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Stringent RTE rules shut down school for poor kids in Okhla

Deepalaya shut down after it failed to receive govt recognition for the piece of land from where it functioned

NEW DELHI: The Right to Education Act (RTE) has been a boon, having got thousands of children to school. But it also seems to have pushed more than 600 students out of Deepalaya School, a 22-year-old institution, in Okhla.



Deepalaya school was highly rated and the first option for parents from low-income families in Okhla.

The school, which had more than 600 students up to Class 8 till April 2014, was forced to shut down because it was not functioning from a piece of land that it owned or had been leased to it.

The NGO-run school, which started in Okhla in 1992, used to teach kids from the slums of Okhla till 2014, when the deadline to receive recognition from the Delhi government ran out.

The school pays a nominal salary to its teachers but its facilities and teaching quality is considered at par with those at many private schools of the city. It normally was the first option for parents from low-income families in Okhla.

"We had got the land from the Basti Vikas Kendra in 1992 under their community development programme. We have been running this school here for 22 years under the same scheme. After the RTE was enacted, a number of problems cropped up. We neither own the land that the school exists on, nor

can we pay our teachers salaries as per the sixth pay commission's recommendations as the RTE mandates. We had applied for recognition as no unrecognized school can function in a state that has implemented the Right to Education Act. We are an NGO run school and can't fulfill these stringent guidelines," said PT Varghese, administrative officer of the school.

A petition on www.change.org to save the school has already garnered over 1,100 signatures.

As of now, the school has been shut down and is running as a tuition centre.

"There is only one primary school nearby where slum children can go. Though, we have not been asked to vacate the land, we can't function as a school till we get recognition. Rules are so prohibitive, that we have been unable to get recognition," said Shikha, the school principal.

According to education department officials, the Delhi Urban Shelter Improvement Board, under which the land comes, was being consulted to find out if the land can be leased out to the school.

The issue of teacher salaries, however, will remain unresolved unless the government decides to fund the school.

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