

CABINET APPROVES PM SHRI SCHEME

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Union Ministers Dharmendra Pradhan (left) and Anurag Thakur addressing media on Wednesday. **SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA**

The Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved the 'PM Schools for Rising India' (PM SHRI) scheme to turn existing government schools into model schools for implementation of the National Education Policy, 2022.

The scheme will be implemented as a Centrally sponsored scheme with a total project cost of Rs. 27,360 crore, with the Centre's share being Rs. 18,128 crore for the period of five years from 2022-23 to 2026-27 for transforming nearly 14,500 schools across the country.

However, schools will be selected only if the State government agrees to implement the NEP "in entirety with the Centre laying down commitments for supporting these schools for achieving specified quality parameters" to become PM SHRI schools, according to a press statement of the Ministry of Education. These schools will also be "monitored vigorously" to assess their progress in implementing NEP.

The scheme has been announced at a time when some States, including Tamil Nadu, continue to oppose the NEP for imposing a centralised education system on the entire country when education is a State subject as well as enforcing the three-language policy under which students will learn three languages out of which two have to be native to India. Other grounds for opposition include mandatory school entry at three years, which could leave out many from marginalised communities, promotion of vocational courses from Class 6 at the cost of formal education, as well as the option to exit schools in Class 10 with the option to re-enter in Class 11.

"A school will receive nearly Rs. 2 crore, and the money will be transferred directly to the school's account through Direct Benefit Transfer. The principal or the local committee will be given the flexibility to determine the use of 40% of the fund," Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan said at a press conference.

The PM SHRI scheme also provides a "School Quality Assessment Framework" which will be developed for measuring key performance indicators for carrying out quality evaluation of schools selected from the current academic year.

The quality parameters that will be evaluated once a school is selected for the scheme will include implementation of NEP 2020, student registry for tracking enrolment and learning progress, improvement in learning outcomes of each child to achieve levels above State and National average, linkage of school with higher education institutions and local entrepreneurial ecosystem for mentoring as well as creating "students rooted in the heritage of India, proud of values of Bharat, conscious of duties towards society and responsibilities towards nation-building".

Earlier, Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal wrote a letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the scheme and said there was a need to pay attention to all government schools, which he said were worse than "*kabaadkhana*" (scrapyard). "You have only prepared a scheme for 14,500 schools. There are more than 10 lakh government schools in the country," he wrote

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