

# Govt school enrolment drops in 23 states; MoE expresses concern, asks states to probe cause

## Officials point to removal of ghost entries, move back to private schools after Covid

A steep drop in government school enrolment at the primary and upper-primary levels across 23 States and UTs in 2024-25 has evoked concern within the Union government, prompting the Ministry of Education (MoE) to ask for probes and remedial action plans from the states concerned.

Minutes of meetings held by the MoE with 33 States and UTs in April to discuss performance, plan and budget under the PM-POSHAN scheme show that student enrolment dipped in 23 states, of which at least eight witnessed declines exceeding 100,000: led by Uttar Pradesh (21.83 lakh), Bihar (6.14 lakh), Rajasthan (5.63 lakh) and West Bengal (4.01 lakh).

PM-POSHAN — Pradhan Mantri Poshan Shakti Nirman, formerly the midday-meal scheme — covers students up to Class 8 in government and government-aided schools. Launched three decades ago, the scheme is a flagship nutritional support programme for children in pre-primary to Class 8 in government and government-aided schools.

Its cost is shared by the Centre and States on a 60:40 basis, with the Centre supplying foodgrains. Besides addressing child nutrition, a cooked meal in school is known to boost attendance, learning outcomes and attention spans.

Compared to 2023-24, Karnataka saw its enrolment fall by around 2 lakh; Assam by 1.68 lakh, Tamil Nadu by 1.65 lakh and Delhi by 1.05 lakh (see chart).

The School Education Secretary at the MoE expressed “deep concern” over the trend and advised States to identify the reasons and submit reports by June 30, The Sunday Express has learned.

The drop first came to light late last year in the UDISE+ report for 2023-24, which pointed to a sharp fall of around 1.5 crore in overall school enrolment (government and private) compared to the 2018-19 to 2021-22 average. PM-POSHAN minutes show the trend continuing into 2024-25, triggering fresh concern in the government.

MoE officials, who did not wish to be named, pointed to two possible causes. The first is a change in data-collection methodology—from school-wise reporting (just total numbers) to student-wise reporting (name, address, parents’ names and Aadhaar details). This ongoing “data cleansing” may have removed “ghost” entries, they said.

Second, officials noted that several States have suggested enrolment may be moving from government to private schools in the post-Covid years, reversing pandemic-era trends.

Alongside enrolment declines, the PM-POSHAN meetings flagged low scheme coverage. In Delhi, the number of students availing midday meals fell by 97,000 in 2024-25 versus 2023-24, with only 60 percent of Balvatika (pre-primary), 69 percent of primary and 62 percent of upper-primary students covered—below the national average. The MoE has asked Delhi to “strive” to improve these figures.

In Uttar Pradesh, meal coverage dropped by 5.41 lakh students, by 3.27 lakh in Rajasthan and 8.04 lakh in West Bengal. Some States reported students bringing their own tiffin; all have been asked to check and ensure meal quality, officials added.