

REPORT ON SINGLE-TEACHER PRIMARY SCHOOLS (STEPS)



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INTRODUCTION

This report presents the findings of a survey of single-teacher primary schools conducted in Manika Block (Latehar district, Jharkhand) between January and March 2025. The survey aimed to assess the functionality of these schools against the norms of the Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2009.

Manika Block, like many other regions in Jharkhand, faces severe educational challenges including a shortage of teachers, poor infrastructure, and low learning outcomes. These issues disproportionately impact children from Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) communities. Single-teacher schools, often the only available educational institutions in remote villages, are expected to teach multiple grades simultaneously despite the RTE Act's minimum norms of two teachers per school and one teacher for every 30 students. This situation places an immense burden on both students and teachers, making quality education impossible to achieve.

The objective of this survey was to study the functioning of single-teacher schools, identify major obstacles affecting education quality and understand the experiences of students and teachers in these institutions. By highlighting these challenges, this study seeks to contribute to ongoing discussions on improving education in disadvantaged and remote areas.



A BRIEF ABOUT THE SURVEY



One third of all government primary schools in Jharkhand are single-teacher schools (STS). This report presents the main findings of a survey of STSs in Manika Block of Latehar district. We surveyed 40 schools out of 55 STSs in Manika Block, in between January to March 2025. The survey was based on unannounced visits during school hours.

The survey exposes the glaring dysfunctionality of single-teacher schools. In most of the schools surveyed, there was no teaching activity when the survey team arrived. Children were either studying on their own, or just milling around. Even with the best of intentions, it is very difficult for single teachers to teach when they face large numbers of children (59 on average, in these 40 schools) from multiple classes on their own. The burden of record-keeping and other non-teaching duties, and the absence of basic facilities, further demotivates them. The bottom line is that children are deprived of their fundamental right to elementary education.

SURVEY HIGHLIGHTS

1. STSs in Manika have as many as 59 pupils on average; some have more than 100.
2. About 84% of the pupils in these STSs belong to SC or ST communities.
3. 77.5% of teachers are above 40 years of age; only 15% were female teachers.
4. Only one-third of the pupils enrolled were present on the day of the survey.
5. Teachers are often diverted by record-keeping and other non-teaching duties.
6. In 87.5% of the schools, there was no active teaching at the time of the survey.
7. Only 17.5% of the schools had a functional toilet.
8. Midday meals are of poor quality.

For compliance with the Right to Education Act, these 40 schools need 99 teachers instead of 40. Unless the High Court intervenes, the situation is likely to get worse: the Jharkhand government has not appointed primary-school teachers since 2017.



STUDENT ENROLMENT AND TEACHER SHORTAGE



The Empty Chair at Revat Khurd: A stark symbol of absence in a single-teacher school where children strive to learn on their own amidst systemic neglect.

Single-Teacher Schools (STs) in Manika Block have as many as 59 students on average. Some have more than 100, and one (in Bichlidag village) has 144. The teacher shortages are mind-boggling: based on RtE norms, these 40 schools should have 99 teachers instead of 40. This gap undermines the quality of education. Single teachers cannot handle all the classes properly. Most students do not get the attention they need. Often, classes remain unattended, and students are left to study on their own. Without proper guidance, learning becomes difficult, especially for young students who need support from teachers. The shortage of teachers also means fewer subjects are taught, and students do not get different learning experiences.

Teachers shortages also affect classroom discipline as it becomes hard to manage a large groups of students. Students do not receive regular feedback on their studies which slows their progress. The gap between the required and actual number of teachers shows the urgent need for more recruitment.

STUDENTS FROM MARGINALIZED COMMUNITIES

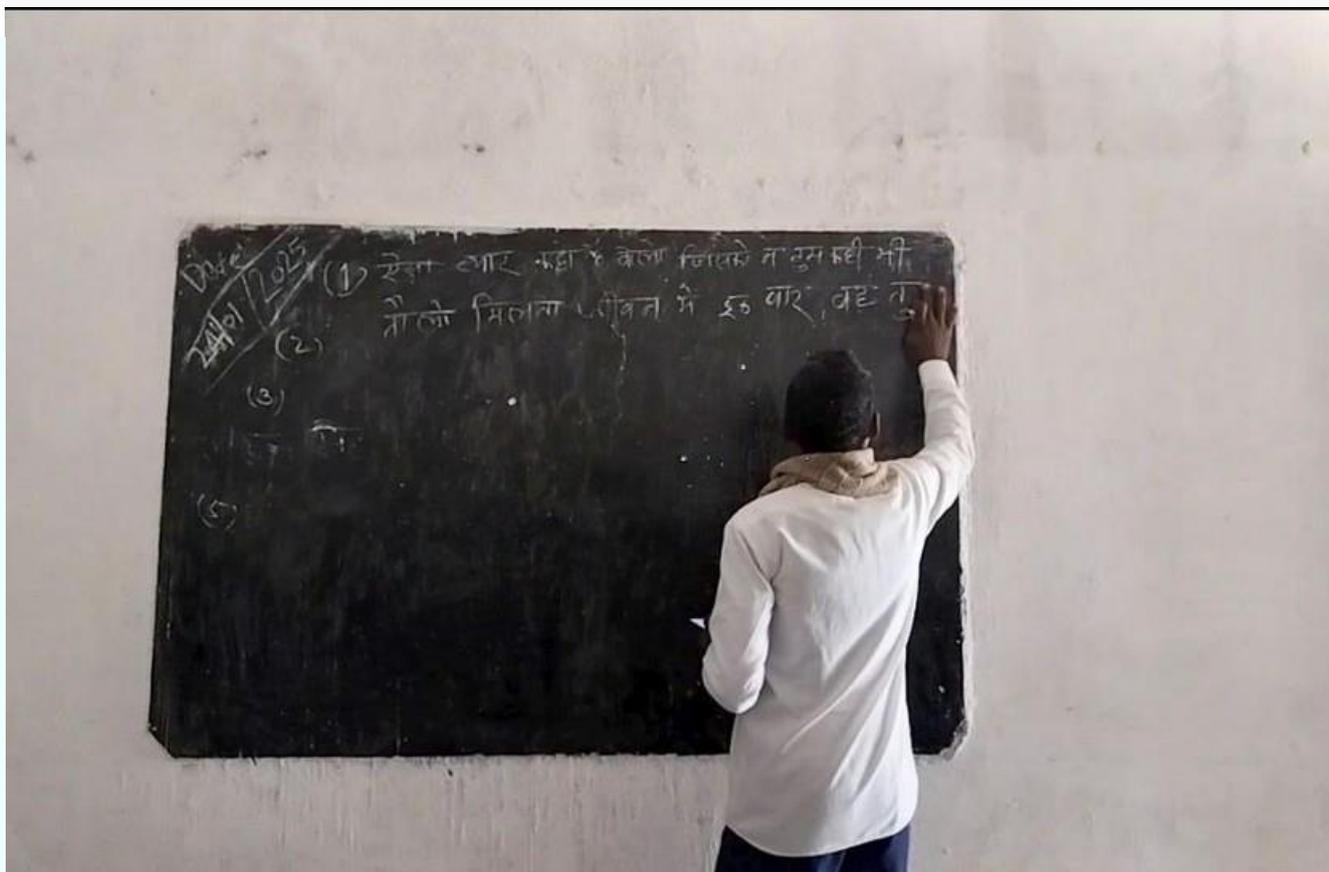


At Dubajarwa school, a single teacher gives his best to teach children from marginalised communities, showing dedication despite many challenges.

According to the StePS Survey, 84% of the students in Manika's Single Teacher Schools (STSS) comes from Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) communities. This means that most children in these schools belong to communities that have faced many disadvantages in the past. They often struggle to study because of money problems, lack of help at home and the fact that many are the first in their families to go to school. They also don't have access to things like private tuitions or internet so they depend only on local government schools, even if these schools have just one teacher. This can make it harder for them to learn well.

According to 2011 Census data, SCs make up 23% of the population in Manika Block and STs 49%. Together, they form around 72% of the people in the area. The census also shows that the average literacy rate in Manika is only 59%. Male literacy is 71%, while female literacy is much lower at 47%. This highlights the urgent need for improved schooling facilities in Manika.

CONTRACTUAL AND GENDER IMBALANCE IN TEACHING STAFF



At Tikolya Tola School, Palhaiya Panchayat, a contract teacher has been teaching students alone for years, showing dedication despite limited support.

The survey revealed that 35 out of 40 (87.5%) teachers in Manika's STSs are on contract, rather than permanent teachers. Contractual employment often comes with poor training, job insecurity, lower salaries and fewer benefits. The uncertainty surrounding contract renewals affects teachers' motivation and their overall commitment to student development. Moreover, the lack of financial and professional security can impact the quality of teaching, ultimately influencing students' learning experiences.

Another major concern is gender imbalance: only 6 out of 40 (15%) teachers in the schools we surveyed are women. This lack of gender diversity can impact the learning environment, particularly for female students who may have a reduced sense of safety and comfort in the school setting. Female teachers play a crucial role in fostering inclusivity, addressing gender-specific concerns, and encouraging young girls to pursue education.

EMPLOYMENT STATUS OF TEACHERS

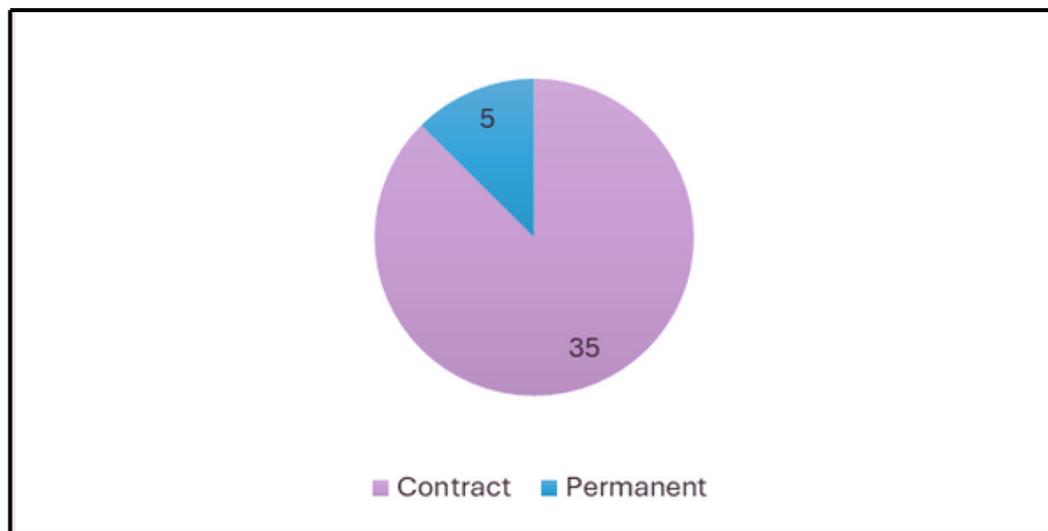


Fig 1: Only 12.5% of teacher (5 out of 35) have permanent posts, highlighting a heavy reliance on temporary teachers and lack of recruitment over a long period.

GENDER DISTRIBUTION OF TEACHERS IN THE SURVEYED SCHOOLS

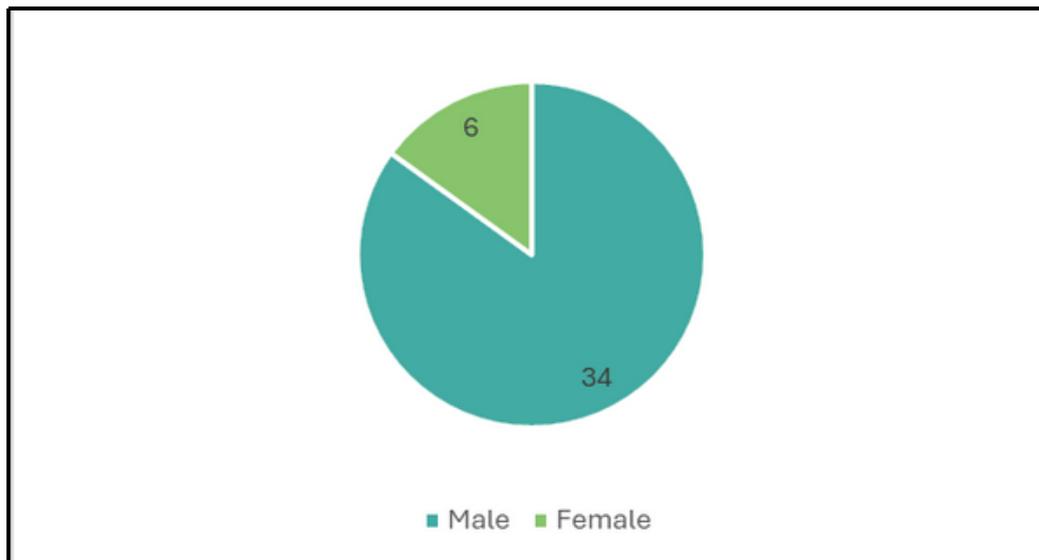


Fig 2: Gender distribution among teachers in single-teacher schools. Only 15% of teachers (6 out of 40) are women, indicating stark gender-based disparities in staffing patterns for single-teacher schools. The predominance of male educators may reflect systemic biases, cultural norms, or recruitment challenges in the education sector.

AGEING CADRE AND LACK OF NEW TEACHER APPOINTMENTS



(Fig: Rajkiya Prathamik Vidyalay Ejamar, Panchayat Manika)

The survey found that 77.5% of teachers (31 out of 40) were more than 40 years old, highlighting a lack of recent teacher appointments. The absence of young educators impacts the adoption of modern teaching methods, such as digital learning tools and interactive techniques, which are essential for engaging students. Moreover, younger teachers often bring fresh energy, innovative ideas and better adaptability to changing educational trends. Many senior teachers also face difficulties in balancing administrative tasks with classroom responsibilities, leading to increased stress and inefficiency. Without new appointments, the burden on existing teachers grows and students suffer from outdated teaching approaches.

TEACHER ABSENTEEISM AND LACK OF TEACHING ENGAGEMENT



Children playing during class hours in the absence of their regular teacher, with only a deputed teacher present.

Teacher absenteeism is a persistent issue in these STSs, with many teachers frequently missing school. This absenteeism severely impacts students as they are left without proper guidance and supervision. When the teacher is absent in a STS, the school often has to close. Even when teachers are present, they often abstain from active teaching. Instead of conducting classes, they are occupied with administrative work, engaged in personal activities, or simply uninterested in teaching. This creates a poor learning environment where students receive no structured education. This lack of engagement affects their academic performance and learning. The absence of effective teaching also leads to disinterest among students, causing high dropout rates. One villager said that “In UPS Amvatekar the teacher doesn't teach and tells children to go home after eating khichdi”. This illustrates the negligence of many teachers towards their duty. It was also observed during the survey that the teachers often had more interest in non-teaching activities than in teaching. One Brahmin teacher seemed more concerned about rituals than curriculum, when he said “*Agar Saraswati puja nahi karenge to bacche udas ho jate hai aur hum khud ka 10-15 hazaar lagate hai*”. (If we don't do Saraswati Puja, children become sad; I spend 10-15 thousand of my own).

MAIN ACTIVITY OF CHILDREN AT THE TIME OF THE SURVEY(% OF SCHOOLS)

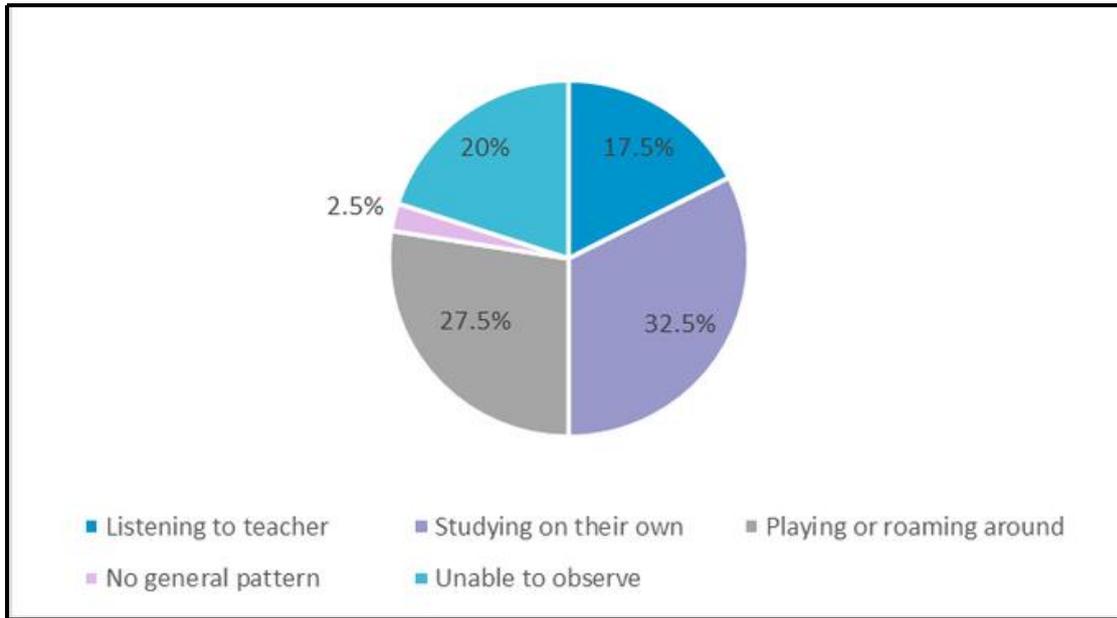


Fig 3: The figure shows student activity patterns at the time of the survey, with the largest proportion (32.5%) studying independently. A significant portion (27.5%) were playing or roaming, while a small minority (18%) were listening to the teacher. Some 20% were unobserved, and 2.5% school showed no consistent pattern.

ACTIVITY STATUS OF TEACHERS AT THE TIME OF THE SURVEY

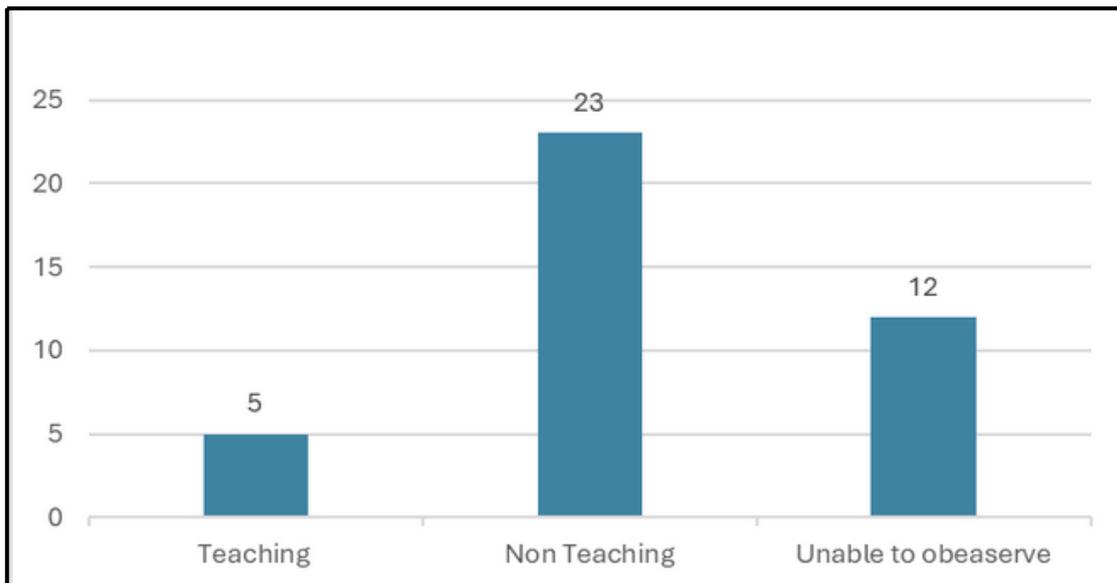


Fig 4: Teachers' activity at the time of the survey. Only 5 out of 40 were engaged in teaching, while 23 were performing non-teaching tasks (in 12 schools, the teacher's activity status was not clear).

STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS BY CATEGORY

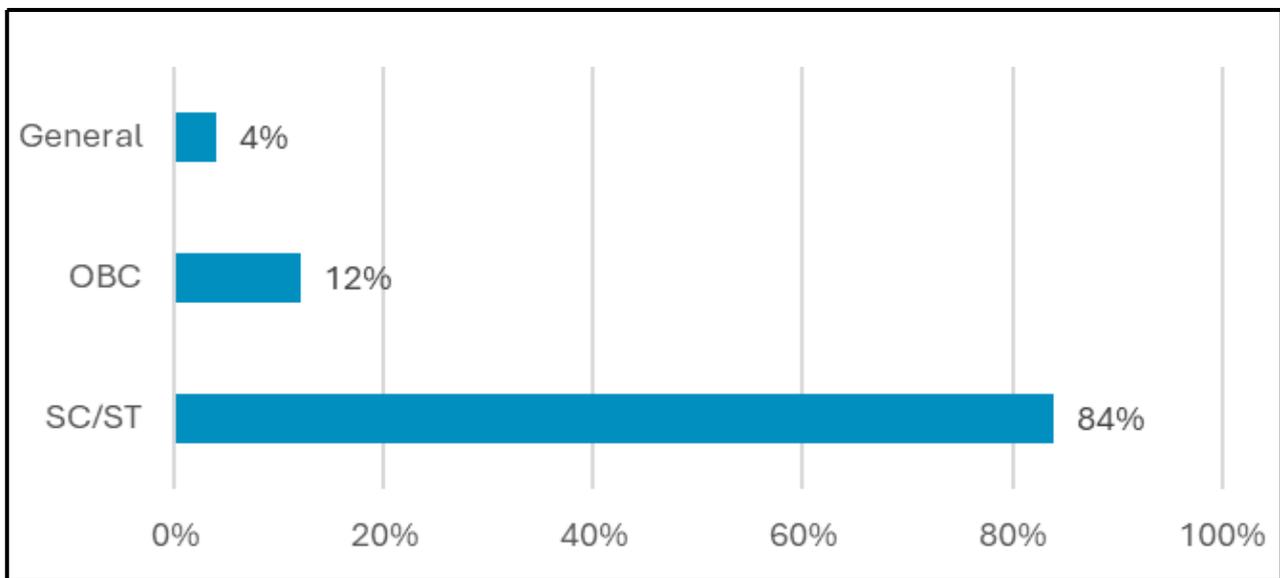


Fig 5: Caste-based distribution of students in single-teacher schools. Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes (SC/ST) constitute 84% of students, while Other Backward Classes (OBC) make up 12% and General Category students account for just 4%. This disproportionate distribution highlights how single-teacher schools primarily serve underprivileged sections of society.



Poor infrastructure and lack of basic facilities affect the learning environment at Government Primary School Dumri, Rakikala.

POOR INFRASTRUCTURE AND LACK OF BASIC FACILITIES

The basic facilities in Manika's Single Teacher Schools are severely inadequate, creating significant barriers to education. Only 17.5% of the STSs (7 out of 40) have functional toilets while a staggering 82.5% lack this basic facility. This is a major deterrent for students especially girls, who often miss school or drop out due to the absence of proper sanitation. Many schools also lack clean drinking water, electricity and well-maintained classrooms, resulting in an unhygienic and uncomfortable learning environment. Students frequently sit on floors due to broken furniture, while poor ventilation, lighting and overcrowded classrooms further disrupt learning. Teachers, particularly female staff, face additional hardships as the lack of facilities compromises their dignity and health. The survey also exposes the lack of credibility of official data: according to UDISE+, 98% of primary and upper-primary schools in Jharkhand have functional toilets.

These deficiencies underscore the urgent need for improved infrastructure and maintenance, including interventions such as repairing toilets, ensuring clean water and improving classroom conditions to create a inclusive learning environment and reduce dropout rates. Addressing these issues is critical to achieving equitable education in the region.



The toilets at Rajkiya Prathmik Vidyalaya Sirish. Most single-teacher schools have unusable washrooms, forcing children to go outside and disrupting their learning.

SCHOOL INFRASTRUCTURE ISSUES

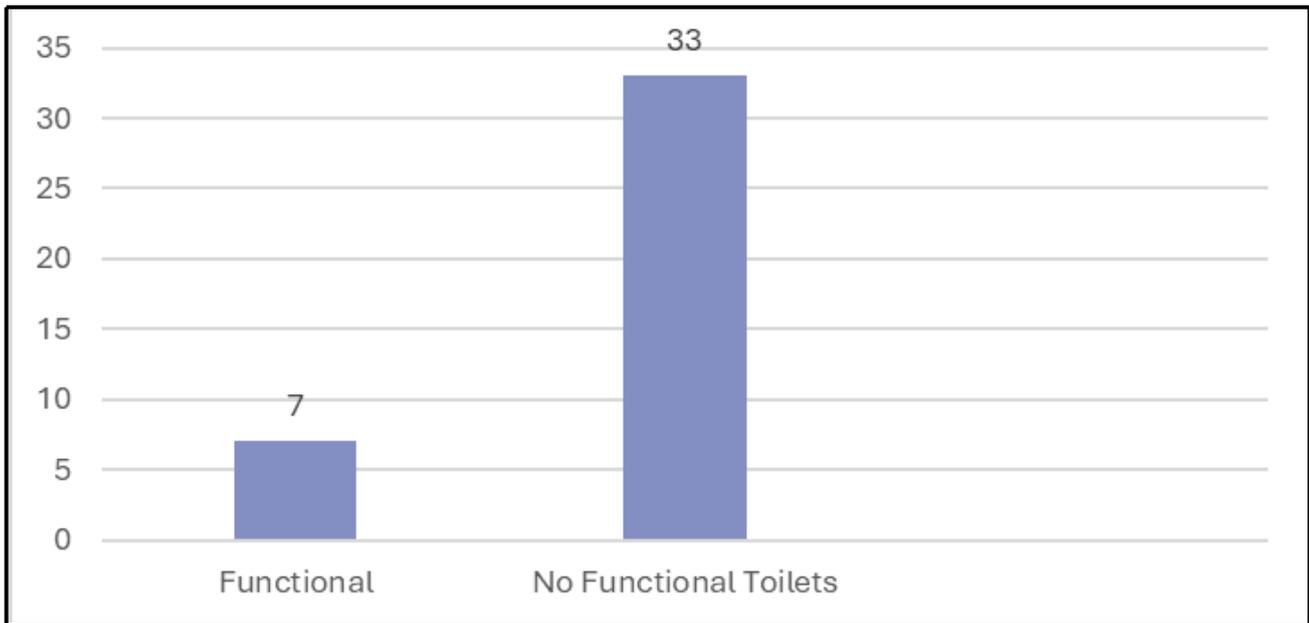


Fig 6: Only 17.5% of single-teacher schools (7 out of 40) have a functional toilet. Over 80% of students potentially face health and hygiene challenges daily. The near-total absence of functional toilets underscores an urgent need for infrastructure development and maintenance to ensure basic health standards and dignity for students.

HEAVY ADMINISTRATIVE BURDEN ON TEACHERS

Teachers in STSs report spending an average of 10 hours per week on record-keeping. This curtails their teaching time. Tasks like filling attendance records, administrative reports and government forms take priority over classroom instruction. This administrative burden adds to the dysfunctionality of schools and lowers teacher motivation. Contract teachers, already facing low pay and job insecurity, feel further frustrated by excessive paperwork. Instead of planning lessons or engaging students, they are occupied with documentation. A villager from Parsahi said that “The children of 5th class don't know basic reading and writing”. highlighting severe gaps in foundational learning due to inadequate teaching support. Many villagers also complained that “The teachers are barely staying at the school till 1.30 PM as they say they have to go BRC for some work after that.”



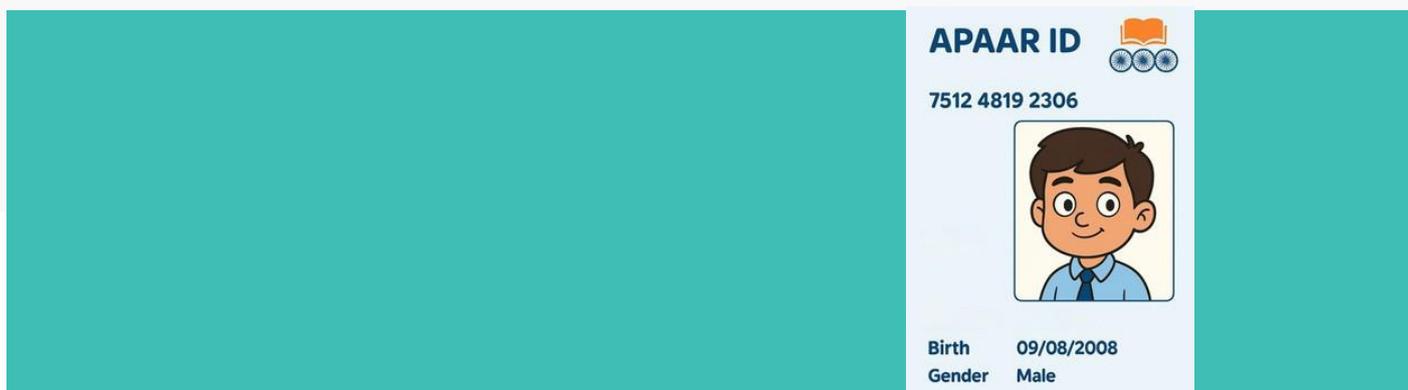
Frequent disruptions at UPG PS Savandera as teachers are often busy with non-teaching duties, affecting students' learning.

GENERATION OF APAAR IDS: A NEW ORDEAL

The APAAR (Automated Permanent Academic Account Registry) number is a unique identification number issued by the Government of India under the ‘One Nation, One Student ID’ initiative. It is designed to create a lifelong digital record of a student’s academic achievements from school through higher education. To generate an APAAR ID, essential documents such as the child’s Aadhaar card, birth certificate, and school enrollment records are required, along with parental consent and accurate data entry. One of the most common issues in generating APAAR IDs is related to mismatches between the Aadhaar database and UDISE+ or school registers. This includes discrepancies in the child’s name, spelling errors, incorrect or inconsistent surnames (such as “Singh” instead of “Kumar”) mismatched dates of birth and gender errors where a child’s gender is incorrectly recorded. Additionally, some children do not have an Aadhaar card at all, or their card is yet to be submitted by parents.

Documentation issues also play a significant role. Many students lack important documents like birth certificates or their parents have not submitted the necessary paperwork often due to lack of awareness or migration from the village. Technical challenges such as server failures and system errors have also hindered the timely completion of the APAAR application process. Record-keeping errors at the school level further complicate matters. Some students are not properly entered in the UDISE+ database or their details contain mistakes that conflict with Aadhaar data causing the APAAR application to be rejected even after multiple correction attempts. Moreover, administrative hurdles, such as the requirement to physically visit the Block Resource Centre (BRC) for document verification cause further delays.

Teachers are under immense pressure to achieve APAAR ID generation for 100% of children as soon as possible, but this is proving very difficult. So far, only 57% of children in the 40 schools we surveyed have an APAAR number. The pressure to achieve 100% APAAR generation adds a significant workload on top of their teaching and other responsibilities, especially in areas where documentation issues are widespread. The APAAR ID system aims to streamline educational records, but multiple ground-level challenges remain unaddressed.



LACK OF MID- DAY MEAL QUALITY AND IRREGULARITY

The mid-day meal (MDM) program is crucial for student nutrition and attendance, but many STSs face challenges in its implementation. The quality of meals is often poor, with an irregular supply of essential items like eggs. Many schools lack proper kitchen facilities, with no gas supply for cooking, forcing them to rely on traditional firewood, which is inefficient and unhealthy. Additionally, kitchen sheds are in poor condition, with no repairs or maintenance. Most sheds have no ventilation, making cooking difficult and unsafe for staff. Poor infrastructure leads to delays or skipped mid-day meals, discouraging school attendance. Inconsistent and low-quality meals affect student health and participation.



Students of UPG PS Pachphedi having mid-day meal and washing the dishes.





A school cook (rasoiya) highlighting the difficulties faced due to inconsistent supply of gas cylinders, forcing them to cook meals using firewood - a method that becomes especially challenging during the rainy season.

Rasoiya of UPG MS Jamuna stated that “From 2023 I haven't received my payment since the teacher has come”. It was not the issue of a single Rasoiya: almost every Rasoiya in the schools surveyed haven't received payment from October 2024. Such persistent delays deprive these essential workers of their rightful income, disrupt school meal programs, and reflect systemic neglect in the administration of these schools. Immediate action is needed to ensure timely payments and uphold the dignity of these workers, who play a crucial role in supporting student's nutrition and education.

RECAPTULATION OF THE KEY FINDINGS

SL No.	Key Issue	Summary
1.	High Student Enrollment but Low Teacher Availability	STSs in Manika have 59 students on average, and some have more than 100. Based on RtE norms, these 40 schools should have 99 teachers instead of 40.
2	Majority of Students from SC/ST Backgrounds	Most students in STSs (84%) belong to SC/ST communities.
3	Contractual and Gender Imbalance in Teaching Staff	Male teachers account for 85% of single teachers (34 out of 40), while female teachers account for just 15%.
4	Aging Workforce and Lack of New Teacher Appointments	31 teachers out of 40 (77.5%) are more than 40 years old, showing a lack of recent recruitment and affecting education quality.
5	Teacher Absenteeism and Lack of Teaching Engagement	Teachers are often absent, and when present, they do not actively teach, leading to poor learning outcomes.
6	Low Student Attendance Rates	Only about one-third of the enrolled students were present on the day of the survey.
7	Poor Infrastructure and Lack of Basic Facilities	33 out of 40 (82.5%) schools lack functional toilets; many STSs also lack clean drinking water and adequate classrooms.
8	Heavy Administrative Burden on Teachers	Teachers report spending an average of 10 hours per week on paperwork, reducing their teaching time.
9	Frequent Disruptions Due to Non-Teaching Responsibilities	Teachers are often pulled into meetings, training and reporting tasks causing classroom disruptions.
10	Lack of Mid-Day Meal Quality and Irregularity	Mid-day meals are often of poor quality and irregularly provided, negatively affecting student attendance and nutrition.

OBSERVATIONS FROM THE SURVEY

ENDANGERING EDUCATION

In 4 out of the 40 single-teacher schools we surveyed, the teachers were found to be under the influence of alcohol. Even during class hours. The schools where this serious issue was reported are: UPG PS Betla, PS Ejamar, UPS Bakhartola and UPG PS Rakhat. This finding is deeply concerning as it highlights not only the negligence and irresponsibility of the teachers involved but also the broader challenges facing the education system in these areas. The presence of intoxicated teachers during school hours poses a serious threat to the learning environment and the overall well-being of the students. It reflects a troubling disregard for the responsibilities entrusted to educators and underscores the urgent need for monitoring, accountability, and systemic reform.

UNEQUAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Caste-based discrimination continues to be a deeply entrenched issue within the schooling system, especially affecting students from marginalized and underprivileged communities. In this survey it was observed that the composition of teachers included 12 from the General category, 10 from Other Backward Classes (OBC), 4 from Scheduled Castes (SC) and 14 from Scheduled Tribes (ST). Despite this representation, discriminatory practices persisted within the school environment. As we saw, 84% of the STS students in Manika belong to disadvantaged (SC, ST and OBC) caste groups. These students were frequently subjected to biased treatment by teachers which manifested in both verbal and non-verbal forms of discrimination. Teachers were often heard making derogatory and stereotypical remarks such as, “These children do not study because they belong to a particular caste,” implying that caste identity determines academic ability. Such statements not only reflect personal prejudice but also reinforce systemic inequality within the classroom. This kind of discrimination negatively impacts students’ self-esteem, motivation and overall educational experience. It creates a hostile learning environment where students from marginalized castes feel alienated and less valued, thereby deepening existing social inequalities. Addressing such caste-based prejudices among educators is essential for creating an inclusive and equitable education system.

INCLUSION GAPS IN SCHOOLS

During the survey, it was observed that out of the 40 teachers, one teacher from Government Primary School Dumri was a Person with Disability (PWD), specifically with a locomotor disability. However, no special facilities or accommodations were provided to support him in carrying out his official duties. Despite his physical challenges, he was required to attend monthly teacher's meetings, submit reports and ensure timely submission of attendance at the Block Resource Centre (BRC) located in Manika, approximately 15 km from Dumri. The absence of transport assistance or reasonable workplace accommodations reflects a lack of institutional support and inclusivity for staff with disabilities within the education system.

CONCLUSION

The survey findings reveal deep-rooted challenges in single-teacher schools (STSs), significantly affecting both students and teachers. Despite serving a large number of students, these schools suffer from an acute shortage of teachers, particularly permanent and female staff. The reliance on contractual employment creates job insecurity, discouraging long-term commitment. Additionally, a lack of new teacher appointments has resulted in an aging workforce, further weakening the education system. Poor infrastructure, including inadequate classrooms, lack of functional toilets, and insufficient drinking water, makes learning difficult and discourages regular attendance. Many students, particularly from SC/ST backgrounds, rely on these schools for education, yet teacher absenteeism and low engagement further hinder their academic progress. The burden of administrative tasks and non-teaching responsibilities further reduces the time teachers can dedicate to actual instruction. Additionally, the poor quality and irregularity of mid-day meals affect student nutrition and attendance. Addressing these issues requires urgent interventions, including hiring more permanent teachers, improving infrastructure, reducing administrative workloads, and ensuring proper implementation of mid-day meal programs. Without immediate action, the learning crisis in STSs will continue, depriving marginalized students of quality education and future opportunities