

Interviewee: Delhi Education Minister, Arvinder Singh Lovely

Q: Recently, the planning commission proposed to adopt the voucher system in secondary education for the XI plan. What is your take on it?

I am glad that the planning commission has proposed the voucher system of funding education, which talks of funding students instead of funding schools. The government spends the same amount of money on government schools, infact more that what public schools often spend, and is still not able to provide quality education. The voucher system is a very good method of ensuring that the government money is spent well and provides every Indian, rich or poor access to quality education.

Q: Your government has removed the cap on the number of essentiality certificates to be given out. What was your agenda behind the removal? How do you plan to take this forward?

Government policies should not restrict the growth of private schools. They should be liberated and allowed to grow. The removal of the cap on the number of essentiality certificates is just the first step. In the coming year, we will be looking at ways to completely retrench essentiality certificates, making it all the more easier to open more and more schools.

Q: What are your plans for government schools in the current academic year?

This year we will be concentrating on improving the infrastructure of government schools. As of now the PWD is the sole incharge for maintaining the infrastructure of schools. Now we are planning to rope in more government agencies for managing the infrastructure of schools. Secondly, we will introduce computer-aided learning in more number of government schools. Introduction of computers in schools raised the pass percentage of students in schools by more than 11%.

Q: Your government has managed to get govt and aided schools to publish their attendance reports online? What is the thought behind this reform? How has it impacted govt. schools in Delhi?

Government schoolteachers are no less competent than public school teachers. Still these schools are not performing that well. For improving their performance, it was felt that regular monitoring of school performance was required and hence the introduction of MIS (Management Information System). MIS helps the government in documentation as well as keeping track of the daily activities of schools in Delhi. Moreover, the system compels the students and teachers to make use of computers, since most of their work – attendance, transfer, postings, applications, payments etc is done online. The system is hence making them more computer savvy.

Q: How do you plan to address the problem of non-performing government schools?

The number of suspensions and penalties on teachers in the last one-year alone has been more than what has been in the last seven years. Inspections are becoming a regular feature. But it is not just disincentives that we use to make them perform. Our government is providing Advanced Career Progression for well-performing teachers; in fact it is the only state in India to do so.

We are also looking into the aspect of handing over management of non-performing government schools to private bodies like NGOs and corporate foundations that are well-experienced in the field of education.

Q: What are the challenges you face in achieving the targets that you have set?

Our biggest challenge is the multiplicity of authority. For example, at present, MCD schools are in a rather poor state. However there is little we can do to improve them, since these schools do not come under our purview. This however will not be a problem once Delhi attains complete statehood.