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Parents abandon free govt schools for costly non-govt options

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Many parents in Rajshahi division are increasingly turning away from free government primary schools and enrolling their children in fee-charging kindergartens and other non-government institutions.

It has led to a steady decline in enrolment in state-run schools despite population growth in the region, according to data obtained from the divisional deputy director of primary education.

The data shows that enrolment in government primary schools in the division fell from 13,20,975 students in 2014 to 11,83,992 in 2026, a decline of nearly 1,37,000 students over a decade.

The opposite has happened to the non-government primary schools, including kindergartens, where enrolment over the period increased from 4,36,966 to 5,04,030.

The trend has emerged even though the population of Rajshahi division increased by about 25 lakh over the decade, according to official statistics.

Educationists said that the figures reflected a growing shift in parental preference towards kindergarten schools and madrassahs, driven by perceptions of better educational quality, discipline, supervision and accountability.

The shift is visible across both urban and rural areas.

At Kastanagar Government Primary School under Bagmara upazila in Rajshahi, enrolment has fallen from around 100 students to about 60 after two kindergarten schools were established nearby, according to head teacher Afroza Khatun.

At Atkoshi Government Primary School in Rajshahi city, the number of students decreased from over 550 five years ago to about 350.

‘At least 10 kindergarten schools have been established within one kilometre of our school. Many students have shifted there,’ said head teacher Nilufa Akhter Khanom.

Interviews with more than two dozen government primary school head teachers across the division revealed similar experiences, with most attributing declining enrolment to the rapid expansion of kindergarten schools and growing enrolment in madrassahs.

At Kachua-2 Government Primary School, teacher Nikhil Ranjan Pramanik said that at least 17 students had left the school to enrol in nearby madrassahs.

Several guardians said that they had transferred their children because kindergarten schools offered closer supervision, regular examinations and stronger communication with parents.

‘The government school is free, but we are not satisfied with the quality of education there. Kindergarten teachers monitor the children more closely and regularly inform us about their progress,’ said Mustafizur Rahman, a guardian from Rajshahi city.

Asma Begum, who lives on her meagre income as a domestic worker, said that she enrolled her daughter in a kindergarten because she believed instructions in government primary schools lacked effectiveness.

Professor Akter Banu, director of the Institute of Education and Research at Rajshahi University, said that parents were increasingly shifting their children to kindergarten and other private institutions because they had greater confidence in those schools.

‘The shift is real. Even many government primary school teachers prefer to enrol their own children in private schools rather than the institutions where they teach. That reflects a confidence gap,’ she told New Age.

According to her, weak monitoring, declining teacher motivation and lack of accountability were among the factors affecting public confidence in government schools.

‘Private schools actively communicate with parents and try to keep them satisfied. In many government schools that level of engagement is missing. Unless teacher motivation, accountability and monitoring improve, parents will continue to look elsewhere,’ she said.

Former Rajshahi Education Board chairman Dipak Das said that the enrolment trend reflected changing parental preferences rather than demographic factors alone.

‘If the population continues to grow while private institutions are enrolling more students, the decline in government schools clearly suggests a shift in parental choice,’ he said.

AKM Anowar Hossain, Rajshahi district primary education officer, said that teacher shortages, parental preference for smaller class size and disruptions in classroom activities during and after the COVID-19 pandemic might have contributed to the decline.

‘We have a shortage of teachers compared with the number of students in many schools. At the same time, some parents prefer institutions where class-size is smaller and students receive closer supervision,’ he said.

He, however, said that the government was trying to restore public confidence through stronger monitoring and improved accountability.

Educationists warned that continued declines in enrolment could weaken the public primary education system, which remains the principal source of education for children from low-income families.

They said that unless confidence in government schools could be restored, the growing shift towards private institutions and madrassahs could deepen educational inequality and further reshape the primary education landscape in Rajshahi division.

Tags [#government primary school](#)



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