-24) was higher than all India average for all levels of education. Further, growth rates at the State level were also higher than the corresponding all India figures. Significant improvements were observed in the GER for upper primary, secondary and higher secondary levels from 2019-20 to 2023-24. Notwithstanding the progress, GER in higher secondary education remained below the desired level of 100 *per cent* in 2023-24. Audit also observed that no annual surveys had been conducted by the SI of schools, in test-checked districts, during the period 2020-22 and 2023-24 in order to work out the actual age-wise population of school-going children in the State.

With respect to the six test-checked districts, the GER during the period 2019-20 to 2023-24 was as given in **Table 3.2** below:

**Table 3.2: GER of the six sampled districts in 2019-20 and 2023-24**

| District          | Year    | Primary                                                             | Upper Primary | Secondary | Higher Secondary |
|-------------------|---------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|-----------|------------------|
| Bankura           | 2019-20 | 100.11                                                              | 100.46        | 102.02    | 100.35           |
|                   | 2023-24 | 100.87                                                              | 102.73        | 101.64    | 103.34           |
| Uttar Dinajpur    | 2019-20 | 125.31                                                              | 79.63         | 57.27     | 31.24            |
|                   | 2023-24 | 100.87                                                              | 97.78         | 95.65     | 66.10            |
| Murshidabad       | 2019-20 | 102.15                                                              | 94.75         | 82.59     | 86.29            |
|                   | 2023-24 | 144.25                                                              | 140.26        | 82.59     | 86.29            |
| Dakshin Dinajpur  | 2020-21 | 99.95                                                               | 91.95         | 83.36     | 50.08            |
|                   | 2023-24 | 96.43                                                               | 91.26         | 89.47     | 57.16            |
| Purulia           | 2019-20 | 108.52                                                              | 103.40        | NA        | NA               |
|                   | 2023-24 | 108.87                                                              | 103.51        | NA        | NA               |
| Paschim Midnapore | 2019-20 | No information for the period from 2019-20 to 2023-24 was available |               |           |                  |
|                   | 2023-24 |                                                                     |               |           |                  |

Source: Data furnished by DEO of the respective district

As can be seen from the **Table 3.2** above, of the sampled districts, only Bankura had successfully reached the desired GER across all levels, while Purulia had attained the same for Primary and Upper Primary levels. In case of Higher Secondary education, no information was available from two of the test-checked districts and of the remaining two districts (Murshidabad & Dakshin Dinajpur) reported only marginal or no improvement in these figures.

Acknowledging the observations, the Department stated (July 2025) that the State had consistently performed better *vis-à-vis* the national average. Department further opined that development was a continuous process and PBSSM was taking utmost care for progress despite several constraints. The Department however, remained silent regarding district specific observations.

### 3.1.2 Net Enrolment Ratio

NER<sup>20</sup> represents the percent of students enrolled in a specific level of education who belong to the official age group for that level, compared to the total population of that age group. It helps assess how effectively a region or country

<sup>20</sup> Example: NER primary = Students of age 6-10 years enrolled in class 1 to 5 divided by projected population in age group 6-10 years

is ensuring enrolment of school-age children in appropriate educational stage. The NER values for different education levels for the State as well as in selected districts are summarised in **Table 3.3**.

**Table 3.3: Net enrolment Ratio at different levels of education**

| District                 | Year    | Primary                                                              | Upper primary | Secondary | Higher secondary |
|--------------------------|---------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|-----------|------------------|
| <b>All India average</b> | 2019-20 | 91.40                                                                | 71.10         | 50.20     | 32.30            |
|                          | 2023-24 | 79.00                                                                | 66.00         | 48.30     | 33.80            |
| <b>West Bengal</b>       | 2019-20 | 100.00                                                               | 73.30         | 62.30     | 39.40            |
|                          | 2023-24 | 100.00                                                               | 85.70         | 68.10     | 43.60            |
| <b>Bankura</b>           | 2019-20 | 99.88                                                                | 99.28         | 99.75     | 97.11            |
|                          | 2023-24 | 99.62                                                                | 99.75         | 99.85     | 99.79            |
| <b>Uttar Dinajpur</b>    | 2019-20 | 99.41                                                                | 74.12         | 24.07     | 13.01            |
|                          | 2023-24 | 98.89                                                                | 85.42         | 87.97     | 61.61            |
| <b>Murshidabad</b>       | 2019-20 | 98.83                                                                | 81.09         | 56.45     | 59.98            |
|                          | 2023-24 | 97.37                                                                | 84.03         | 56.45     | 59.98            |
| <b>Dakshin Dinajpur</b>  | 2020-21 | 98.33                                                                | 81.55         | 63.26     | 36.73            |
|                          | 2023-24 | 94.41                                                                | 91.23         | 86.22     | 35.21            |
| <b>Purulia</b>           | 2019-20 | 97.40                                                                | 96.57         | NA        | NA               |
|                          | 2023-24 | 96.90                                                                | 95.87         | NA        | NA               |
| <b>Paschim Midnapore</b> | 2019-20 | No information for the period from 2019-20 to 2023-24 was available. |               |           |                  |
|                          | 2023-24 |                                                                      |               |           |                  |

Source: UDISE Plus Report and information furnished by DEO offices of test-checked districts

It is evident from above table that the NER of the State was higher than the national average for all levels of education. The above data also indicated that, while the NER at primary, upper primary and secondary levels declined at the all-India level, the State registered growth in NER at upper primary and secondary levels during the period 2019-20 to 2023-24.

However, in Upper Primary, Secondary and Higher Secondary levels, NER fell short of the desired levels, as envisaged in NEP 2020, in 2023-24. NER at the Primary-level declined marginally in five selected districts during 2019-20 to 2023-24. NER of the State at the primary level stood at 100 during 2019-20 and 2023-24. Audit, however, noted that NER of all the test-checked districts was below 100 during these years.

In reply the Department stated (July 2025) that the position of the State was better than the national average. The Department, however, remained silent regarding district specific observations.

### 3.1.3 Retention Rate

Retention rate<sup>21</sup> represents the percent of students who start in the first grade of a given educational level and are expected to continue until the final grade of that level. **Table 3.4** provides the retention rate data for the entire State as well as six selected districts.

<sup>21</sup> Retention rate = (Number of students retained / Initial enrolment) / 100

**Table 3.4: Retention rate at different levels of education in 2019-20 and 2023-24**

| District          | Year    | Primary                                                              | Upper primary | Secondary | Higher secondary |
|-------------------|---------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|-----------|------------------|
| All India average | 2019-20 | 87.00                                                                | 74.60         | 59.50     | 40.20            |
|                   | 2023-24 | 85.40                                                                | 78.00         | 63.80     | 45.60            |
| West Bengal       | 2019-20 | 86.10                                                                | 61.70         | 46.60     | 38.60            |
|                   | 2023-24 | 85.60                                                                | 85.30         | 82.30     | 43.90            |
| Bankura           | 2019-20 | 100                                                                  | 100           | 100       | 97.25            |
|                   | 2023-24 | 100                                                                  | 100           | 100       | 98.25            |
| Uttar Dinajpur    | 2019-20 | 86.40                                                                | 81.05         | 80.31     | 81.90            |
|                   | 2023-24 | 99.45                                                                | 89.85         | 87.90     | 89.05            |
| Murshidabad       | 2019-20 | 100                                                                  | 93.61         | 71.96     | 78.74            |
|                   | 2023-24 | 84.63                                                                | 90.09         | 72.81     | 79.21            |
| Dakshin Dinajpur  | 2020-21 | 96.27                                                                | 107.30        | 93.42     | 94.25            |
|                   | 2023-24 | 86.54                                                                | 98            | 102.37    | 97.24            |
| Purulia           | 2019-20 | 100                                                                  | 100           | 70.60     | 92.70            |
|                   | 2023-24 | 100                                                                  | 100           | 47.90     | 100              |
| Paschim Midnapore | 2019-20 | No information for the period from 2019-20 to 2023-24 was available. |               |           |                  |
|                   | 2023-24 |                                                                      |               |           |                  |

Source: UDISE Plus Report and information furnished by DEO offices of test-checked districts

The above data indicated that the retention rate of the State improved in 2023-24 vis-à-vis 2019-20 at all levels except in the primary level. In the selected districts, retention rates reduced drastically in primary & upper primary levels in Murshidabad and Dakshin Dinajpur, while in Purulia significant decline was noted in secondary level education in comparison to 2019-20. In Dakshin Dinajpur district, retention rate in Upper Primary and Secondary levels was more than 100. Similarly, in Purulia district the retention rate in 2023-24 at Higher Secondary level was shown as 100 though the same was 47.90 at the Secondary level. This raised apprehensions about the accuracy of the data furnished by these districts which appeared unrealistic, as retention rate cannot exceed 100 per cent.

The Department in its reply stated (July 2025) that the reason for low retention rate in Murshidabad district was due to migration of parents as it is a socially and economically backward district. However, the Department remained silent about lower retention rates in other districts and inconsistencies in data as pointed out by Audit.

### 3.1.4 Transition rate

The transition rate represents the percent of students advancing from one educational level to the next in the following academic year<sup>22</sup>. The data for six districts and the State, as mentioned in **Table 3.5**, depicts whether students were effectively transitioning through the education system.

<sup>22</sup> Example: Transition rate from Secondary to Higher Secondary level = Number of enrolment in Class-XI of higher secondary level in a year / number of students enrolled in the Xth grade of secondary education in the previous year) x 100

**Table 3.5: Transition rate**

| District          | Year    | Primary to Upper Primary                                             | Upper primary to Secondary | Secondary to Higher Secondary |
|-------------------|---------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| All India         | 2019-20 | 92.80                                                                | 91.40                      | 71.60                         |
|                   | 2023-24 | 88.80                                                                | 83.30                      | 71.50                         |
| West Bengal       | 2019-20 | 91.98                                                                | 96.11                      | 78.65                         |
|                   | 2023-24 | 100.00                                                               | 100.00                     | 64.20                         |
| Bankura           | 2019-20 | 100.00                                                               | 100.00                     | 97.25                         |
|                   | 2023-24 | 100.00                                                               | 100.00                     | 98.25                         |
| Uttar Dinajpur    | 2019-20 | 90.97                                                                | 82.94                      | 85.35                         |
|                   | 2023-24 | 89.25                                                                | 87.43                      | 82.60                         |
| Murshidabad       | 2019-20 | 83.67                                                                | 94.78                      | 72.03                         |
|                   | 2023-24 | 89.94                                                                | 91.19                      | 37.72                         |
| Dakshin Dinajpur  | 2020-21 | 98.29                                                                | 80.66                      | 93.41                         |
|                   | 2023-24 | 95.33                                                                | 98.75                      | 86.80                         |
| Purulia           | 2019-20 | 98.87                                                                | 100                        | 70.64                         |
|                   | 2023-24 | 100                                                                  | 100                        | 87.28                         |
| Paschim Midnapore | 2019-20 | No information for the period from 2019-20 to 2023-24 was available. |                            |                               |
|                   | 2023-24 |                                                                      |                            |                               |

Source: UDISE+ Report and information furnished by DEO offices of test-checked districts

It was observed that transition rate in the State from Primary to Upper Primary and Upper Primary to Secondary levels of education had improved, whereas it had declined from Secondary to Higher Secondary level of education during 2023-24 in comparison to 2019-20. Records of districts like Bankura and Purulia indicated strong progress across levels, while others- particularly Murshidabad district experienced notable decline, especially from Secondary to Higher Secondary level.

The Department, in its reply stated (July 2025) that the State implemented Rule 2 (1) (C) of WBRTE Rules regarding admission to age-appropriate class from the academic year 2013. As a result, the number of students in class-I in 2013 decreased significantly. The impact of this was reflected at the Higher Secondary level, in 2023-24, leading to the decrease of transition rate significantly. The reply is not acceptable as specific data in respect of age-appropriate admission and its resultant effect of increase or decrease in transition rate in the subsequent years could not be produced to Audit.

### 3.1.5 Dropout/Transition Loss

The dropout rate is the proportion of pupils from a cohort enrolled at a given level during a given academic year<sup>23</sup> who are no longer enrolled at any grade in the following academic year. The **Table 3.6** below indicates the dropout rate at the State level for educational levels.

**Table 3.6: Dropout rate at different levels of education**

| Class | 2019      | 2020      | 2021      | 2022      | 2023      |
|-------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| VII   | 11,50,909 |           | -*        |           |           |
| VIII  | 14,07,032 | 13,83,171 |           |           |           |
| IX    | 14,82,786 | 14,92,724 | 14,47,355 |           |           |
| X     | 11,74,230 | 12,21,896 | 11,66,817 | 13,44,173 |           |
| XI    |           | 9,25,270  | 10,58,903 | 10,46,686 | 6,66,060  |
| XII   |           |           | 8,40,638  | 10,32,103 | 10,14,866 |

Source: Data received from SPD office

<sup>23</sup> Academic year starts from January and ends in December.

It is obvious that if there is no transition loss or dropout, a student enrolled in class VII in 2019 will enrol in class VIII in 2020, in class IX in 2021 and so on. It may however be seen that there was significant transition loss/dropout (28 to 42 *per cent* at the Higher Secondary level *vis-à-vis* Upper Primary level)<sup>24</sup> during the period covered under Audit.

The Department in its reply (August 2025) stated the reasons for decline of enrolment in class XI during 2023 was due to the fact that some students start earning after completion of secondary level education, whereas some migrate after completion of secondary level education. Thus, it was obvious from the reply that there was significant dropout/transition loss after secondary level of education.

### ***3.1.5.1 Dropout of children and the associated reasons***

Audit conducted a survey (August 2024 to March 2025) at 21 selected High Schools in six test-checked districts covering 581 children who were not attending schools for more than six months and left school at different stages of education between 2022 and 2024. During the survey, the parents/relatives of these students were interviewed. Audit categorised the causes as expressed by parents/relatives, to bring forth an understanding of the causes leading to discontinuance of education.

#### **Reasons attributed by the parents for dropout**

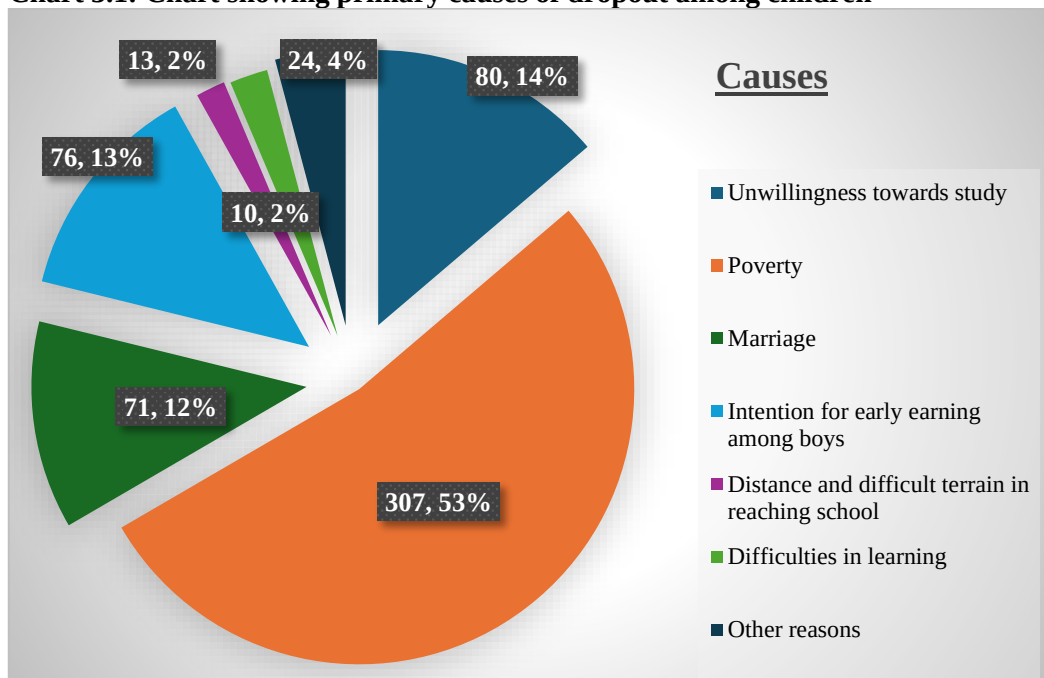
- I. Unwillingness to study:** 80 out of 581 (14 *per cent*) parents stated that the students dropped out / discontinued education due to unwillingness to study.
- II. Financial problems:** 307 out of 581 (53 *per cent*) parents stated that the students dropped out due to poverty/financial constraints of the family.
- III. Intention for early earning among boys:** 76 out of 581 (13 *per cent*) went to other States/places for earnings and discontinued studies thereafter.
- IV. Marriage:** 71 out of 581 (12 *per cent*) respondents stated that the students dropped/ discontinued further studies due to marriage.
- V. Distance and difficult terrain in reaching schools:** 13 out of 581 (two *per cent*) students dropped/discontinued studies due to inaccessible terrain/distance leading to difficulties in reaching schools.
- VI. Difficulties in learning:** 10 out of 581 (two *per cent*) students dropped/ discontinued studies due to difficulties faced in learning.
- VII. Other reason:** Linked to reasons of financial instability and intention of early earning among boys was the fact that as noted during the survey, 24 out of 581 (four *per cent*) respondents stated that students dropped/ discontinued studies because they had started working, mostly as labour, to support their families.

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<sup>24</sup> **2019:** enrolment in class VII-11,50,909 *vis-à-vis* 2023- enrolment in class XI- 6,66,060 a decrease of 4,84,849 (42 *per cent*). Similarly, in 2019-enrolment in class VIII-14,07,032 *vis-a-vis* 2023- enrolment in class XII- 10,14,866, a decrease of 3,92,166 (28 *per cent*).



Chart 3.1: Chart showing primary causes of dropout among children



Hence, though GER and NER were higher than the National averages, enrolment in Secondary and Higher Secondary levels fell short of 100 *per cent*. Audit surveys identified several key reasons for dropouts *inter alia* including financial constraints, early marriage and intent for early earning among boys. This indicated that there was need to spread awareness through measures such as community education to address the underlying social and economic factors driving the dropout rates.

**Recommendation 3:** The Department should focus on targeted interventions for underperforming districts coupled with enhancing higher secondary enrolment through awareness, incentives and better infrastructure.

**Recommendation 4:** To deal with cases of dropouts, programmes for enhancing community awareness should be initiated, along with counselling to boost motivation of students towards continuing education.

### 3.2 Access to education in backward areas

For achieving the goal of universalisation of Primary (Class-1 to IV) as well as Upper primary education (Class- V to VIII) and to provide equal educational opportunities to children in remote areas, the Panchayat & Rural Development Department (P&RD) GoWB decided to establish the Shishu Shiksha Kendras (SSK) (1997) and the Madhyamik Shiksha Kendras (MSK) (2001) mostly in backward areas under the GoI's Education Guarantee Scheme (EGS<sup>25</sup>). In these remote and backward areas, a large number of students were unable to gain formal education, mostly due to the non-existence of such schools within close distance (of one KM).

<sup>25</sup> The Education Guarantee Scheme (EGS) was a programme in India aimed at providing primary education to children in "school-less" habitations, particularly those not enrolled in formal schools. It operated as a part of the broader Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) initiative and was designed to address the lack of access to schooling within a 1km radius.

Based on directions of the MHRD, GoI, the P&RD Department GoWB decided to upgrade SSKs/MSKs in 2009-10. As a result, SSKs and MSKs became affiliated to the West Bengal Board of Primary Education (WBBPE) and the West Bengal Board of Secondary Education (WBBSE) respectively. Funds were allocated by GoI to PBSSM, which then passed them to the PBRSSM for programme implementation in SSKs/MSKs. A review of records of PBRSSM and test-checked SSKs/ MSKs in test-checked districts revealed the following findings.

### **3.2.1 Shifting of administration of SSKs/ MSKs**

The State Government aimed to provide uniform academic benefits for learners in Government and Government-sponsored schools at Primary and Upper Primary levels, including operational SSKs and MSKs. In December 2019, the administration of the PBRSSM society was shifted from the P&RD Department to the SED. The move aimed to ensure uniform academic benefits for learners in Government and Government-sponsored schools at the Primary and Upper Primary levels, including operational SSKs and MSKs. However, despite this shifting, issues in the administration and operation of SSKs/MSKs, continued to persist.

As per guidelines issued by the P&RD Department each SSK was to have a minimum of four teachers, while each MSK would have a minimum of six. The Management Committees set up at the Gram Panchayat level were to recruit these teachers (Shiksha Sahayikas/Sahayaks). Audit scrutiny revealed that as against a requirement/sanctioned strength of 72,856<sup>26</sup> primary (SSKs) and upper primary level (MSKs) teachers, there were only 40,152<sup>27</sup> in place (as of 2023-24) in the State. The P&RD Department had not recruited any new teachers for SSKs and MSKs since their inception to fill in the gaps. Consequently, these SSKs and MSKs faced a shortage of 28,402 and 4,302 teachers respectively. As a result, educational services in SSKs/MSKs were being carried out on the basis of temporary arrangements, with teachers (Madhyamik for SSKs and Graduate for MSKs) being engaged on contract basis. In contrast, the schools under SED followed a formal education system, with qualified teachers recruited through the School Service Commission. These differences in the recruitment process and qualification of teachers being hired for different categories of schools, all under the SED (post 2019) impacted uniformity in the provision of educational services to students.

The Department stated (July 2025) that no new guidelines including recruitment of SSK & MSK teachers were framed and SSKs/MSKs were running on the basis of previous guidelines issued by P&RD Department only.

### **3.2.2 Functioning of SSKs/ MSKs**

Number of SSKs and MSKs in the State and enrolment of students therein between 2019-20 and 2023-24 is shown in **Table 3.7**.

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<sup>26</sup> Minimum four teachers per SSKs for 15,367 SSKs -61,468, Minimum six teachers per MSKs for 1,898 MSKs-11,388

<sup>27</sup> SSKs-33,066, MSKs-7,086

**Table 3.7 Number of SSKs & MSKs and enrolment of students therein**

| Year    | SSK     |           | MSK     |           | Total   |           |
|---------|---------|-----------|---------|-----------|---------|-----------|
|         | Schools | Enrolment | Schools | Enrolment | Schools | Enrolment |
| 2019-20 | 15,651  | 9,64,686  | 1,908   | 2,48,058  | 17,559  | 12,12,744 |
| 2020-21 | 15,599  | 9,43,556  | 1,909   | 2,54,119  | 17,508  | 11,97,675 |
| 2021-22 | 15,559  | 8,76,466  | 1,909   | 2,17,716  | 17,468  | 10,94,182 |
| 2022-23 | 15,455  | 7,96,276  | 1,898   | 2,01,554  | 17,353  | 9,97,830  |
| 2023-24 | 15,367  | 8,02,720  | 1,898   | 2,05,684  | 17,265  | 10,08,404 |

Source: UDISE Reports

From the above it is observed that the number of SSKs decreased from 15,651(2019-20) to 15,367 (2023-24) whereas the number of MSKs decreased from 1,908 to 1,898 during the same period. This reflected closure of 284 SSKs and 10 MSKs during these years. Closures occurred due to the retirement or demise of 508 teachers posted in those SSKs and 24 teachers in MSKs respectively. Additionally, in 2024-25, 52 SSKs/MSKs in remote areas (Bankura district: 32 and Paschim Medinipur district: 20) remained closed for the same reason, with no steps taken to reopen them. This raised the risk of students in these schools either being denied education or being forced to shift to other schools, which may be further away.

Audit noted that 14 *per cent* of SSKs and 22 *per cent* of MSKs operated with an adverse pupil-teacher ratio (PTR) exceeding the norm of 40:1 during 2023-24. In the test-checked districts, 1,084 SSKs/MSKs (887 SSKs and 197 MSKs) faced similar issues during the same period as mentioned in **Appendix 3.1**.

It was also noted that 3,879 (25 *per cent*) of SSKs in the State and 1,193 (21 *per cent*) in test-checked districts had only one teacher as of 2023-24. As regards MSKs, it was observed that 765 MSKs (40 *per cent*) in the State and 276 MSKs (38 *per cent*) in the test-checked districts operated with fewer than four teachers as of 2023-24.

In line with the Audit observation, the Department accepted (July 2025) that most of the SSKs/MSKs could not maintain the PTR due to non-recruitment of SSK&MSK teachers since 2010 and a good number of SSKs / MSKs were closed due to non-availability of teachers.

Thus, the goal of providing education to students in inaccessible areas in order to achieve universal education, has been undermined. Transferring administrative control of these schools from the P&RD Department to the SED without systemic reforms, through policy decisions, did not resolve the core issues.

***Recommendation 5: To ensure uniform academic benefits for learners, the Department may ensure recruitment of teachers for SSKs and MSKs on priority and formulate required policy/guidelines in this regard.***

### **3.3 Access of child labour in formal schools**

The Ministry of Labour & Employment initiated (1988) the National Child Labour Project (NCLP) Scheme for rehabilitation of child labourers through District Project Societies, working under the chairmanship of the District Magistrates (DM). Under the NCLP scheme, children in the age group of nine to 14 years were to be rescued /withdrawn from work and enrolled in the NCLP Special Training Centres (STCs), where they would be provided with bridge

education, vocational training, mid-day meals, stipend, health care, *etc.*, before being mainstreamed into the formal education system.

The NCLP scheme was subsequently closed and subsumed under the Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) with effect from April 2021. Henceforth, it was intended that the rescued child labourers would be mainstreamed into the formal education system under SSA.

The NCLP scheme was overseen by the Project Director (PD) at the district level under the supervision of the DM. Following its merger into SSA, all district offices of the PD, NCLP were shut down gradually. The records made available to Audit in the test-checked districts revealed the following:

**Table 3.8: Observations on NCLP in test-checked districts**

|                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|-------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Uttar Dinajpur</b>   | <p>There were 39 NCLP schools in the district with a capacity of 50 students each. Between January and March 2017, a survey was conducted by PD, NCLP, Uttar Dinajpur wherein it was noted that there were 11,303 child labourers in the district. Of these, only 1,777 children were admitted to STC to avail of the bridge courses<sup>28</sup>. Thus, 9,526 child labourers remained out of these schools.</p> <p>In August 2021, based on directions of the DM, a new survey was conducted and 7,757 new child labourers in the district were identified. PD, NCLP handed over (May 2022) the survey report to the DEO for integrating these children into age-appropriate classes. However, no action was taken for their admission into formal schools.</p> <p>As a result, authorities were not successful in mainstreaming a total of 17,283 identified child labourers (9,526 <i>plus</i> 7,757 child labourers), violating the RTE Act. In reply the Department commented (July 2025) that most of the children who were identified were admitted in schools. The reply was not acceptable as the Department could not produce any documentary evidence to support this claim.</p> |
| <b>Paschim Midnapur</b> | <p>No details regarding the NCLP scheme were made available by the DM/DEO and DPO, SSM. However, records from the Mid-Day Meal section indicated that there were 1,176 children in 34 STCs as of December 2022. However, status of these children and whether they were mainstreamed into the formal education set up remained unclear as no records regarding this were made available to Audit.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| <b>Purulia</b>          | <p>A survey was conducted (January 2020) by the District Project Society<sup>29</sup>, Purulia wherein 2,436 child labour were identified in the district. The GoI instructed (November 2020) the SPD to ensure their immediate admission into age-appropriate classes in neighbourhood schools. However, the district SSM office could not provide any records to confirm whether these children had been integrated into the formal education system as per directions.</p> <p>The Department in reply stated (July 2025) that child labourers enrolled under NCLP upto December 2019 were mainstreamed into formal schools. The reply however, is silent about the mainstreaming of 2,436 child labourers identified after closure of STCs in December 2019.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| <b>Dakshin Dinajpur</b> | <p>In 30 STCs, 1009 child labourers were enrolled in the district, as of March 2021. After closure of the scheme PD, NCLP provided a list of these child labourers to the district SSM office for mainstreaming them into formal education. Scrutiny of records disclosed that only 228 out of 1,009 children could be enrolled (as of December 2022) into formal schools and 781 children remained excluded.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |

<sup>28</sup> A bridge course for NCLP students is a programme designed to reintegrate working children into the formal education system by providing them with foundational skills and knowledge to catch up with their peers.

<sup>29</sup> Society was district level body under NCLP Scheme, chaired by District Magistrate.

|                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|--------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Bankura</b>     | Survey by PD, NCLP, Bankura in 2019-20 identified 1,477 child labourer in the district. However, scrutiny of the records showed that 1,070 children between age group of nine to 14 years were never enrolled in schools and 354 students dropped out from classes between I to VII. Further, it was observed that no action was taken by the authority to admit these 1,424 (1,070 <i>plus</i> 354) out of school children in age-appropriate classes in formal schools. |
| <b>Murshidabad</b> | No child labour survey was conducted by the PD, NCLP after April 2015. The reasons for closure of the NCLP scheme in Murshidabad district without conducting any survey of child labour was not communicated to Audit.<br><br>In reply the Department stated (July 2025) that no such report was available in Murshidabad district office.                                                                                                                                |

*Source: Information furnished by the test-checked Districts*

It is thus evident that despite policy changes, effective implementation remains a challenge in curbing child labour and mainstreaming them into formal education system due to lack of effective steps in survey and identification of such children and their enrolment into schools under SSA.

***Recommendation 6: The Department should strive to bring all children, including child labour under the ambit of Samagra Shiksha. Steps should also be initiated for survey & identification of out of school children and mainstreaming them into formal education.***