

**REPORT
OF THE COMMITTEE
ON
PRE-PRIMARY AND PRE SCHOOL EDUCATION
IN DELHI**

**(IN COMPLIANCE WITH THE ORDER OF THE HON'BLE HIGH
COURT OF DELHI CM NO.2293/2007 IN W.P.(C) 12490/2006)**

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Chapter – I

Introduction

- 1.1 Early Childhood Care and Education has globally been recognized as critical for human resource development. The first 8 years of a child's life are the most crucial years because during this period of early childhood the pace of development is extremely rapid, determining the cognitive and physical growth and laying the foundation for shaping the social and personal habits and values. There is a growing body of research evidence to prove that the synoptic connections in the brain that are critical for the full development of the brain's potential take place during the early phase of childhood.
- 1.2 Early Childhood Development includes two main aspects, i.e., care and education. Care is a comprehensive term that includes proper nutrition, medical attention particularly in regard to immunization, security and safety and emotional support. The 'education' component includes pre-school education programmes aimed at 3-6 year olds and extends to Class I and II to cover children upto the age of 8 under the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE). However it is to be clearly understood that ECCE is an integrated programme that takes into account the synergistic and interdependent relationship between health, nutrition, intellectual, social and emotional development and education, addressing the imperative of holistic and all round development of the child.

Thus it can be seen that any discussion on pre-primary education can not exclude other aspects of early childhood development. On the contrary an examination of issues relating to pre-primary education should necessarily focus on the developmental paradigm so that the cognitive, affective and psychomotor issues are comprehensively addressed in the context of education.

- 1.3 Changing socio-economic conditions have also thrown up new challenges. The changes in family structure brought about by transition from joint families to nuclear families coupled with the increasing propensity of both parents going to jobs have put greater pressure on Early Childhood Education especially in urban and semi-urban areas. As parents face the compulsion of keeping their children in 'safe custody' when they are out on work, they invariably turn to crèches, Kindergarten and Play Schools. Parents are taking their children out of the home environment much earlier than ever before. While sending children to 'creches' by parents who are both employed with no elders to take care of their children can not be faulted, the growing tendency on the part of overenthusiastic parents to initiate their children into 'education' much before the children are ready

- for it is a cause of great concern. So the first question that is to be answered is: What is the suitable age for a child to begin pre-schooling? The other important question is about what is going on in the name of pre-schooling in a majority of schools in Delhi.
- 1.4 The enormous demand for pre schooling facilities has led to a mushrooming of play-schools, nursery schools, Kindergarten, Preparatory Schools etc. indicative of a veritable boom in the 'Alphabet Industry'. A majority of 'big schools' (schools which have classes upto XII) run not only nursery and Kindergarten or preparatory classes before class I, some of these schools also have pre-nursery. Thus a child of 2-2½ years of age enters into a system which also has adolescents of 17-18 years of age. Parents' wish is to put their children early on into such a system so that they need not worry about their children's future schooling upto class XII. It defies all logic of 'child-centric' education. Instead the prevalent system has become either 'parent-centric' or 'school-centric'. It is seen that, barring a few exceptions, these schools are nothing more than mere downward extension of the formal and structured education at the level of Class I and above. The unrealistic expectations of parents for early stimulation of their children and the inappropriate learning environment offered by schools staffed by either untrained or unsuitably trained teachers have resulted in a confusing and often chaotic situation. To compound the matters further, pre-schooling by whatever name, does not come under any regulation.
- 1.5 Against this background the order passed by the Hon'ble High Court of Delhi in Writ Petition No. 12490/2006, dated 7th March, 2007 assumes great significance. An earlier order of the Hon'ble High Court of Delhi in LPA No. 196/2004 had constituted a committee of experts headed by Shri Ashok Ganguly, Chairman, CBSE to go into the entire gamut of issues relating to nursery admission in the private schools of Delhi and evolve appropriate criteria for admission of children to nursery class. The order of the court enumerated three basic principles for evolving a common admission procedure: transparency, elimination of interview and minimizing the discretion of management/principal. Accordingly the committee, after wide consultations with different stakeholders and long deliberations, formulated a 100 point scale with different criteria and a uniform admission procedure. The report with recommendations was submitted to the Hon'ble High Court in the month of October, 2006. The court directed the private schools of Delhi to implement the recommendations for admission of children to nursery for the academic year beginning from 1st April, 2007. Ever since the implementation of the recommendations, the committee has come to be identified as Ganguly Committee.
- 1.6 Subsequently, in disposing of an application vide Writ Petition (C) No. 12490/2006 on the subject of the minimum age for admission to pre-primary school and related issues, the Hon'ble High Court of Delhi requested Ganguly Committee 'to try and find out a viable and all

comprehensive policy for pre-primary education in Delhi so that admission to the pre-primary education class/classes as the case may be is made homogeneous and uniform.'

The main issues figuring in the court's directive are as follows:

1. What should be the minimum age for a child to be eligible for admission to pre-primary class at the entry level?
2. What should be the cut off date for determining the age of a child for the purpose of admission to pre-primary class keeping Section 16 of Delhi School Education Act in view?
3. What should be the duration of pre-primary class?

The court has also delineated certain procedures to be adopted by Ganguly Committee for arriving at its recommendations. These are as follows:

1. The Committee should take the opinion and expert views of two child psychologists of repute, a professor of the Department of Pediatrics, AIIMS and, if possible, Prof. Yashpal.
2. The Committee should consider the views of the members of the Delhi School Education Advisory Board constituted under section 22 of the Delhi Education Act.
3. The Committee should consult a cross section of parents including parents whose children have been given admission at the age of 3+ pursuant of the Court's order dated 8th December, 2006.
4. The Committee should consider the criteria for admission to pre-primary and primary classes in other states of India and also the yardstick adopted internationally.

Other stipulations that the court has made are as follows:

1. The standard and the yardstick for pre-primary and primary education should be consistent and unvarying, whether it is for Government, Government-aided or Private Schools all over the State of Delhi.
2. The Committee would submit its recommendations on or before the 31st of March, 2007 so that the recommendations can be made applicable for the academic year starting from 1st April, 2007.
3. However, in case, for some reason, it is not possible to give its recommendations on or before 31st March, 2007, the Committee shall give some interim recommendations which can be made applicable for the ensuing academic year starting from 1st April, 2007.

Chapter – II

Present Position and Some Policy Perspectives

- 2.01 In recent years the significance of pre-primary education is being increasingly realized. The early years are seen as important in their own right as well as being a Foundation for Life Outcomes. There is no denying the fact that primary education outcomes cannot be improved despite high investments unless the early childhood education that ensures preparedness is also improved. It has been found that children who have undergone pre-primary education show better progress at the primary stage and thus it helps in reducing wastage and stagnation.
- 2.02 However there is wide variation and divergence in the present pre-primary education particularly in Delhi. Firstly, all the full-fledged secondary/senior secondary schools do not offer uniform pre-primary education. While a majority of private schools in Delhi have pre-primary facility, only a few government schools have it. Secondly, the duration of this stage of education varies from school to school. In government schools where this facility exists, pre-primary class is of only one year duration prior to class I, whereas in many of the private schools pre-primary consists of two or even three years variously known as LKG, UKG, Pre-nursery, Nursery, Preparatory and so on. Sometimes 'Creche' facility is also provided by big schools.
- 2.03 Another compounding factor is that apart from full-fledged schools that have classes upto X or XII offering pre-primary education, there are a number of smaller institutions that generally go by the name of 'Play Schools' which are exclusively for pre-schooling which may be for 2-3 years depending on whether the school has 'creche' facility along with LKG and UKG classes. In effect it is possible for parents to send their 2-2½ year children to a pre-school in Delhi and other big cities of our country.
- 2.04 The next important issue about the present situation is related to what actually goes on in such pre-schools. While there may be a few quality schools offering a healthy developmental environment for the children of pre-primary stage, a majority of schools treat this critical period of early childhood with very little understanding and sensitivity. The increased focus on childhood learning in the early years has resulted in some schools and parents perceiving that young children need an academic, teacher-directed curriculum. The infrastructure including suitable and safe transport, timing, trained and adequate number of teachers and child-centred, activity-oriented and non-structured informal learning ambience should be integral and non-negotiable features of pre schooling. But the situation obtained in Delhi is a cause of much concern because, even where the infrastructure is adequate, the excessive emphasis on formal learning has reduced these schools into mere downward extension of the formal education that begins from class I. In some cases the preparatory

school literally lives upto to its name by being training centres of students for admission to class I in bigger and more renowned schools. Thus the present position presents a disturbing scenario with most schools (big full-fledged schools as well as exclusive play schools) providing structured and regimented curriculum transaction with all the attended paraphernalia including homework and examination. Premature initiation of children into literacy and numeracy characterizes the present pre-primary education.

2.05 Another cause of grave concern is the widely varying standards of quality in pre-schooling. Since pre-primary education does not come under the ambit of any Education Act, there is little or no regulation of these classes. Schools that are exclusive play schools also do not need any recognition from a government agency. So when such institutions are driven mainly by commercial interests, the children who go to these schools suffer. Presently there is a lot of variation in the quality standards among these schools. It is not only these institutions but also a majority of parents who are to blame for the present state of affairs. Many parents feel that their children should get a head start in the rat race of academic success and expect the pre-primary class to make their children adept in reading, writing and arithmetic. There are also parents who send their 3 year old children for private tuition after their 'regular' school hours!

2.06 The burden of a loaded curriculum and formal learning on the tender children is very unhealthy and it robs the children of the joy of childhood. Today a nursery school child can read and write which should be treated as an anomaly. Bad nursery education is much worse than no nursery education.

As regards the age as a criterion for pre-primary/pre-school education there are no clear-cut guidelines or regulation at present. The age at this stage is generally adjusted against the norm of minimum age prescribed for admission to class I.

2.07 As mentioned earlier in this report in Delhi, pre-primary education is of one year duration in some Government schools and a few Kendriya Vidyalayas wherever the provision exists and the situation in private schools of Delhi presents much divergence. Of the 910 government schools and 225 government aided schools in Delhi pre-primary class is available in 39 schools. The situation in the schools run by the Municipal Corporation of Delhi is almost similar. MCD is running primary schools only. The number of such schools is 1818. Of these schools pre-primary class is available in 919 schools that include 33 independent nursery schools. Pre-primary education is uniformly of one year duration in these schools. The minimum age for a child to get admission in Pre-primary class is 4+. The child should have attained the age of 4+ at the time of admission in Pre-primary while the child should be 5+ for admission in class I. The last date for admission in Pre-primary class is 31st August of the year of admission.

2.08 The other agency that runs schools in Delhi is the New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC). Presently there are 26 Primary, 11 Middle, 07 Secondary and 05 Senior Secondary Schools in Delhi under NDMC. Besides these institutions NDMC is also running one Navyug Secondary and 05 Navyug Senior Secondary Schools. Including 03 aided schools, the total number of schools under NDMC Administration is 81. NDMC offers pre-primary education in 34 of its schools of which 18 are exclusive pre-primary schools. The duration of pre-primary class in these schools is one year and the minimum age for admission to this class is 4+ which is calculated as on 30th September of the year of admission in NDMC schools and on 30th April in Navyug Schools.

Most of the private schools have two years and a few have only one year of pre-primary classes. In some schools where crèche facility is offered pre-primary is of three years of duration.

2.09 As for the minimum age for admission to class I in the schools of Delhi, the Delhi School Education Act & Rules – 1973 states, as per Section 16: 'A child who has not attained the age of five years shall not be admitted to class I, or an equivalent class or any class higher than class I, in a recognized school'. The Delhi Directorate of Education issued a Circular No. 1062-2861 dated 09.04.1997 which stated that "A child who has not attained the age of 5 years as on 30.09.1997 shall not be admitted to class I or any student seeking admission for the first time in a recognized school in a class higher than class I shall not be admitted to that class if his age, reduced by the number of years of normal school study between that class and class I or any equivalent class falls short of 5 years".

2.10 It further states: "A child who has not attained the age of 4 years as on 30.09.1997 shall not be admitted to pre-primary classes". The Hon'ble High Court, in its order dated 07th March, 2007 has held that extending the cut-off date for admission to class I from date of admission (which is the 1st of April of the academic session in which admission is sought) to 30th September of the academic session in which admission is sought would not be in consonance with the provisions of Section 16 of the Act. So, while there is some clarity as far as the minimum age for admission to class I is concerned (which is stated as 5 years) there is some confusion regarding the cut-off date based on which the age of a child should be determined for the purpose of admission to pre-primary class and to class I. The confusion lies in the sense that a child of 4½ years can get admission in class I because of the extension of cut-off date to 30th September of the academic session which goes against the spirit of the provision of Delhi School Education Act.

2.11 This criterion also varies from state to state within the country. As Education is a concurrent subject, every state government has jurisdiction over such issues with regard to education. For instance in West Bengal there is no statute provision for pre-primary education. The minimum age for admission to class I is 5 years and it is calculated as on 1st May of the

year of admission. In Gujarat there is a provision for two years of KG and the minimum age for admission to class I is 5 years, calculated as on 31st August of the year. In Karnataka there is informal arrangement between Block Education Department and service providers in pre-primary education. Children whose age is 5 years and 10 months as on 1st June of the year come under compulsory admission to class I. Children below this age can be admitted by parents on a voluntary basis. In the government and government aided schools of Kerala there is one year of pre-primary education and the minimum age for admission to class I, calculated as on 1st June of the year is 5 years. Maharashtra Board does not prescribe pre-primary education. Children who are five years of age as on 31st August of the year are eligible for admission to class I. In Uttar Pradesh there is no provision for pre-primary education under the education department. However, as per the provision under U.P. Education Code, a child of 5 years of age can be admitted in Class – I. So the general pattern seems to be moving towards 5+ as the minimum age for admission of a child to class I, as exemplified by the practice followed by most of the states in the country, including Delhi, though there is much variation in regard to the cut-off date for determining the age.

- 2.12 The international practice also presents much divergence in this regard. In Europe, for instance, 5 years is the criterion for admission to class I in England, Malta, Netherland, Scotland and Wales. In Australia, Belgium, Cyprus, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Republic of Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Norway, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia and Spain it is 6 years. Only in Northern Ireland children start class I at a very early age of 4 years and in some countries like Bulgaria, Estonia, Denmark, Finland, Romania and Poland only children of 7 years of age are taken into class I. Generally the school year in Europe is counted from 1st September and in England local authorities receive children into first class (called Reception class) during the school year of the child's fifth birthday. The pattern of admission varies from country to country but majority of countries admit children at the age of 5-6 years in class I.
- 2.13 In China, nurseries with childcare as their main purpose have been placed under the jurisdiction of the education departments at all levels. Kindergartens enroll children at age 3 and the length of schooling is three years. However, pre-school education is not compulsory and non-state entities are encouraged to be the main providers to supplement some government initiatives. Formal schooling begins immediately after kindergarten at 5-6 years.
- 2.14 In Japan, early childhood education has been traditionally divided into two systems – kindergarten for children above 3 years, which is with the education department and day nursery for children below 3 years, which is with the welfare sector. In kindergartens, emphasis is placed on enabling children to receive experiences that are believed to be educationally desirable but which cannot be given within the framework of the family.

Group living experiences, intellectual learning activities and creative constructional activities carried out under the guidance of trained specialist teachers make up the curriculum for the kindergarten. Formal schooling begins for children who are 5+ of age.

- 2.15 In Singapore the minimum age for admission to class I is 6 years. The academic session is from 1st January to 31st December and the cut-off date is calculated as on 31st December of the previous year. The pre-primary education is not attached with the school and it is provided independently. There are three levels of pre-primary education: 3+ for nursery, 4+ and 5+ for Kindergarten 1 and Kindergarten 2 respectively.
- 2.16 The National Foundation of Educational Research of UK has done research on Early Childhood Education. One of the findings of the research is that early introduction to a formal curriculum may increase anxiety and have a negative impact on children's self esteem and motivation to learn. However evidence suggests that a quality pre-school experience can bring a range of benefits, including a smoother transition into primary school and increased educational attainment. Research conducted in England and Wales shows that children who are older in the year group achieve better test results than their younger classmates. It is an important factor that has been taken into account by many countries to keep school starting ages a little flexible.
- 2.17 The provisions under the Constitution of India for Early Childhood Education are included in the Constitution (Eighty Sixth Amendment) Act, 2002. Article 21 A has been introduced as a Fundamental Right after Article 21 to read: "The State shall provide Free and Compulsory education to all children of the age of six to fourteen years in such manner as the state may, by law, determine". The needs of Early Childhood Care and Development are addressed by Article 45 under Directive Principles of State Policy. The article reads: "The State shall endeavour to provide early childhood care and education for all children until they complete the age of six years". Read together, though free and compulsory education covers children in the age group of 6-14 years, there is no stipulation that prescribes that formal schooling of children would begin at the age of six. The dichotomy between free and compulsory education beginning at the age of six and the general practice and in some cases as in the Delhi School Education Act of treating 5+ as the minimum age for children to be eligible for admission to class I, has to be resolved.
- 2.18 Various Education Commissions and Committees have made strong recommendations for quality pre-school education. It is significant that the Education Commission (1964-66) headed by Prof. D.S. Kothari, popularly known as Kothari Commission departs from the traditional practice of dividing the period of school education into three stages – pre-primary, primary and secondary. Instead Kothari Commission has treated the entire pre-university period of education as one stage, recommending an integrated approach to school education. It makes pre-primary education

an integral part of schooling. The Commission has identified the following objectives for pre-primary education:

- To develop in the child good health habits and to build up basic skills necessary for personal adjustment, such as dressing, toilet habits, eating, washing, cleaning etc.;
- To develop desirable social attitudes and manners; and to encourage healthy group participation, making the child sensitive to the rights and privileges of others;
- To develop emotional maturity by guiding the child to express, understand, accept and control his feelings and emotions;
- To encourage aesthetic appreciation;
- To stimulate the beginnings of intellectual curiosity concerning the environment and to help him understand the world in which he lives; and to foster new interest through opportunities to explore, investigate and experiment;
- To encourage independence and creativity by providing the child with sufficient opportunities for self expression;
- To develop the child's ability to express his thoughts and feelings in fluent, correct and clear speech; and
- To develop in the child a good physique, adequate muscular coordination and basic motor skills.

2.19 While recommending an activity-oriented and play-way curriculum, the Commission has included play activities, physical activities, group activities, physical training including simple exercises and dance, manual activities, sensorial education, handwork and artistic activities including finger skills, drawing, painting, music, personal hygiene, self service etc. The spirit of the recommendations lies in providing informal, activity-rich and interesting learning experience for the children. Textbooks and Writing are not included in the curriculum recommended and this is an aspect that needs special attention of educators in the present situation

2.20 The National Policy on Education (NPE), 1986 states that "Early Childhood Care and Education is a crucial input in the strategy of human resource development as a feeder and support programme for primary education and also as a support service for working women". The other policy perspectives provided by NPE in this regard include the following:

- The National Policy on Children specially emphasizes investment in the development of the young child, particularly children from sections of the population in which first generation learners predominate.
- Recognizing the holistic nature of child development, viz., nutrition, health and social, mental, physical, moral and emotional development, Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) must receive high priority

and be suitably integrated with the Integrated Child Development Service Programme.

- Programmes of ECCE will be child-oriented, focused around play and the individuality of the child. Formal methods and introduction of the 3 R's will be discouraged at this stage. The local community will be fully involved in these programmes.
- A full integration of child care and pre-primary education will be brought about, both as a feeder and a strengthening factor for primary education and for human resource development in general. In continuation of this stage, the School Health Programme will be strengthened.

2.21 Yashpal Committee, in its report titled 'Learning without Burden' observes that 'deeply harmful practices in pre-schools and primary schools such as early emphasis on shapely drawing, writing and memorizing information' result in a lot of stress and anxiety for the children. "A curriculum policy that takes away the elements of joy and inquiry from learning obviously contributes to the rate at which children leave school in the early years", states the report.

2.22 The committee recommends that appropriate legislative and administrative measures be adopted to regulate the opening and functioning of early childhood education institutions (pre-schools). Norms regarding accommodation, staff, apparatuses, play materials be laid down for the recognition of these schools. It should be ensured that these institutions do not perpetrate violence on young children by inflicting a heavy dose of 'over-education' in the form of formal teaching of Reading, Writing and Numbers. The practice of holding tests and interviews for admission to nursery class be abolished.

2.23 The National Curriculum Framework – 2005, describes the early childhood stage as the most critical period when foundations are laid for life long development and realization of the child's full potential. To promote children's learning in the early years, efforts must be directed by each child's interests and priorities, be flexible and not structured formally, within an enabling and supportive environment. Activities and experiences for this group of children should be developmentally appropriate and be realized through play-way, activity-based methodology. Caution should be taken against pressuring children into the 3Rs and early introduction of formal learning.

2.24 Assessment practices commonly observed also add to the pressure on the young child. The NCF recommends that "At this stage, assessment must be purely qualitative judgements of children's activities in various domains and an assessment of the status of their health and physical development, based on observations through everyday interactions. On no account should they be made to take any form of test, oral or written". (page 76 NCF – 2005)

- 2.25 To provide ECCE of equitable quality to all children it is essential to address five basic dimensions namely: developmentally appropriate curriculum, trained and adequately rewarded teachers, appropriate teacher-child ratio and group size, infrastructure supportive of children's needs and an encouraging style of supervision. All pedagogic efforts during the primary classes greatly depend on professional planning and the significant expansion of ECCE.
- 2.26 The NCF 2005 Focus Group Position Paper on ECCE has highlighted a number of critical issues, such as societal divides that influence equity, access and quality of ECCE programme and practices. Surveys conducted by the NCERT in all the major cities indicate that children as young as 3 to 4 years old at the pre-school stage are being taught the syllabus prescribed not only for Class I but even for Class II for which they are neither cognitively nor physically mature enough.

With regard to admission and testing of children the position paper states – “Admissions: Interviewing the child seeking admission and his/her parents is a common practice followed by many private schools. The child is tested for general knowledge and made to perform tasks, which are expected of him in the class after he gets admitted. This results in pressure, tension, and anxiety for both parents and children, and has harmful effects on children”.

The problem is further compounded by the “Early start in structured learning: Most ECE programmes today are merely a downward extension of primary education. The heavy curriculum exposes children to very structured and rote learning at an age when they are not developmentally ready for it”. (page 18 – Position Paper-National Focus Group on Early Childhood Education).

All these issues need to be carefully addressed while planning and implementing pre-primary education programme.

- 2.27 The NCERT had published a booklet on ‘Minimum Specifications for Pre-Schools’ in the year 1996. On the issue of Age for Admission it observes:

There is an increasing tendency today of bringing younger and still younger children into the fold of organized centre based Early Childhood Education programmes. As a result the programmes offered to the children are often more detrimental rather than helpful to the development of the child. The need for children, younger than three years, to come into an organized programme has arisen because of the growing incidence of mothers joining the work force. It may be noted that the programme especially for the under threes, while being stimulating, should be free play oriented with no structured or formal content.

A child is ready for an organized pre-school programme when he/she:

- (i) is able to tackle separation anxiety from family.
- (ii) has developed some verbal competence and can communicate basic needs.
- (iii) has become toilet trained.

The report also mentions that a child is ready in these terms by 3½ + years of age. Before this age the child can go to a day care centre/play centre. The child will be ready to go to primary school by 5½ years.

Chapter – III

Feedback from Stakeholders

3.01 While delineating the procedure to be adopted by Ganguly Committee for arriving at its recommendations, the Hon'ble High Court of Delhi has directed the committee to take the opinion and expert views of two child psychologists of repute, a Professor of the Department of Pediatrics, AIIMS and if possible, Professor Yashpal. In compliance with this directive the committee invited the following experts to a meeting held on 15th March, 2007 at CBSE Headquarters, Delhi for interaction and getting their views on the issues being considered by the committee:

1. Dr.Jitendra Nagpal - Expert in Mental Health and Child Psychology
2. Dr.Sameer Parikh - Expert in Mental Health and Child Psychology
3. Dr.Veena Kalra - Head, Pediatrics, AIIMS

3.02 The views of Dr. Nagpal and Dr. Parikh are summarized below:

- First of all it should be ensured, while determining the right age for a child to enter pre-schooling, whether schools are ready to accept the responsibility of early childhood care and education. All schools are either not prepared or properly equipped to provide the specialized service that is required for early childhood care and education. A regulatory and monitoring mechanism for schools that are offering pre-schooling is essential.
- The nomenclature has to be decided in clear terms to avoid confusion. Research in this field has established that pre-primary includes all learning that takes place between 4 and 6 years. It is an acknowledged fact that the human personality development is telescoped from the important first five years. During this period of development there are complex factors such as motor development, co-ordination, emotional, social, multi-cultural and multi-linguistic influences that play a critical role in the developmental process. So at pre-primary level sensory learning should precede symbolic learning.
- There should be absolutely no formal schooling upto 4 years. The internationally accepted practice is to begin formal schooling at 5-6 years and that is when class I should begin.
- At pre-primary stage there should be no regimented and prescriptive learning. Instead learning should be informal consisting mainly of visual, auditory and kinesthetic experiences. Parents would choose pre-school facilities on the basis of affordability, accessibility and acceptability. As schooling progresses to higher stages, the neighbourhood concept should be merged with other criteria.

- The most critical factor about pre-schooling is the readiness of the school in terms of appropriate and specially trained teachers, exclusive facilities like infrastructure, transport etc.
- In the present scenario 60%-80% of public schools offering pre-school facility follow regimented and structured practices including regular homework in the name of early stimulation. The inappropriate methodology and unsuitable learning environment often leads to psychological trauma among children. Even parents are not aware of the problems they create for their children by expecting unrealistic developmental targets.
- So it is necessary for the government to conduct a survey of schools of Delhi to ascertain their readiness to offer pre-schooling. To do this, experts should be consulted and parameters determined to evaluate schools. Also some legislative provision should be made to regulate and monitor pre-school facilities, whether they exist as part of a recognized main school or they are part of independent, exclusive play schools. At least such a law would be a deterrent to unscrupulous elements and unhealthy practices.
- Human development cannot be structured due to compulsions. Worldwide 5-6 years is treated as the ideal age for beginning Class-I with two years of pre-school. Kindergarten is the nomenclature that is generally followed.
- Of the two years of KG Classes, one year (the second year) should be part of mainstream education.
- Combining one year of KG with mainstream education is necessary to provide for smooth transition of children from informal learning to more formal learning in a familiar school setting. Anything more than one year of this transition would be illogical and superfluous.
- However the one year of pre-primary in a main school should be in a separate ambience that is conducive for small children.
- Since the needs at pre-primary stage are quite different from higher stages of education, school-readiness becomes a crucial factor. For example the internationally accepted standard for adult-child ratio is one adult for every 8-10 children. It is easier to enforce such stringent parameters if the pre-primary is condensed/restricted to one year.
- Children should not be forced to perform tasks that they are not biologically and developmentally programmed to perform. So pre-schooling has to have a separate ambience, curriculum, methodology and objective.

3.03 The views of Dr. Veena Kalra are summarized below:

- Taking the process of child's development into account we should provide for at least two years of pre-primary/pre-school education.

- It is a crucial period in a child's growth when children begin to explore the world, get to know and communicate with others, learn to self-feed and learn to train themselves in toilet habits. The home environment may not always provide all the opportunities for the child, particularly in respect of developing social skills and community language. In such a context, one year of pre-schooling would not be adequate.
- Further, in the present scenario of increasing number of working parents, the home may not provide an effective learning environment for a three year old child. Parents do not have enough time to develop the child's faculties in a holistic manner.
- Lack of adequate pre-school facilities is one of the main causes for early school drop out. Poor and inadequate acclimatization to out-of-home-environment is one of the reasons for some children dropping out of school at an early stage.
- The two years of pre-primary could be part of main school or it could be divided between a main school and an exclusive play school.
- If pre-school is part of a main school, the space and facilities should be defined and provided completely separately. Since small children can feel thwarted in the presence of bigger children, care should be taken to provide a safe, secure and conducive learning environment to them.

3.04 In order to formulate clear-cut guidelines for the age criteria for admission to pre-primary classes and to obtain views on the admission procedure based on Ganguly Committee recommendations a meeting of Delhi School Advisory Board, a statutory body under section 22 of the Delhi School Education Act – 1973, was held on 12th February, 2007. The meeting was attended amongst others by educationists, principals of various recognized aided and unaided schools of Delhi, representatives of parents etc.

3.05 The consensus opinion that emerged in the meeting was that three years is too early for a child to start pre-primary education. Most of the members and invitees felt that the minimum age should be 3½ years for nursery, 4½ years for preparatory and 5½ years for class I to be calculated as per the earlier system, i.e. as on 30th September of the year preceding the year of admission. However many schools had interpreted the provision as denoting 30th September of the year of admission and consequently a child who had not attained 5 years as on 1st April of the year of admission also was admitted to class I. Similarly children who had not attained 4 years were admitted to the second year of pre-primary i.e. the class immediately prior to class I. Be that as it may, the consensus that emerged from the meeting was that the minimum age for class I admission must be 5+ which is in consonance with Section 16 of Delhi School Education Act – 1973.

3.06 Shri Ashok Agarwal, Senior Counsel and a petitioner in the case was also invited to give his views. The main points of his submission are as follows:

- Pre-school and pre-primary should be differentiated. Pre-school classes may be conducted by separate and exclusive play schools but pre-primary should be part of the main school.
- Pre-primary should be for one year prior to class I and children who are 4 years and above should be eligible for admission to pre-primary class.
- The common admission procedure and norms should come into operation at the pre-primary class.
- The provisions in the Constitution (Article 21A), 165th Law Commission Report and the CABE Report (2005) specify 6 years as the minimum age for a child to begin formal education, i.e., class I. Though it is an ideal situation, it is necessary to take into account the increase in number of years of schooling from 11 years to 12 years after the introduction of 10+2 system uniformly in the country. There is also a binding imposed by the Delhi School Education Act (1973) that has fixed 5+ as the minimum age for children to be admitted in class I. This dichotomy has to be resolved by the committee.
- Also the Article 21A of the Constitution stipulates that free and compulsory education to all children of the age of six to fourteen is the state's responsibility. Does it mean there will be no education before the age of six? What will happen to children of underprivileged sections with regard to their pre-school and pre-primary education?
- As regards the cut off date to determine the age of a child for the purpose of admission to schools, there is much divergence and variation. As per the Delhi Primary Education Act (1960) the age was to be calculated as on 1st April of the year of admission and the minimum age was fixed as 6 years. But the Delhi School Education Act (1973) reduced it to 5+ years and the subsequent circular dated 09.04.1997 sent by Delhi Education Directorate had asked schools to calculate age as on 30th September. This has caused much confusion. Since the academic year commences on 1st April in all the recognized schools in Delhi it would be logical to consider 31st March of the year of admission as the cut-off date for calculating the age of child.

3.07 The feedback received from Springdales Education Society contained the following suggestions:

- The status quo should be allowed to continue for the academic session beginning from 1st April, 2007 as admission to nursery class has already been completed in all the private schools of Delhi.

- Re-allocation of classes/sections for students who are under-aged may be sorted out at the end of the academic session.
- The minimum age suggested is 3½ years for nursery, 4½ years for preparatory and 5½ years for class I.
- No further change should be made for 2007-08 session.

3.08 The views of principals of some Delhi private schools were also obtained. Their suggestions and comments are summarized below:-

- Presently there is no uniformity in the schools of Delhi with regard to pre-primary education. Some schools have only one year of pre-primary while many schools offer two years of pre-primary. Since school readiness of children is an important factor, pre-primary should be of two-year duration uniformly in all the schools of Delhi.
- Children who are just 3 years old are not ready for school ambience. So nursery should begin at 3½ years and pre-primary at 4½ years and class I at 5½ years as on 31st March of the year of admission.
- Teacher training is a crucial factor and some regulation in the appointment of teachers for pre-primary classes is essential.

3.09 Feedback from parents was also invited by putting up a questionnaire in the CBSE website and giving publicity in the print and visual media to the initiative, requesting parents to send their responses by email. Over 140 parents responded. The salient features of the feedback received are as follows:

- Most of the respondents were of the view that there should be uniformity in duration and age criteria for pre-primary education across all types of school, i.e., Government, Government-aided and Private Schools of Delhi.
- A majority of the respondents have suggested 31st March/1st April of the year of admission as the cut off date to determine the age of a child for admission.
- A majority of the respondents are of the view that 4+ should be the minimum age for admission of children to pre-primary. However, a few parents have suggested 3+ as the minimum age.
- There is some ambiguity in the response of parents to the question on the duration of pre-primary education. The parents seem to be equally divided between one year and two years. The ambiguity arises because even many of those suggesting two years as duration of pre-primary education have recommended 4+ as the minimum age. This would not be in consonance with the DSE Act 1973 since it prescribes the minimum age for admission to class I as 5+years.
- To the question whether parents should have the freedom to decide whether their children should undergo one year or two years of pre-

primary education, majority of parents have suggested that since uniformity should be enforced among all types of schools, it follows that parents can not be given any flexibility in this regard.

- Other suggestions received from parents on issues such as curriculum, methodology, timings etc. are given below:
 - Pre-primary education should be 'bookless' and 'bagless'. It should be learning while playing.
 - Pre-primary school should focus on socialization skills and group activities. There should be no formal syllabus nor should we set learning targets.
 - Audio-visual teaching should be included in the method of teaching.
 - Playway method that includes moral values should be adopted.
 - The process of learning should be in a gentle child-friendly environment where the child is not intimidated by the set up of a large school with many classes. The content should essentially be one where the child enjoys learning. It should be based on close interaction with teacher and other children.
 - School hours for children at this stage should be much shorter than for older children. 3-4 hours starting from 9.00 am would be ideal.

3.10 Leading educationists both of national and international organizations have suggested that the admission age should remain four years for pre-primary class. Children who are younger may not be mature enough to tell teachers in case they wish to go to toilet. There are also times when they are hungry and start crying instead of telling the supervisor their problem. They have pointed out that kindergarten is a school or class for young children, usually four to six years old, which is intended to prepare them for entry to formal schooling.

3.11 The committee also invited senior officers of the Delhi Directorate of Education to get their views and opinion. They submitted that the Delhi Directorate of Education is presently running pre-primary class only in a few of its schools. It is for a duration of one year immediately prior to class I. If uniformity is to be enforced, the Directorate would have to consider the proposal of expanding pre-primary facility in its schools in a phased manner depending on resources available. As for the circular dated 09.04.1997, it was conceded that it had given rise to some confusion regarding the cut off date to determine the age of children for admission to primary and pre-primary classes. In order to clarify the matter the Directorate has filed an Urgent Application before the Hon'ble High Court of Delhi praying for modifying the Court's orders dated 17.01.2007 and 14.02.2007 to the effect that the Hon'ble Court may prescribe attaining the minimum age of 3½ years by 31st March of the year of admission for the admission of children to pre-primary class. The officers pointed out that such a modification would remove the confusion

caused by the circular which had mentioned 30th September of the year of admission as the cut off date.

- 3.12 In order to obtain the views of the Government of Delhi, the Chairman and the Convener of the Committee met Hon'ble Minister of Education, Govt. of National Capital Territory and the senior officers of the Secretariat and Directorate on 28th March, 2007. The Hon'ble Minister was briefed regarding the deliberations that the Committee has held so far and the views emerging from such deliberations with regard to the minimum age, cut-off date and duration of pre-primary education in the schools of Delhi. There was general agreement with the Committee's view that 31st March of the year of admission should be the cut-off date, the pre-primary class should be uniformly of one year duration in all types of schools of Delhi, the minimum age for a child to be eligible for admission should be 4+ for pre-primary and 5+ for Class I as on 31st March of the year of admission and the pre-primary class should be part of the recognized schools in Delhi.
- 3.13 At the same time it was felt that since the government would require some time for making adequate preparations to implement the changes, the recommendations of the Committee could come into effect from the academic year 2008-09. The officers of the Government of Delhi and the Directorate of Education pointed out that the admission of 3 year old children in nursery class for the academic year 2007-08 has resulted in certain difficulties. According to them the minimum age for a child to be admitted to pre-primary class is 3 ½ years as per the existing system which treats 30th September of the year preceding the year of admission as the cut-off date for determining the age of children. Hence the youngest child to be admitted in nursery class would be 3 ½ years of age as on 31st March of the year of admission. However, in pursuant of the Court's order dated 08.12.2006 schools have admitted children who are just 3+ as on 31.03.2007 in nursery class and not 3 ½ years as was the practice earlier. Hence they wanted status-quo of the earlier admission procedure, age criterion and cut-off date to be maintained for the year 2007-08. It was also clarified that the proposals of the Committee would be placed before the School Education Advisory Board for consideration and for any further action.
- 3.14 As desired by the Hon'ble High Court of Delhi, the committee also invited Prof. Yash Pal to a meeting on 24.03.2007 to listen to his views. He said that in a country like ours children come from different kinds of families. Even when they are 3 or 4 years old, they would have picked up language skills and values. What they need is an opportunity to develop their cognitive skills and abstract thinking. At the same time this period of childhood should not be used by schools for preparing children for admission to class I. If we make pre-primary more than one year of duration, schools would surely resort to this unhealthy practice. So the pre-primary class should be of only one year duration and it should be part of a recognized main school though the ambience and learning

environment for this class should be quite different from that which is offered at the formal education stage. Children who are 4 years of age as on 31st March of the year of admission should be considered eligible for pre-primary class. The society and community should provide a number of play schools and day care centres in the neighbourhood for children who are younger and who need such an arrangement due to different reasons. If we accept that pre-primary education will be of only one year duration, it can be enforced uniformly. Government should also expand pre-school facility in its schools in a phased manner and, say in the next three years, all government schools and government-aided schools in Delhi should have pre-primary class. Then the norms and common admission procedure would be applied to pre-primary class uniformly. It is likely that there will be some problem for private schools having two or three years of pre-primary classes. Such schools can be given some flexibility in the implementation of the recommendations. They may stagger the withdrawal of one or two years of pre-primary and within three years, all schools will have one year of pre-primary to which the common admission norms and procedure would apply.

- 3.15 Another question that arises in this regard is: Since students who have been admitted in nursery this year (2007-08), will automatically progress to prep or pre-primary in 2008-09, then what would be the scenario in 2008-09 if pre-primary class is reduced to one year? Only schools having two years of pre-primary classes will face this problem. So there may not be any need for fresh admission for pre-primary class in 2008-09. However schools may be given some freedom to accommodate 4 year olds who need admission on account of their parents' transfer to Delhi or those who could not be put into big schools for various reasons. The committee could formulate some guidelines in this regard to tide over this problem arising during the transition period. Another suggestion that schools may try out is to redistribute surplus teachers, staff and infrastructure created by the one-year norm of pre-primary class, to augment the sections in higher classes over a period of time. Alternatively progressive private schools can volunteer to run one-year pre-primary class in neighbourhood government schools. Such creative ideas should be encouraged to sort out any problem that may arise due to the change-over from two years to one year of pre-primary class in recognized and full-fledged schools. The above views of Prof. Yash Pal have been duly considered by the Committee to arrive at its recommendations.

Chapter – IV

The Rationale

- 4.01 A review of the policies and practices of different countries indicates that Early Childhood Care and Education is receiving increasing attention and perceived as a priority for the full development of the human person. Several Nations are committing themselves to a major expansion of both child care and pre-school education. There is growing research evidence to indicate the paramount role that early childhood care and education plays in laying a proper foundation for a healthy and productive adult life. It also touches areas of nutrition and health care concerns in the early education of children.
- 4.02 The National Focus Group on Early Childhood Education, constituted in the context of evolving the National Curriculum Framework 2005, presents many challenges that we face in India in the sphere of ECCE. According to the 2001 census, India has a population of 158 million children in the age group of 0-6. One third of the 25 million babies born every year are born with low birth weight. Malnutrition and lack of health care, particularly immunization affect a large section of the child population. Only a small percentage of children in the age group of 3-5 years are getting pre-school education.
- 4.03 In order to meet the challenge in ECCE, the Government has taken many initiatives particularly after the declaration of the National Policy for Children in 1974. In pursuance of that policy, the Integrated Child Development Services was launched in 1975. The Ninth Five-year Plan reaffirmed the priority accorded to the development of early childhood services and saw it as an investment in human resource development. The Tenth Five-year Plan has adopted a rights-based approach to child development, and included major strategies which aim at reaching all young children in the country to ensure their 'survival', 'protection' and 'development'. The private sector has also been active in providing services including day-care centres, nurseries and pre-primary classes. Several NGOs, with funding from international and national donors, are also active in this field.
- 4.04 A very significant factor that has emerged from the feedback of parents, teachers and other stakeholders is the awareness of the critical contribution that pre-primary education makes for the holistic development of the child. The changing family structure and increasing mobility of families are also contributing to the growing demand for provision of pre-school facilities for children.
- 4.05 Presently the government schools are not fully catering to meet the need for pre-primary education since only a small percentage of schools in government sector have pre-primary class. The section of society that government schools are serving cannot be denied this critical facility. As a

matter of fact, pre-primary education should be made mandatory in all types of schools without exception, so that children of all socio-economic backgrounds have access to early childhood education. The government agencies may cite resource crunch as the main reason for not providing pre-primary education in all its schools. Pre-primary education must get priority attention and resources. A beginning can be made and a viable plan of expansion may be evolved so that within a period of three years all government schools in Delhi would also have pre-primary class of one year duration.

- 4.06 The increased awareness among parents about the importance of the early years for children's development is a welcome trend. However, the tendency on the part of many parents to initiate their children into formal learning at a very inappropriate age, in the name of pre-school education, has to be questioned. Whether by design or through ignorance, there is a growing number of providers of pre-school service. This again needs to be examined.
- 4.07 The committee is of the view that the issues to be considered fall under two broad areas:
1. structural issues such as nomenclature, duration, age, flexibility and uniformity with regard to pre-school education.
 2. curricular issues that examine the content and methodology to be adopted in pre-school education.

Though the directive of the Hon'ble High Court of Delhi is mainly concerned with the first set of issues mentioned above, the committee feels that it is an opportune time to go into the curricular aspects of pre-schooling to initiate serious thought that will lead to affirmative action. Another inescapable fact is that all the issues are inter-related and it is necessary to take a comprehensive view lest we miss the wood for the trees.

4.08 **Pre-primary and Pre-school**

As mentioned in the first chapter of this report there is much divergence and variation in the name given to pre-school facilities provided by both the government and private sectors in Delhi. At present pre-school classes are variously called Nursery, Montessori, Kindergarten, Pre-primary, Play-school, Prep-school etc. It is relevant here to point out that the committee's earlier report had followed the court's directive and used the nomenclature of 'Nursery' while making recommendations for a common admission procedure and criteria for admission to the pre-primary class. Some schools had created a little confusion with reference to the connotation of the term 'nursery'. There is also some ground for suspecting willful misinterpretation by a few institutions so as to exempt themselves from implementing the Committee's recommendation in this regard. So it is necessary to agree upon a name to be applied to the pre-

school classes for which this committee has been entrusted with the responsibility to make recommendations. Another aspect that emerges from the Court's order also deserves attention. The Court seems to make a distinction between pre-primary and pre-school in its order. While dwelling on the issue of duration of pre-primary class, the Court's order observes: "Therefore, there may not be any objection if it is decided that pre-primary section will be of one year duration only and a child completing the age of four years on or before 31st of March of the said academic year will be eligible for admission into the said pre-primary class. In that event, if any child is admitted to the class prior to the said age, the same could be in the nature of pre-school class and would not be considered as pre-primary class".

4.09 In a sense the court's order has spelt out the distinction between 'Pre-school class' and 'Pre-primary Class'. Pre-primary class is the one year of schooling of a child immediately before the child enters Class-I and pre-school class/classes constitute that section of schooling which precedes the pre-primary class. The committee would adhere to this nomenclature and the rationale is that the one year of schooling before primary education in Class I does become pre-primary and will be part of a regular school. What precedes pre-primary class will not be part of a school and hence it will be treated as pre-school. Though pre-primary would be part of a regular school, it would still be in an informal setting, differentiated from the classroom organization that begins at Class-I.

4.10 There cannot be any prescription of a standard nomenclature for pre-school classes because such facilities would, to a large extent, derive their names from the system they follow such as Montessori, Kindergarten etc and also from their purpose and function, such as crèche, nursery and day care centre. etc. What is important is that pre-primary education as described above will be called only by the name, 'Pre-primary class.' The recommendations of the committee, accordingly, would specify whether they are applicable to pre-primary class or pre-school classes, though most of them would be dealing with the former with some guidelines for the latter.

4.11 **Duration**

The Hon'ble Court, in its order, has raised the question: "Why not have a only one year of pre-primary schooling before (a child) being eligible to Class I wherein they can be admitted provided he or she has completed the age of four years as one 31st March of the academic year in which the said admission is sought?"

The feedback from parents to this question is rather divided, with almost an equal number of parents recommending either one or two years of pre-primary education

4.12 The principals of many private schools of Delhi have also expressed their opinion in favour of two years of pre-primary education as part of main

school. Some missionary private schools have voiced their opinion in favour of one year of pre-primary education. However, in view of the facts mentioned in the Para 4.08, it is necessary that pre-primary is understood only as the 'one year of schooling that a child undergoes before entering Class I.' While making it clear that pre-primary should be of only one year of duration before Class I, there are also other compelling reasons for arriving at such a decision:

1. The Government of Delhi, for the most part, is not running pre-primary classes. The exception occurs in 39 schools where one year of pre-primary education is available. MCD and NDMC are also running pre-primary classes in some of their schools. Of the 1818 schools run by the Municipal Corporation of Delhi, 919 schools have pre-primary class of one year duration. New Delhi Municipal Council has provided pre-primary class of one year duration in 34 of its 81 schools. Some Kendriya Vidyalayas have pre-primary class. What is common in all these types of schools under the government sector offering pre-primary education is that the duration is of one year only. The variation in duration is seen only in the private schools. However, there are also some private schools which run pre-primary class of one year duration. So if uniformity has to be enforced, (as the Court has desired) it will be prudent to follow the pattern of government schools and make pre-primary class uniformly of one year duration.
2. It is interesting that the Delhi School Education Act & Rules – 1973 does mention pre-primary schools under 'Classification of Schools'. It reads: "Pre-primary schools, that is to say, schools imparting education below the primary stage." So it can be inferred that schools having pre-primary class would also come under the ambit of the DSEA. Hence it stands to reason that only recognized schools can run pre-primary class. It means that pre-primary class should be part of a main, recognized school. In a circular dated 09.04.1997, the Delhi Directorate of Education had stipulated that 'A child who has not attained the age of 4 years as on 30.09.1997 shall not be admitted to pre-primary class'. And admission to recognized schools in Class I is defined by Section 16 of DSEA which states 'A child who has not attained the age of five years, shall not be admitted to Class I.....'.

So reading the above provisions together it can be gathered that a child should be 5+ to be eligible for admission to Class I and 4+ to enter the pre-primary. It implies that pre-primary should be of one year duration only. From the above points it can be concluded that pre-primary education will be of one year's duration before Class I and it will be part of a recognized school.

- 4.13 As for pre-school education, the Committee feels that there should be some flexibility to help working, single and ailing parents in providing proper care for their children. While play-school, by whatever name, should not admit children who are not 3+ of age, parents should have the

freedom to utilize the services of day care centres and crèches. Such facilities, though presently not under any regulation, should also be gradually brought under some kind of state supervision. In this context the committee feels that a systematic survey of play-schools, crèches and day care centres functioning in different parts of Delhi may be undertaken. Such a survey would provide very useful information that can become the basis for putting a regulatory mechanism in place.

4.14 **Minimum Age and Cut-off Date**

The committee considered the criteria for admission to pre-primary and primary classes in other states and also the yardstick adopted internationally. The details are given in Chapter II of this report. A study of the practices in general reveals the following features:

- Most of the Asian countries have prescribed 5+ as the minimum age for a child to be admitted to Class I.
- In Europe the minimum age in most countries is either five or six for Class I.
- In the different states of India it is generally 5+ for Class I, though a few have age 6.
- Hence, there is no uniformity in pre-primary education either among the different states of India or internationally.
- Similarly there is much variation in the cut-off date to determine the age of children for admission.

4.15 Another aspect that was examined by the committee relates to the constitutional provisions. Article 21 A states: "The state shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of six to fourteen years in such manner as the state may, by law, determine". Does it mean Class I begins at the age of six? Is 'six' to be taken as completion of five years of age and running the sixth year or based on the sixth birthday of the child (having completed six years)? If the state's responsibility for providing compulsory education for children begins only for children of age 6 and above, what is the position of pre-primary education? These are questions that need answers.

4.16 As per the available information, 17+ is the minimum age for admission into undergraduate courses in Delhi. Similarly 17+ is the minimum age for gaining entry into professional courses like medicine and engineering which includes IITs and NITs. It is understandable because the minimum age for admission in class I is 5+ and after completing 12 years of schooling a student will be 17+. If the minimum age for admission to class I is increased to 5 ½ or 6 years, students will complete schooling only at 18+. In the globalized context forcing students to delay their entry into higher studies including professional courses and subsequent

employment by one year will be a retrograde step. Hence it seems appropriate that the minimum age for admission to class I should be 5+.

4.17 Besides, in determining the cut-off date for calculating the age of a child for the purpose of admission, the date of commencement of an academic year in the schools of Delhi, has to be kept in view. In most of the states the cut-off date is based on the date on which the academic year begins. The Delhi School Education Act (DSEA) stipulates 5+ as the minimum age for admission to Class I. Keeping all these factors in mind, the committee had to arrive at a decision with regard to age and cut-off date. There is also a need to remove the existing confusion created by a circular dated 09.04.1997 sent by the Directorate of Education, Delhi which has extended the cut-off date to 30th September of the year of admission while, in actual fact, the Directorate had meant 30th September of the year prior to the year of admission. The Directorate of Education, Delhi has since clarified its stand as per an 'Urgent Application' filed by it in Writ Petition No.12490 of 2006.

4.18 The Directorate of Education, Delhi in the above mentioned application has prayed for prescribing the minimum age of 3 ½ years by 31st March of the year of admission for the admission to any pre-primary class. In subsequent discussions with the senior officers of the Government of Delhi and the Directorate this point was reiterated and it was argued that the status quo about the minimum age for admission to nursery should be maintained for the year 2007-08. The argument given was that children of 3+ years are not ready for pre-primary education in nursery class. But looking into the provision in the Delhi School Education Act about the minimum age and also the anomaly created by the circular in this regard this can not be accepted. Moreover, the demand for maintaining status quo for the year 2007-08 as far as the age for nursery admission is concerned does not appear to be in the interest of children.

Also the request for deferring the admission of children who have not attained 3 ½ years as on 31st March, 2007 to nursery class can not be entertained since such a step would create much hue and cry. Most of the schools have completed the admission of children to nursery class. Moreover the parents have withdrawn the admitted children from their play schools and procured new uniform, play materials etc. At this juncture if the parents and children are told that they will have to wait for a year, it will be unfair and unjust, adversely affecting the motivation of young children. Such controversies at the beginning of children's schooling are to be avoided keeping the psychological factors of early childhood in view. In the light of the above rationale the Committee is very clear in its stand in this regard. There should be no further changes to the admission that has already been completed to the nursery class for the year 2007-08. This is also why the Committee proposes to recommend that the change over from the present system to a uniform system consisting of one year of pre-primary education will come into effect from the academic year 2008-09.

4.19 Keeping all these factors in view, the committee is of the view that a child should have attained the age of five on 31st March of the year of admission to be considered eligible for admission to Class I in the schools of Delhi. Since an academic year begins on 1st April in the schools of Delhi, all children admitted to class I would have completed 5 years at the time of admission. Consequently a child should have attained the age of 4 years on 31st March of the year of admission to be eligible for admission to pre-primary class. The committee is also of the view that preference should be given to children who are senior by age in the matter of admission to both Class I and pre-primary. It means that 5+ and 4+ as on 31st March for admission to Class I and Pre-primary respectively are only minimum ages and there would be no upper age limit.

4.20 **Uniformity**

The feedback received from different stakeholders points to a consensus opinion that the norms for pre-primary education including duration, age and cut off date should be uniform in all kinds of schools of Delhi, whether Government or private. It means that from the academic year 2007-08 pre-primary class, in all categories of schools, should be of one year duration only. However admission based on the norms recommended by the Ganguly Committee has been completed for nursery class in all the private schools of Delhi for the academic year 2007-08. So these children will automatically progress to pre-primary class in the academic year 2008-09.

4.21 This change-over has some important implications. Firstly, there may not be any scope for fresh admission in 2008-09 to pre-primary class in schools that have already admitted children to nursery class in 2007-08. Secondly, schools that are presently running two years of pre-primary class would have to discontinue the first year, i.e., nursery of pre-primary in the main school. Thirdly, all the government schools which do not have pre-primary class would have to start it in order to abide by the 'uniformity' norm.

4.22 The committee feels that though these are very serious issues, the transition from one system to another will have to be managed by finding creative and equitable alternatives to solve the problems. The committee has given much thought to these aspects and decided to recommend a three year change-over period to be adopted by both the private and government schools. Where pre-primary class does not exist, government can start it in such schools and ensure that all its schools are covered during the ensuing three year period. Private schools that have two years of pre-primary will also need to change over to one year pre-primary class in a staggered manner but in no case, this change over should exceed a three-year time frame.

- 4.23 Such a flexibility will also provide some freedom and adequate time to private schools that have admitted children in nursery class in 2007-08 to make provision for new admissions in pre-primary in 2008-09 to accommodate some children whose parents could not admit their children due to some reason or the other. While discontinuing nursery class, some staff and infrastructure will be rendered surplus. Schools may decide to redeploy them as per their needs and convenience without, as far as possible, making staff redundant.
- 4.24 Thus it may be prudent for some schools presently having more than one year of pre-school class to use the three year transition period for gradually reducing the intake of children (of 3+ years) in nursery and accordingly balancing the intake of children (of 4+ years) in pre-primary so that the space, infrastructure, teachers and supporting staff are utilized. What is to be ensured by such schools is that the common criteria for admission should be followed for all new admissions below class II. Rule 132 of the Delhi School Education Act & Rules 1973 permits admission tests only for class II and above. So during the period of transition if schools are making new admission for both nursery and pre-primary, they should follow the common admission criteria prescribed by Ganguly Committee for all such admission as well as to any new admission that may be granted to class I. No tests or interviews of children should be conducted for deciding all such admissions. By the year 2010-11 all schools in Delhi, both private and government, should have one year of pre-primary class uniformly.

Chapter – V

Recommendations

The Committee's aim was to find a viable and comprehensive policy direction for pre-primary education in Delhi. For expert counsel, the Committee held wide consultations with child psychologists, a pediatrician, Prof. Yash Pal, senior officers of the Delhi Directorate of Education, principals of different types of private schools in Delhi and other stakeholders like senior legal counsels and educationists. The views of a cross section of parents including those whose children have been given admission at the age of 3+ for the academic year beginning from 1st April, 2007, have also been considered by the Committee. The consensus views emerging from a meeting of the Delhi School Education Advisory Board held on 12th February 2007 have also been given due consideration. The Hon'ble Court's stipulation that admission to the pre-primary class/classes, as the case may be, is made homogeneous and uniform has been taken as the guiding principle by the committee to evolve a policy that would cover all the major issues in this regard comprehensively. Keeping the suggestions of all the stakeholders and the directive of the Hon'ble High Court of Delhi in view, the Committee makes the following recommendations:

5.01 Duration of Pre-primary Education

Pre-primary Education shall uniformly be of one year duration in all the schools of Delhi and it shall be the class immediately prior to Class I. The Committee recommends that this class be uniformly known as Pre-primary Education.

5.02 Minimum Age and Cut-off date for Admission

A child should have attained four years on or before 31st March of the year of admission to be considered eligible for gaining admission to pre-primary class. Consequently children completing five years on or before 31st March of the year of admission would progress to Class I. Thus the cut-off date for determining the age of children for the purpose of admission shall be 31st March of the year of admission for the academic session starting from 1st April.

5.03 Time and Space for Pre-primary Class

One year of Pre-primary education shall become part of all recognized, full-fledged schools, whether upto primary, middle, secondary or senior secondary level. However the section/sections of pre-primary class shall have separate designated space and ambience even though they may be located in the same campus. Such a provision would ensure that small children feel secure and have their own identity and play space and are not overawed by older children. The school hours will also be different and the Committee feels that three to four hours of duration daily for five days a week would be adequate. The Committee also recommends that the

pre-primary class may start at a later time according to the convenience of the schools, parents and children.

5.04 Common Admission Procedure

The Common Admission Procedure and criteria for deciding the admission of children shall apply to the pre-primary class from the academic year 2008-09. There would be no interview of children nor interaction with parents to select children for admission. Schools should follow the common admission procedure and criteria prescribed by the Ganguly Committee in this regard.

5.05 Facilities for Children below Four (Pre-school Class/Classes)

As mentioned earlier, the one year class of early childhood education that is offered by all recognized schools immediately prior to Class I shall be known as Pre-primary class. Facilities such as Child Day Care Centre, Nursery, Kindergarten, Crèche etc that parents avail of, depending on their needs, shall come under the term: 'Pre-school Class/Classes'. The Committee recognizes the need for such facilities for the children who are below the age of four. However, such Pre-school classes shall not be part of main schools. Such facilities should be provided by the residents of the community as neighbourhood play-schools/day care centres so that children below the age of 4 are not forced to commute long distances. Presently exclusive play-schools, nurseries, day care centres and crèches are functioning without any regulation and supervision by the government.

It has also been observed that the infrastructural facilities offered by these establishments vary depending on the fee structure, the management, the locality and other factors. Besides the appropriateness and adequacy of physical facilities, what is transacted in terms of activities for the children is also a matter of grave concern. Many of these nursery schools are teaching the curriculum of Class I and even Class II in an effort to get a head start leading to a flourishing 'Alphabet industry'. This is a very unhealthy trend. Hence, efforts should be made to correct it. The Committee recommends that there shall be no school bag for carrying any prescribed books in all such pre-school class(es). The children will carry only tiffin box and play materials etc. from home to school and back home.

To effectively implement this, the Committee recommends the setting up of a monitoring mechanism that may be evolved by the Government of Delhi to regulate the establishment and supervision of such play-schools for children below the age of four.

5.06 Year from which the New Criteria shall Take Effect

The revised criteria of duration of pre-primary education, minimum age and cut-off date for admission shall come into effect from the academic year 2008-09. Since admission to the nursery class has already been completed in most of the schools of Delhi for the year 2007-08, the

Committee recommends that there shall be no further change or modification to the rules and procedure of admission for the current batch of students, who are already in school. Any intervention at this stage will cause serious disturbance to the young children and parents. There is no harm if some 3+ children have taken admission in nursery because by the time they go to pre-primary class in the academic session 2008-09, they will be 4+.

5.07 Uniformity

All the private schools, government schools and government-aided schools of Delhi, recognized/affiliated up to primary, middle, secondary or senior secondary level shall uniformly follow the norm of having only one year of pre-primary class from the academic session 2008-09 beginning from 1st April, 2008.

5.08 Managing the Transition

When the new norms of pre-primary education are implemented from the academic year 2008-09, schools will be required to make certain adjustments to respond to new needs created by the reorganization of the pre- primary classes. Firstly, the Government of Delhi will have to arrive at a plan of action and provide adequate resources to start one year of pre-primary class in all the government and government-aided schools of Delhi. Secondly, when the pre-primary class is reduced to one year, private schools having two or three years of pre-primary will have to reorganize and re-allocate resources including teachers. The Committee is aware of this difficulty. The Committee, therefore, strongly recommends that schools should be given the freedom to carry out this process of transition to one year of pre-primary education in a phased manner so that within a period of two to three years i.e. by the year 2010-11 all such schools shall have one year pre-primary class uniformly.

5.09 Content and Methodology

In order to carry out the pre-school programme in a proper manner, the curriculum and activities would have to be very different from what is done at the formal education stage and from what obtains in most such schools currently. Besides, holistic and informal pre-school education should also take into account issues of health, nutrition and early childhood development aspects. So the Committee recommends that the content and methodology for pre-primary education should be evolved by experts in the field and the same should be implemented by all the schools. A Committee of experts may be constituted for this purpose and the content and methodology suggested by that Committee may be implemented in all the schools from 2008-09. In the interim period, the Committee recommends certain do's and don'ts for pre-primary education. These may be provided to schools for their guidance. To facilitate the implementation of this provision, the Committee has attached some

guidelines with this report which may be used by schools till they are provided with more detailed content and methodology.

5.10 The Road Ahead

- The unprecedented expansion of Early Childhood Education facilities in the country in general and urban areas like Delhi in particular has neither been uniform nor quality-driven. Care and education of young children at this critical stage can not be merely custodial but must be developmental in nature. In order to streamline this critical stage in a child's education, reliable information and data about the pre school facilities available in Delhi have to be collected. The Directorate of Education, Delhi may take the initiative and conduct a survey of schools of Delhi to ascertain the position with reference to both pre-primary and pre school facilities available to the children of Delhi. After collecting the data, the unserved habitations can be identified and appropriate measures can be taken to provide the requisite facilities.
- Experts in ECCE could be involved in developing the necessary guidelines with regard to the infrastructure, trained teachers and supporting staff, content and methodology within a fixed time frame. Apex national organizations like National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT) may be involved who may develop the appropriate content for pre-primary as well as pre school class.
- Availability of trained teachers for pre school and pre-primary education should receive the attention it deserves. So training of teachers, both pre service and in-service, must receive greater focus. Apex national institutions like National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) and other organizations providing quality Kindergarten and Montessori education, may be requested to evolve a module of teacher training specially meant for this stage of education for children. It may be necessary to even revise the existing curriculum of pre service teacher training courses in different institutions.
- Maintaining a good adult-child ratio at this stage is very important. So while changing over to one year of pre-primary education in future, redeployment of teachers should be made in such a manner that a good adult-child ratio is maintained.
- While expanding the facility of pre-primary education to all the government and government aided schools, attention should be paid to quality parameters. The pre-primary education offered in the government schools should be of comparable quality so that the children coming from the sections of society that these schools are serving get a solid foundation for all round development.

Drawing up norms and standards for pre-primary and pre school education, evolving a responsive and responsible monitoring mechanism and providing appropriate curricular inputs with teacher training facilities are the main areas that deserve immediate attention. A good beginning can be made in Delhi if all the educational institutions including schools come together and make a concerted effort to raise the standards of Early Childhood Care and Education. Our young children deserve the best and Delhi has the potential to deliver. If this vision could be realized in a fixed time frame, it will set in motion a change process in other parts of the country that will lead to a total transformation of Early Childhood Care and Education for the children of our nation.

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DATE : 31ST MARCH, 2007

SOME GUIDELINES FOR PRE-PRIMARY AND PRE SCHOOL EDUCATION

In order to ensure some degree of standardization of quality in the Early Childhood Education Programmes that are presently offered in different types of schools, a concerted effort should be made with the help of experts in the field, to evolve regulations, rules and guidelines for implementation. However, it will require some time. So the Committee has thought it fit to provide some guidelines in terms of desirable and undesirable elements. It is hoped that the schools as well as the regulating agencies like Directorates of Education will find the guidelines useful.

Desirable

- Clean, safe and healthy environment free of hazards
- Adequate space for play and movement, both indoors and outdoors
- Facilities for clean water and toilets appropriate for children
- Adequate space for storage of play and other equipment and materials
- First Aid Kit and arrangements for emergency medical care
- Regular medical check-up and screening of children
- Presence of trained child care givers
- Ratio of children to adult categories : one adult to eight-ten children (for children of age 2 to 4)
- Flexible daily schedule appropriate to age, including developmental activities of various kinds
- Play and developmental materials appropriate to age
- Timings convenient for parents and children
- Safe transportation facilities appropriate for young children
- Nutritious, hygienic and balanced food, adequate in terms of quantity, quality and frequency for each age group, appropriate to age (wherever food is provided in the school)

Undesirable

- Introduction of formal education (reading, writing and arithmetic)
- Activities associated with formal education and evaluation such as tests, marks, grades etc.
- Activities involving competition and competitive achievement such as prizes, stars and other rewards
- Materials such as textbooks. (However, picture books, drawing and colouring books, pattern books, worksheets and other pre-reading, pre-writing and pre-arithmetic materials may be used appropriate to age)
- Home tasks and assignments
- Selection procedure based on ability testing or screening for any pre-determined qualities

