

## Every Child in School and Learning Well in India

### Investigating the Implications of School Provision and Supplemental Help

*Rukmini Banerji and Wilima Wadhwa*

#### THE DEBATE

Much of the recent debate and discussion on schooling in India focuses on private and public provision of schooling. While there is consensus on the need for universal access to schooling, in India there are strong views on who receives it and how this provision is to be done. The commitment of the Indian government to provide access and reduce all gender and social gaps in enrolment has been strong and in place even before the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education or Right to Education (RTE) Act was passed into law in 2010. The RTE further strengthens this position. Not only should all children be in schools, but in schools with particular characteristics; taught by teachers with specific qualifications; and following a set of minimum procedures. The recent Supreme Court judgement on the RTE further focused the nation's attention on the issue of who goes to or is eligible to go to what kind of school.

Thus at one end of the spectrum are those who take a rights-based approach and believe in entitlements, where every child in India is entitled to schools and teachers who comply with the norms regarding inputs and processes laid down by the law. According to this viewpoint, every school in the country must have certain specific characteristics and education can be imparted in only such schools. At the other end are those who equally and strongly believe in freedom of enterprise and choice. This school of thought believes that parents should have the liberty and the option to send their child to a school of their choice, and that education can take place in government schools or in a variety of different types of private schools, with formal or non-formal education programmes.

While viewpoints and opinions may vary across people and over time, what does the available evidence suggest

about who goes to what type of school in India? And, what are the outcomes and implications of the different patterns of school access? For the past seven years, for every rural district in India, the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) has made available comparable data on school access and learning. This makes it possible to use empirical evidence to explore questions of school access and outcomes. This paper is primarily based on ASER data from 2006–11.<sup>1</sup>

Using ASER data, this paper sets out to explore three basic questions: First, what have been the trends in private schooling in rural India in the recent years? Second, are there other private educational inputs going into children's education such as tuition? How pervasive is the practice of tuition or coaching and what have been the trends in this over time? Third, what is the impact of private inputs — such as private schooling and private tuition on children's learning outcomes? The paper concludes with a discussion on the interpretation of the available evidence on effective strategies to ensure that every child is in school and learning well.

#### THE EVIDENCE: PROVISION OF SCHOOLING IN RURAL INDIA

##### How have Private School Enrolment Patterns been Changing in the Recent Years in Rural India?

This question can be answered in several ways. Table 5.1 focuses on the age group of 6–14-year-olds and examines national trends from 2006–11 for all rural districts put together.

Table 5.1 suggests two basic trends: first, the fraction of children in the age group 6–14 enrolled in private schools has risen considerably by almost 7 percentage points in six years to reach 25.6 per cent in 2011. At the same time,

TABLE 5.1 Percentage of Children Enrolled and not Enrolled in School: Rural India

Age Group 6–14	Government	Private	Other	Not Enrolled	Total
ASER 2006	73.3	18.7	1.2	7.6	100
ASER 2007	75.3	19.3	1.1	5.6	100
ASER 2008	71.8	22.6	1.3	4.9	100
ASER 2009	72.9	21.7	0.2	4.5	100
ASER 2010	71.8	23.7	0.2	3.5	100
ASER 2011	69.9	25.6	0.3	3.8	100

Source: ASER (2006–11).

the proportion of children not enrolled or out of school is declining, dropping to below 4 per cent in 2011.<sup>2</sup>

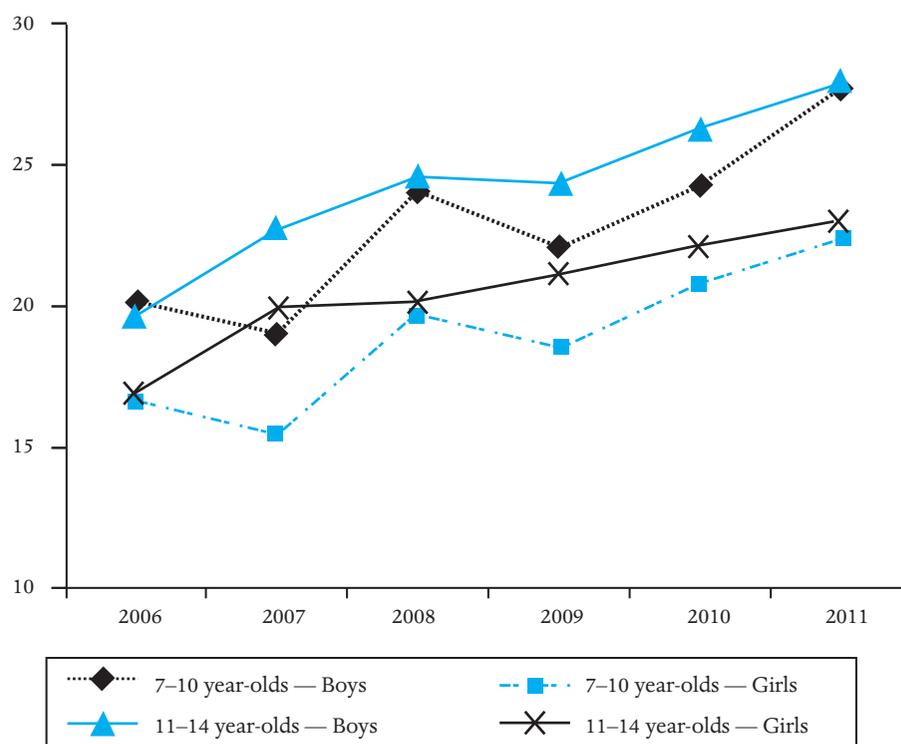
How do these enrolment patterns look when we disaggregate them according to age and sex? Figure 5.1 takes the all-India rural figures and divides the sample into two age groups by gender — boys and girls in the age groups of 7–10 and 11–14 for the 2006–11 period.

For each age group in every year, higher proportions of boys are enrolled in private school than girls. Although for some years the data suggests that older children were more likely to be in a private school than younger ones, by 2011 the differences between age groups in private school

enrolment seemed to have narrowed considerably, but the differences in gender remained.

States vary substantially with respect to private school enrolment in rural areas. Table 5.2 summarises the private school enrolment in the major Indian states, using ASER 2011 data. Since ASER is a household survey, families are asked about the type of school that their children are enrolled in. While parents know whether their child goes to a government or private school, they often do not know if the private school is aided or unaided, recognised or unrecognised. Therefore, the data reported here is for all private schools clubbed together.<sup>3</sup>

FIGURE 5.1 Private School Enrolment, by Age and Gender



Source: ASER (2006–11).

TABLE 5.2 Percentage of Children Enrolled in Private Schools (age 6–14)

Percentage	States	Total Number of States
Above 50 per cent	Kerala, Manipur, Meghalaya	3
40–49 per cent	Haryana, Uttar Pradesh	2
30–39 per cent	Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab, Uttarakhand, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh	6
20–29 per cent	Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Himachal Pradesh	3
10–19 per cent	Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Assam, Gujarat, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram	7
Less than 10 per cent	Bihar, Odisha, West Bengal, Tripura	4
Total Number of States		25

Source: ASER (2011).

There are clear regional patterns in private school enrolment. The states north and west of Delhi, from Jammu & Kashmir in the north to Rajasthan in the west, as well as the large state of Uttar Pradesh fall into a ‘high’ private schooling region, where anywhere between half to a third of all rural children (in the age group 6–14) are enrolled in private schools. In the eastern region of India — West Bengal, Bihar and Odisha — private school enrolment is very low. The north-eastern states also provide contrasting cases: Manipur, Meghalaya and Nagaland have very high private school enrolment, whereas Tripura has extremely low levels.

Looking at the state-wise trends according to class levels over time is an even more interesting exercise (this section is based on the analysis laid out in Chavan 2011). Figures 5.2, 5.3 and 5.4 present three cases from three states to highlight the different regional trends across the country.

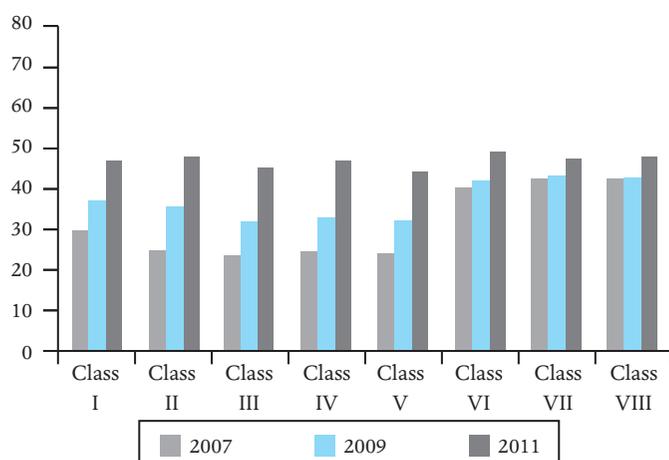
The three cases presented here highlight the need for a much deeper exploration of patterns of school provision and

choice across states, over time and according to classes. So far, available research on this topic in India refers to general patterns and explanations across the country, rather than an investigation of the differences in geography, time and phases of education. These differences need to be explored more carefully. This is especially important since education is a concurrent federal and state subject in India, and state policies can and do differ significantly.

## THE EVIDENCE: INCIDENCE OF ‘TUITION’

Do children get any other educational supplements? The phenomenon of additional educational inputs through tuition classes and coaching centres is very widespread and visible in India especially in secondary and post-secondary education. For example, it is common to see signboards in many rural block and district headquarters as well as in state capitals for classes to prepare for college entrance and

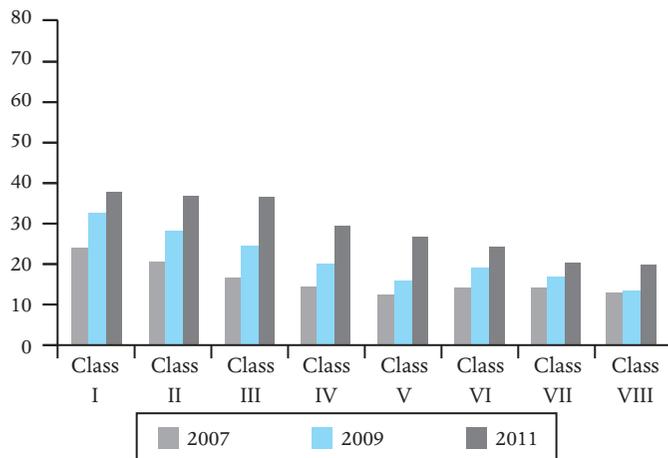
FIGURE 5.2 Percentage of Children Enrolled in Private Schools, by Class and Year in Uttar Pradesh



**Uttar Pradesh:** The ASER data suggest that a few years ago more children went to private schools in the middle-school years than the primary school. For example, in 2007, the proportion of children enrolled in private school in Class VI or VII was much higher than in Class II or III. However by 2011, it appears that close to 50 per cent of the children were going to private schools from Class I onwards. This fraction is high across all classes. Overall, the percentage of children (age 6–14) in private schools has increased from 29 per cent in 2007 to above 45 per cent in 2011.

Source: ASER (2007–11).

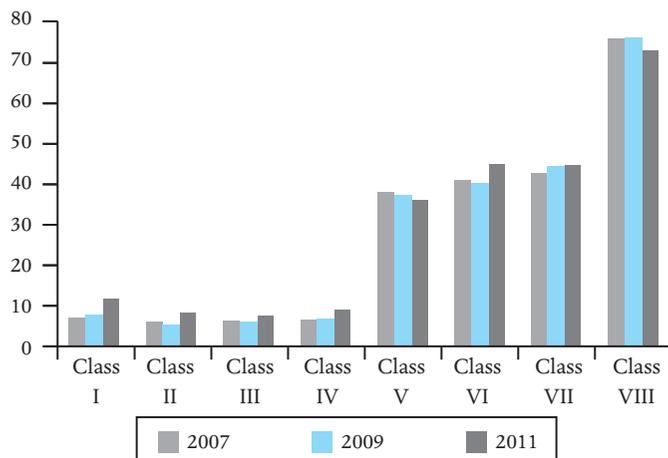
FIGURE 5.3 Percentage of Children Enrolled in Private Schools, by Class and Year in Tamil Nadu



**Tamil Nadu:** The trends of private school enrolment by grade over time in Tamil Nadu show a different picture as compared to that of Uttar Pradesh. Private school enrolment is higher in early classes and is growing. For example, in 2011 the fraction of children enrolled in private schools in Class I was higher than that in 2007. This trend needs further analysis because it takes place against the backdrop of heavy investment by the Tamil Nadu Government in the early classes in government schools, with quality enhancement programmes such as Activity-Based Learning (ABL).

Source: ASER (2007–11).

FIGURE 5.4 Percentage of Children Enrolled in Private Schools, by Class and Year in Maharashtra



**Maharashtra:** The picture in the state looks relatively stable over time. Most children go to government schools (*zilla parishad* schools) in the primary years. Enrolment in private schools jumps in the post-primary years, with a substantial proportion of children going to private schools. These schools in Maharashtra are often government-aided.

Source: ASER (2007–11).

professional examinations (such as the civil service entrance examinations).

What does one know about the kind of supplemental inputs for students in elementary school? ASER asks families if their children are attending any paid classes outside school. Table 5.3 summarises the status of tuition in every class from Classes I to VIII for government and private school children in the sample. The 2011 ASER data shows that for rural India as a whole almost one-fourth of all children access these supplemental inputs by Class VIII.<sup>4</sup>

Table 5.4 uses ASER 2011 data for children in Class IV in different states and examines the incidence of tuition for those enrolled in government and private schools. It is clear that tuition patterns vary considerably across states even

for the same class. For every state shown in Table 5.4, the incidence of tuition is substantially higher among private school children than government school children, ranging from double to four times higher in some states.

It is interesting to unpack the all-India patterns and look at the incidence of tuition across states. There are wide variations across states; among government school children we see almost no tuition in Rajasthan or Chhattisgarh, compared to nearly 75 per cent in West Bengal and Tripura.

The highest incidence of tuition is visible in states such as Bihar, West Bengal and Odisha, where private school enrolment is 10 per cent or below. ASER 2011 data for three selected classes in the three states has been shown in Table 5.5. The data shows that prevalence of tuition is very

TABLE 5.3 Percentage of Children taking Paid 'Tuition' Classes, by Class and Type of School

Type of School	Classes								Total
	Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV	Class V	Class VI	Class VII	Class VIII	
Government	15.8	19.5	21.2	24.0	25.4	25.8	27.7	28.4	23.3
Private	18.9	21.1	23.2	23.3	23.1	21.6	22.2	22.4	21.8

Source: ASER (2011).

high even in classes as early as Class III and it rises even more by the time children reach higher classes such as Class VII.

Putting it all together, the tuition data from ASER suggests three broad patterns: first, even in rural areas, states vary substantially from each other in terms of the proportion of

TABLE 5.4 Percentage of Children in Class IV taking Paid Tuition Classes, by School Type

States	Type of School	
	Government	Private
Jammu and Kashmir	6.9	22.7
Himachal Pradesh	3.6	18.6
Punjab	9.0	26.4
Uttarakhand	5.9	36.3
Haryana	10.1	23.3
Rajasthan	1.5	8.6
Uttar Pradesh	5.8	14.8
Bihar	48.2	60.5
Jharkhand	23.8	42.1
West Bengal	72.7	79.4
Odisha	48.6	61.2
Maharashtra	5.5	23.7
Gujarat	11.3	46.3
Madhya Pradesh	5.8	11.9
Chhattisgarh	1.2	2.4
Andhra Pradesh	16.2	29.0
Karnataka	6.7	27.0
Kerala	32.2	31.6
Tamil Nadu	16.3	24.4
Arunachal Pradesh	10.0	21.9
Assam	15.2	31.5
Manipur	12.5	51.3
Meghalaya	10.9	23.3
Mizoram	0.9	17.2
Tripura	73.9	45.5
Nagaland	13.0	39.0

Source: ASER (2011).

TABLE 5.5 Percentage of Children in Government Schools taking Tuition, 2011

States	Classes		
	Class III	Class V	Class VII
Bihar	42	51	59
Odisha	44	46	52
West Bengal	67	77	82

Source: ASER (2011).

children who avail of tuitions. Second, even though all-India numbers show little difference in this regard between private and government schools (Table 5.3), in many states, even as early as in Class IV, private school children are more likely to take tuition classes (Table 5.4). Third, in the high tuition-low private school states in eastern India (Odisha, West Bengal and Bihar), the percentage of students who take tuition classes is high even in primary classes and rises as children get older and move to higher classes.

### Case Study of a Village from West Bengal

To understand the phenomenon of tuition in a high incidence state, a case study was done in a village in Mohammad Bazar block, Birbhum district, West Bengal. The village has approximately 350 households living in four separate habitations (*paras*). The government primary school here has 135 children enrolled in Classes I to IV. A quick survey of the village revealed that there were five tutors who taught primary school children, and an additional two volunteers working with children in Classes III and IV who were lagging behind.<sup>5</sup> Table 5.6 gives details about tuition in the village.

Table 5.6 shows that 51 children get tuition from paid tutors. Besides, an additional 40 children are taught by Pratham volunteers (who are unpaid). So, of the 135 children enrolled in school close to 100 are also getting supplemental help outside school. According to the villagers, the monthly payment for tuition for primary classes ranges from ₹30–50.

This village also has two tutors who teach at the post-primary level and are very well known in the area. The tutors draw children from a catchment area of five–six surrounding villages. Table 5.7 shows that fees are higher for higher classes.

TABLE 5.6 Tuition for Primary School Children in a Village in West Bengal

Tutor	Location of Tuition Class in the Village	Age of Tutor	Educational Qualifications of Tutor	Class of Children	Class-wise fees (₹ per month)	Number of Children Enrolled	Number of Years the Tutor has been giving Tuition
Tutor 1	Sarkarpara	20	High Secondary	I	30	2	1 year
				II	30	2	
				III	30	4	
				IV	40	4	
Tutor 2	Dangalpara	22	Secondary	I	30	4	4 years
				II	30	3	
				III	30	3	
				IV	30	3	
Tutor 3	Dangalpara	17	Secondary	I	40	1	2 month
				II	40	1	
				III	40	1	
				IV	0	0	
Tutor 4	Dangalpara	17	Secondary	I	30	5	2 years
				II	30	4	
				III	30	2	
				IV	50	7	
Tutor 5	Moral Para	37	Secondary	I	50	2	10 years
				II	50	1	
				IV	50	2	
Total Students with Tutors						51	

Source: Data collected by Pratham, West Bengal team, March 2012.

TABLE 5.7 Details of Tutors who Teach at Post-Primary Level

Name of Tutor	Age	Qualification	Subjects Taught	Class of Students	Monthly Fees (in ₹)	Number of Children Enrolled	Experience as Tutor	Catchment Area						
Tutor 1	52	Bachelors in Commerce	All	V	50	10	28 years	From Six Neighbouring Villages + own Village						
				VI	50	15								
				VII	60	20								
				VIII	60	30								
				IX	75	40								
				X	100	50								
				XI	100	25								
				XII	100	30								
				Total Students						220				
				Tutor 2	40	Bachelors in Electrical Engineering			All	V	50	20	12 years	From Seven Neighbouring Villages + own Village
										VI	50	20		
										VII	50	20		
VIII	50	20												
IX	100	25												
X	100	15												
XI	100	15												
XII	100	35												
B.A	150	10												
Total Students								180						

Source: Data collected by Pratham, West Bengal team, March 2012.

Each of these surveyed tutors makes well above ₹14,000 per month as income from tuition. This case study provides evidence for the fact that there is a substantial teaching activity in a village outside the school or the formal education system. Even this medium-sized village and its surrounding areas can support a significant ‘market’ for additional teaching. The case study illustrates that by ignoring this large and active unorganised sector in education, any discussion of school provision and educational inputs is incomplete. For trying to understand the educational landscape in India, the incidence and the ‘value added’ of these supplemental inputs need to be understood properly.

## THE EVIDENCE: PULLING TOGETHER ALL PRIVATE INPUTS INTO SCHOOLING

Much of the debate on provision of schooling revolves around private and government schools, but putting the private schooling, tuition data and the trends together we see that the educational landscape in the primary and upper primary stages is much more diverse. There are at least four scenarios that are possible for children in the 6–14 age group who are enrolled in school as indicated in Table 5.8.

TABLE 5.8 Percentage of Children (6–14 age group) and the Type of School

Type of School and Tuition	Percentage
Government school + No Tuition	54.8
Government School + Tuition	17.6
Private School + No Tuition	21.4
Private School + Tuition	6.3
Total (ASER Rural)	100.0

Source: ASER (2011).

The ASER 2011 data suggests that close to half of all school-going children in rural India get some form of paid private input or supplement in their ‘education portfolio’; this spans across children who are attending both private and government formal schools.<sup>6</sup> ASER data allows us to look back over the last half a dozen years in a consistent manner. However, lack of annual national data for previous years means that one does not know if the incidence of tuition has increased, decreased or stayed the same over time.

In India, in other sectors such as manufacturing or services, the importance and extensive spread of the unorganised sector is well documented. It is clear from the evidence presented here that there is immense activity in the ‘unorganised’ sector in education. This phenomenon needs to be better documented, researched and analysed. Some questions also need to be answered: where, how and

why is formal schooling supplemented with inputs from the unorganised sector? What are its impact and implications?

## THE EVIDENCE: BASIC LEARNING LEVELS OF CHILDREN

Implications and impact of school provision and other inputs on educational outcomes can be explored in many ways. For the purposes of this paper, only one kind of educational outcome will be examined — children’s learning outcomes in basic reading and arithmetic.

With well over 95 per cent of 6–14-year-olds enrolled in school, India is very close to universal enrolment. But, what about children’s learning? The evidence shows that children are enrolled in schools, but are they actually learning? Are they learning well? Children learn in school. Children learn at home. Children learn from variety of other sources. As India’s elementary school enrolment increases, the focus needs to move to thinking about the ‘value added’ for each year spent in school. The underlying assumption is that this ‘value’ accumulates over time; years of schooling are a proxy for this.

What is the evidence? The last six years’ data from ASER indicates that by Class V close to 50 per cent of all enrolled children are not yet able to read Class II-level text fluently. The arithmetic findings are even less satisfactory. Further, although India seems to have been in a ‘big stuck’ as far as basic learning is concerned, the ASER 2011 data suggests a possible additional decline. Using ASER data from the past, Lant Pritchett and Amanda Beatty (2012) go further to show that not only are learning levels low, the ‘value added’ for each subsequent year in school is very small.<sup>7</sup>

In this context, the debate on private and public schooling becomes louder. First, in some quarters, there is widespread perception that government schools do not function well or deliver quality education. Therefore parents are turning to private options. Second, it is also possible that rising private enrolment and supplementation may also be correlated with rising aspirations, better information about schools and their characteristics and rising incomes. These ‘demand’-side considerations have been discussed in several recent research papers, for example Karthik Muralidharan and Michael Kremer (2006), recent work in India by S. Pal (2010), and Amita Chudgar (2012); Tahir Andrabi, Jishnu Das and Asim Ijaz Khwaja (2008) point to factors on the ‘supply’ side in Pakistan.<sup>8</sup>

ASER data from 2006 onwards provides annual measurement of basic reading and arithmetic outcomes. Table 5.9 presents basic reading level (ability to read Class II-level text fluently) of Class V children across states by school type and tuition.

TABLE 5.9 Class V Children who can Read Class II-Level Text (in per cent)

ASER 2010	READING LEVELS									
	Private School					Government School				
	Private School Enrollment + Tuition 2010	Private School Enrollment + No Tuition 2010	Government School Enrollment + Tuition 2010	Government School Enrollment + No Tuition 2010	All Children Enrolled in Class V (Government + Private) 2010	Private School Children in Class V Enrolled in Private Schools 2010	Government School Children Attending Tuitions in Class V 2010	Private School Children Attending Tuitions in Class V 2010		
Himachal Pradesh	81.8	81.7	72.0	76.0	77.4	23.5	8.5	22.4		
Punjab	74.9	73.7	78.3	68.1	69.7	33.6	10.5	31.0		
Uttarakhand	79.9	70.1	66.4	64.1	65.8	23.8	7.5	26.1		
Haryana	75.2	79.1	55.6	59.7	67.5	39.1	12.8	25.0		
Rajasthan	76.3	64.5	62.1	43.4	51.1	33.4	4.6	12.9		
Madhya Pradesh	76.9	62.2	68.7	54.4	NA	14.1	NA	NA		
Chhattisgarh	81.8	68.9	67.8	60.9	61.6	7.8	1.9	9.4		
Uttar Pradesh	73.4	55.1	56.9	34.3	44.1	36.1	7.6	16.8		
Bihar	71.8	66.3	62.7	54.7	58.3	4.0	55.5	63.7		
Jharkhand	68.2	61.0	57.0	46.2	49.7	7.0	30.2	45.3		
Odisha	61.3	63.9	58.2	37.3	46.0	3.5	49.9	78.3		
West Bengal	42.5	68.6	59.5	39.1	53.9	2.5	75.6	65.4		
Assam	76.3	49.2	55.5	41.0	45.4	17.6	17.8	28.7		
Maharashtra	82.2	76.2	74.1	70.8	73.1	33.1	8.0	12.9		
Gujarat	66.6	63.1	65.3	41.3	45.5	9.9	9.5	40.8		
Andhra Pradesh	64.1	67.0	67.0	55.9	60.3	34.4	12.6	26.4		
Karnataka	45.4	55.4	49.4	42.4	45.0	18.1	6.9	22.6		
Kerala	81.6	75.9	79.3	71.9	76.1	54.7	44.3	44.1		
Tamil Nadu	44.9	25.5	34.9	32.3	30.6	23.1	19.8	30.3		
All India (Rural)	71.0	62.3	60.7	48.2	53.4	22.1	26.9	23.9		

Source: ASER (2010).

Note: NA = Not Applicable.

At first glance private schools, even in rural areas, seem to be producing children who do somewhat better in school (at least in terms of basic reading ability). However, as soon as the data is disaggregated by school type and tuition, the picture is no longer as clear.<sup>9</sup> Several important implications emerge from the ASER 2010 data (summarised in Table 5.9).<sup>10</sup> Here, the ability of Class V children to read Class II-level matter is taken as a learning indicator (similar arguments can be made for arithmetic as well from ASER data).

This section discusses the implications. First, the data raises questions. Is the self-selection of ‘advantaged’ children into private schools further reinforced by additional supplemental inputs such as tuition?<sup>11</sup> If it is ‘dissatisfaction’ with government schools that led parents to send their children to private schools, then why is it that parents of children going to private schools send their children to tuition as well. Is this trend fuelled by high aspirations or low faith in schools?

Second, even in the best performing states, such as Himachal Pradesh, Kerala or Maharashtra, among those who are going to private schools and for tuition classes, there are about 20 per cent children who are in Class V but unable to read a Class II-level text fluently.<sup>12</sup> Whether looking at their households or their schools, this is the strongest evidence for the biggest challenge faced by elementary education in India today. Despite the flagship programmes for universalising education, regardless of the RTE Law which emphasises ‘age-grade mainstreaming’, despite parental expenditures on education in private schools and for supplemental help, as a country India is unable to ensure that about half of all children who have spent five years in a school are able to read Class II-level text. This means that 50 per cent of all children are at least three class years behind.

Third, in terms of relative performance, children in private schools who take tuition seem significantly ahead of those going to government schools and taking no tuition; the difference in reading levels between private school children without tuition and government school children with tuition is narrow. In fact, in Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Assam, Gujarat, Kerala, and Tamil Nadu, more children in government schools who take tuitions are reading well as compared to their counterparts in private schools who do not get supplemental coaching.

Fourth, there are significant differences across states in the ability of government schools to impart basic learning. Taking the example of two contiguous states, Table 5.10 provides some cases for discussion.

In Case 1, if language or distance were not an issue, parents in Gujarat who are sending their children to private schools and for tuitions would be better off if their children attended government schools in the neighbouring district in Maharashtra. In Case 2, it is seen that the reading levels of Class V children in government schools in Bihar are very similar to that of Class V children in private schools in Uttar Pradesh. In fact the performance of children in Bihar, who are enrolled in government schools but also take tuitions, is the best among these three categories.

Several researchers have explored these issues; deeper analysis indicates that controlling for other factors the private school advantage in terms of children’s learning may not be as sharp as the raw numbers indicate. For example, Shobhini Mukerji and Wilima Wadhwa (2011) use the nationally representative ASER 2009 dataset and find that while private schools seem to have a significant advantage in learning outcomes, a lot of this advantage gets vitiated once other factors are controlled for. They state that the ‘wide variations in learning across states indicate there is more beyond the type of village, type of school or type of family that determines the educational destiny of the child’. Other works by Wilima Wadhwa (2009) and Chudgar (2012) point to similar results.

### *So Where Do We Go From Here? What ‘Works’?*

The available evidence discussed earlier suggests three main points: First, the data shows that while there are variations over time and across classes, a trend has been seen in many states towards increasing private school enrolment. Second, there is strong evidence of the incidence of supplemental help in children’s education across many states and among private school children. Third, supplemental help does matter in terms of learning outcomes; those who get it are more likely to have higher basic learning levels.

In India, we are at a unique point in history. Due to rising demand from parents and rapid provisions by governments, children are now in schools. But more than 50 per cent of

TABLE 5.10 Reading Levels of Class V Children in Different States

<i>Comparisons and Choices</i>	<i>State</i>	<i>Schooling and Tuition Inputs</i>	<i>Percentage of Children in Class V able to Read Class II-Level Text</i>
Case 1	Maharashtra	Government School + No Tuition	70.8
	Gujarat	Private School + Tuition	66.5
Case 2	Uttar Pradesh	Private School + No Tuition	55.2
	Bihar	Government School + No Tuition	54.7
	Bihar	Government School + Tuition	62.7

Source: ASER (2010).

the children who are in schools in India come from families where parents have no schooling. This is more so for children who go to government schools rather than private ones. So, families cannot identify or support their children who are not learning. Indian schools focus on completing curriculum rather than on delivering learning. As a result, many children never get a good foundation of basic learning in the early years of school. They learn but much later than they actually should, with very little chance of ever catching up. With no one to identify, children who are not moving forward and are falling behind, with no learning support at home or in school, a large fraction of Indian children fall through the cracks. Parents have high aspirations for children. Those who can afford it spend money on more inputs, such as tuitions and private schools. Like parents, the government is also input-focused; more expenditures on more schools, teachers, training, textbooks, and so on. The ultimate result is that large numbers of children continue to be ‘stuck’ in a low-learning situation with not much value being added in terms of learning as they move through the primary classes.

Apart from ASER and other evidence on basic learning outcomes in India, the last five years have seen accumulation of considerably well done research and impact evaluation studies on ‘what works’ in elementary education in India, especially for improving children’s basic levels in reading and arithmetic (in particular, see Banerjee and Duflo 2011; Muralidharan et al. 2012; Pritchett and Beatty 2012). Some of this research has been synthesised and discussed in another chapter in this volume (see Chapter 11); so is not be discussed in detail here. However, some key elements from this body of literature have been pulled out to help in interpreting the evidence presented here, in understanding why children’s learning levels are low and suggesting what can be done about it.

Two interconnected and clear messages emerge from the recent body of empirical research. The first is that countries such as India suffer from an ‘overambitious curriculum’ (Pritchett and Beatty 2012). In India, as in many other countries, schools are organised by classes and in turn classes are mainly anchored by age. So a typical 8-year-old in India is supposed to be in Class III or IV depending on when he/she entered school in Class I. Each year the textbook content grows in difficulty often in a linear fashion and assumes that children who have entered, say, in Class III have mastered the content and skills expected of them in Class II. So the teacher in Class III proceeds to use the Class-III textbook and teach from there. The reality is that the textbook content is far above the level of most children at that class level and as the curriculum becomes more difficult, more and more children get left behind.

The ASER data from 2005–11 has been able to pinpoint this phenomenon very clearly in empirical terms. For

example, Table 5.11 shows Class IV reading data at the all-India (rural) level from ASER 2011.

TABLE 5.11 All-India (Rural): Reading Level of Children in Different Classes (in per cent)

Class	Nothing	Letter	Word	Level 1 (Class I Text)	Level 2 (Class II Text)	Total
I	38.4	39.4	15.3	3.9	3.0	100
II	16.6	34.6	28.3	11.8	8.7	100
III	8.5	22.9	28.4	21.5	18.8	100
IV	4.7	14.4	21.2	25.7	34.2	100
V	3.5	9.7	14.6	24.1	48.2	100

**How to read this table:** Each cell shows the highest level of reading achieved by a child. For example, in Class III, 8.5 per cent children cannot even read letters, 22.9 per cent can read letters but not more, 28.4 per cent can read words but not Class-I texts or higher, 21.5 per cent can read Class-I texts but not Class-II level texts, and 18.8 per cent can read Class-II level texts. In sum, for each class, the total of all these exclusive categories is 100 per cent.

**Source:** ASER (2011).

Table 5.11 lays out the following reality: in Class IV, 34 per cent children can read at Class II level (some of these children may be able to read at higher levels too, but ASER administers a ‘floor’ test and it is not possible to assess whether these children are at Class IV level). 25.7 per cent children can read Class I-level text but not higher. The remaining fraction of children — almost 40 per cent — cannot read even a sentence. However, the Class IV language textbook in any state in India has difficult and long content, which according to the ASER results would be well beyond the reach of a large majority of all children.

Once this problem becomes visible and is accepted, solutions can be designed. For example, an impact evaluation study by Abdul Jamil Poverty Action Lab (JPAL), in a programme run jointly by Pratham and Bihar government, finds that the gains in learning during the school year were very minimal (see Banerjee and Duflo 2011). But, when the same teachers taught in a special summer camp, the learning gains for the targeted children were significant (see *ibid.*: 94). The summer camp organised under the programme was designed for children in Classes III–V who were not yet at Class II level of reading and arithmetic (the special one-month summer programme was launched by the Bihar government in 2008). The teaching–learning package (developed by Pratham) focused on teaching children at the level they were, enabling them to become fluent readers and become proficient in basic number knowledge and operations. This suggests that when children are grouped by levels rather than by classes and taught accordingly, their learning improves.<sup>13</sup> This is a major and serious recommendation that has been generated by recent experience and evidence.

The second message from recent research has to do with the role of supplemental help. Since 2000, Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT)'s Poverty Action Lab has been evaluating different aspects of Pratham's work using randomised control trials (See Banerjee et al. 2007, 2010; Banerjee and Duflo 2011). In over 10 years, and across several impact evaluations of Pratham's work in different parts of India, the one significant influence on children's learning that comes across as strong and consistent is the role of village volunteers.

Having figured out which children need extra help, Pratham provides a set of straightforward solutions that have been implemented on scale in India. The organisation recognises that children learn not only in schools but also outside the schools. And both in school and at home or in the community, children who need extra help need to be given time. As described earlier, teachers need to be oriented to work with these children and schools are required to be organised differently to make this happen. Pratham via its Read India Programme has participated in many large-scale partnerships with state governments to jointly implement learning programmes. In addition, it is very important that in the community people need to be catalysed to give children the extra help that they need. In the peak period of the Read India Programme, village volunteers (who were

not paid) worked with children in half of all villages in India. Simple and effective methods of teaching were used to accelerate learning. Affordable and appropriate materials were given to children. Simple measurement was used to track children's progress. This basic package of methods, materials and measurement forms the core of Pratham's Read India Programme.<sup>14</sup> New and innovative strategies both in teaching-learning methods and materials and in organising people have to be devised on scale. 'More of the same' will not lead to sustained results. In addition to energising schools, engagement of communities on scale is needed to change the learning status of India's children.

Thus, in thinking ahead, to help children 'catch up' and bridge the 'learning gap' the focus needs to be on the two real challenges of improving educational outcomes. One, the challenge is not to continue to debate how schooling is provided, instead it is to think of how schools, whether private or government, can be organised differently so that children can be taught from the level where they are today and enabled to reach where they need to be. Two, instead of focusing only on the school as the location of learning, one should think about integrating and maximising the impact of additional supplemental help that children need and get.

## NOTES

- ASER is a household survey usually conducted in October and November every year, which is the middle of a school year in most states of India. The sample size ranges from 500,000–700,000 children in the 3–16 age group. Every child, who is 5 years old or above, is asked to answer a set of simple questions about his or her enrolment status and the type of school they go to; each child is also given basic reading and arithmetic tasks that are carried out on a one-on-one basis. ASER provides a unique opportunity to look back over the last seven years and track the trends in schooling and learning in India. Since 2006, each year ASER has surveyed a representative sample of children (age 3–16) from every rural district in the country.
- Other sources of data also document the rapid increase of private schooling in India. For example, the India Human Development Survey (IHDS) published in 2010 collected data from a nationally representative sample of almost 42,000 rural and urban households in 2004–5. The report states that 'one of the most striking things about the educational panorama in the last decade has been explosion of the private sector in the educational field' (Desai et al. 2010: 82). The report notes that the Fifth All India Education Survey had recorded a 'bare 2 [per cent] attendance in private schools in 1986' (ibid.). The IHDS data shows that 21 per cent of rural and 51 per cent of urban children are enrolled in private schools. A previous round of the same IHDS survey conducted in 1994 had found only 10 per cent children from rural households enrolled in private schools.
- Government of India's District Information System for Education (DISE) data provides numbers of aided and unaided schools in each state.  
IHDS 2004–5 attempted to collect more refined information from households for type of school than has been attempted in ASER. See Table 6.1 (Desai et al. 2010: 82). According to this data, 72 per cent children are enrolled in government schools and 28 per cent in private schools. Broken down further, for the age group 6–14, 67 per cent children go to government schools, 5 per cent to government-aided schools, 24 per cent to privately managed schools, 5 per cent to *madrassas*, convents or other types of schools.
- Data on 'tuition' was collected for the first time in ASER (2007). The data suggests that for Classes I–VIII, 20 per cent of government school children and 24 per cent of private school children in rural India took 'tuition'.  
IHDS 2004–5 finds that across their rural and urban sample, 20 per cent of children in the 6–14 age group received some form of private tutoring in the year before the survey (Desai et al. 2010: 82).  
Rohini Somanathan and Michael Walton (2012) are working on this issue as well. They presented a paper at the India Growth Centre (IGC) conference in Bihar in early 2012.
- This village is covered under Pratham's Read India Programme in which youth volunteers work in each village with children who are lagging behind academically. These volunteers do not

get any financial remuneration for their time. However, an integral part of the programme is a component called Education for Education — anyone who gives time for children in the village will be eligible for a learning opportunity. In the case of Pratham's work in West Bengal, youth volunteers get a course in basic digital literacy and spoken English.

6. IHDS 2004–5 finds that in their sample of 6–14-year-olds (rural and urban) about 40 per cent participated in private sector education, either through enrolment in private school, through private tuition or both (Desai et al. 2010).
7. The term 'big stuck' has been coined by Lant Pritchett. His position regarding shallow learning curves has been laid out in Pritchett and Beatty (2012) and also in ASER 2011 national report.
8. The supply-side factors influencing the emergence of the private school option in rural areas include the availability of educated young women in labour force in the local area, government infrastructure, road connectivity, etc. Chudgar (2012) uses ASER 2009 data and looks at a variety of village-level correlates to construct a broader landscape in which the private and government school differences in learning outcomes can be studied.
9. Table 5.3 summarises the national situation. The data in the table refers to the percentage of children getting tuition within each category — government school children and private school children. The national aggregate table hides state-level variations. Table 5.4 gives variations by state and uses a class (Class IV) as an example. Here too the data refers to percentages within each category of children (government and private). Table 5.8 also summarises the national situation but in a different way to that in other tables. Here the denominator is all children and therefore government school children dominate.
10. ASER 2010 data has been used here rather than 2011, mainly because the trends for the past few years held steady around this

year. Up until 2010, the learning profiles in most states, although low and shallow, were quite unchanging over time. The ASER 2011 data shows a downward trend in learning levels across many states especially in government schools. The reasons for this learning loss is yet to be understood; This visible 'learning loss' and its reasons have to be understood better — is it a one year drop or the beginning of a secular decline? Only data from ASER 2012 will be able to provide clues. So, for now, Table 5.9 uses ASER 2010 data to lay out the differences between the kinds of schools and tuition patterns.

11. Here 'advantaged' refers to a combination of household education, income and aspirations. In addition, given that private schools can be selective for admission, the self selection into private schools may have an ability bias as well.
12. In ASER, the most difficult reading task that a child is asked to do is read a paragraph Class II-level of difficulty. So, when it is stated that 50 per cent of Class V children in a state are reading at Class II level, one is not sure what proportion of these children are reading at Class V level.
13. In this context, does something happen in private schools that is different from government schools? There is very little data investigating such issues for private schools but we can conjecture that apart from the issue of self-selection and parental advantage that private school children have, it is possible that class repetition is more likely in private schools as is the possibility that children who are not performing well academically are not encouraged to continue in the school.
14. Currently Pratham's Read India Programme is active in 250 districts across India in blocks of 100 villages each. It is estimated that approximately 40,000 village volunteers work with close to a million children on a daily basis.

## REFERENCES

- Andrabi, Tahir, Jishnu Das and Asim Ijaz Khwaja. 2008. 'A Dime a Day: The Possibilities and Limits of Private Schooling in Pakistan'. *Comparative Education Review*, 52(3): 329–55.
- Annual Status of Education Report (ASER). 2005–11. *Annual Status of Education Report*. New Delhi: ASER Centre/Pratham. <http://www.asercentre.org> (accessed 18 October 2012)
- Banerjee, Abhijit and Esther Duflo. 2011. *Poor Economics*. New York: Public Affairs.
- Banerjee, Abhijit, Shawn Cole, Esther Duflo, and Leigh Linden. 2007. 'Remedying Education: Evidence from Two Randomized Experiments in India', *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 122(3): 1235–64.
- Banerjee, Abhijit, Rukmini Banerji, Esther Duflo, Rachel Glennerster, and Stuti Khemani. 2010. 'Pitfalls of Participatory Progress: Evidence from a Randomized Evaluation in Education in India', *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy*, February, 2(1): 1–30.
- Chavan, Madhav. 2011. 'The Unseen Change', in *Annual Status of Education Report 2011*. New Delhi: ASER Centre/Pratham.
- Chudgar, Amita. 2012. 'Variation in Private School Performance: The Importance of Village Context', *Economic and Political Weekly*. 12 March, XLVII(11): 52–59.
- Desai, Sonalde, Amaresh Dubey, Brij Lal Joshi, Mitali Sen, Abusaleh Shariff, and Reeve Vanneman. 2010. *Human Development in India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Mukerji, Shobhini and Wilima Wadhwa. 2011. 'Do Private Schools Perform better than Public Schools? Evidence from Rural India'. Working Paper, ASER Centre/Pratham, New Delhi.
- Muralidharan, Karthik. 2012. 'Priorities for Primary Education Policy in India's 12th Five Year Plan'. Paper presented at the 'India Policy Forum', National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER)-Brookings Institution, 17–18 July, New Delhi.
- Muralidharan, Karthik and Michael Kremer. 2006. 'Public and Private Schools in Rural India'. Working Paper, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, MA.
- Pal, S. 2010. 'Public Infrastructure, Location of Private Schools and Primary School Attainment in an Emerging Economy', *Economics of Education Review*, 29(3): 783–94.
- Pritchett, Lant and Amanda Beatty. 2012. 'The Negative Consequences of Overambitious Curricula in Developing Countries'. Working Paper, Harvard Kennedy School of Government.
- Somanathan, Rohini and Michael Walton. 2012. Presentation in IGC Conference, Patna, Bihar.
- Wadhwa, Wilima. 2009. 'Private Schools: Do They Provide Higher Quality Education?', *Annual Status of Education Report*. New Delhi: Pratham Resource Centre and ASER Centre.