

THE TIMES OF INDIA

'Schools second home, let children express emotions'

Meghna Dhulia
@timesofindia.com

New Delhi: Even as protests erupt over the death of a Class X student, teachers and principals say schools have long been working to create safe, trusting and emotionally supportive spaces for children. Many describe the school environment as a "home away from home", a place where students feel secure enough to share what they cannot always express at home. The goal, they say, is to ensure no child feels alone or unheard during the hours they spend on campus.

To build this atmosphere, schools rely on structured communication systems, sensitisation workshops and close teacher-student engagement. "We held a sensitisation session for our teachers, an interactive workshop with role play. Our two counsellors led it to make teachers comfortable and simply reiterate what they already know. With today's children, it's not a power struggle; you just need to know how to deal with them," said Tania Joshi, principal of The Indian School. "I've worked in three or four schools and I can safely say I haven't seen a child being targeted. Even during discipline conversations, we explain why something is good for them rather than humiliating them."

Joshi pointed out, "You appeal to the child; they do understand what's happening. We also have a full system in place with counsellors and peer educators from senior classes. During breaks, they run a programme called 'You Speak, I Listen', where younger students can talk to them. It builds responsibility in seniors and creates a sense of brotherhood and friendliness."

For psychologists, the early warning signs teachers spot are often the most crucial. When emotional distress shows up as physical complaints or reluctance to attend school, teachers' sensitivity can prevent escalation.

"Before a child reaches a counsellor, teachers often observe early signs — changes in behaviour, emotional withdrawal, reluctance to attend school, recurring physical complaints or a sudden loss of

interest. In one instance, a student repeatedly reported stomach aches despite no medical concerns. When I spoke with her, it became clear she was experiencing mild anxiety and feeling overwhelmed because she couldn't follow parts of the syllabus," said Kadambari Katoch, a psychologist who works with adolescents in education settings.

"Children don't always understand or articulate their emotional experiences, so these concerns often appear through physical symptoms, increased fearfulness or sensitivity. Teachers play a crucial

little attention, being constantly compared or growing up amid parental conflict, separation or single-parent situations. These circumstances can make them aggressive, cause small problems to feel overwhelming and build ego-related behaviour." Students must be taught problem-solving skills and motivated in the areas they excel, she added.

Pathak said workshops were conducted for teachers before every session and instructions were given and explained in detail. "We take signatures on every guideline: no punishment, no touching, no abusive

Across schools, teachers, however, also point out that the emotional burden they carry has grown sharply in recent years, often without being fully recognised. Beyond teaching, they are expected to spot early signs of distress, manage behavioural shifts, support children coping with family conflict and respond to the needs of increasingly diverse classrooms

role in noticing these early indicators, and many of them do this with great care and commitment," she added.

Across schools, teachers, however, also point out that the emotional burden they carry has grown sharply in recent years, often without being fully recognised. Beyond teaching, they are expected to spot early signs of distress, manage behavioural shifts, support children coping with family conflict and respond to the needs of increasingly diverse classrooms.

"People don't realise how much teachers hold. Our work is deeply meaningful but emotionally exhausting, especially when we absorb students' anxieties while suppressing our own," said a teacher of DPS Dwarka. "With rising academic pressure, parental expectations and the rapid emotional swings of adolescence, it becomes a high-stakes environment where even one missed sign can have consequences. We try to look out for children who seem withdrawn or upset, but cooperation from parents is paramount."

Rooma Pathak, principal of MM Public School in Pitampura, said, "Schools cannot be blamed for everything. Many issues begin at home — children feeling ignored, receiving

language and no reprimanding a child in front of the class."

Teachers also send referral forms if they notice any academic or behavioural change and the counsellor meets the child, and if necessary, parents. "The counsellor's finding has to be taken seriously and parents have to be made accountable," Pathak emphasised.

Katoch said, "Schools are complex environments, and no single person can be expected to handle everything alone. This is why strengthening school systems becomes important through structured mental health programmes, clear processes for referral and regular teacher sensitisation on mental health."

A senior teacher of a private school said communication remained the foundation of support inside classrooms. "We have open talk sessions, wellness spaces and calm zones, and teachers make time for one-to-one conversations, peer mates, suggestion boxes. Children open up when they feel heard," she said.

"Raising voice doesn't work; children today face far more pressure, so they need acceptance, gentle guidance, and clarity about what's right or wrong. Trust and open communication are essential," she emphasised.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

Hybrid learning not implemented by schools in letter & spirit, claim parents

Megha Dhulia
@timesofindia.com

New Delhi: Parents whose kids are enrolled in some of Delhi's private schools have started complaining about how hybrid classes are being undermined, perhaps at the cost of students in the middle of rising air pollution.

They said the concept of hybrid schooling was being stretched, misused and in some cases, completely undermined.

According to them, some private schools are disregarding the Directorate of Education's (DoE) guidelines, which mandate a genuine hybrid option during periods of severe pollution. Although AQL levels have soared, some schools have insisted on mandatory in-person attendance for most of the week, offering online classes only on some days.

A recent notification issued by a school in Old Delhi has deepened such concerns. Parents were told that classes Nursery 1 to Class II would continue in "hybrid mode" as per the DoE circular, but the timetable left little room for pa-

rental choice. On-campus attendance was required on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday. Online classes were limited to Wednesday and Saturday. In a few other schools, the option of "online" was not implemented at all.

Aprajita Gautam, president of the Delhi Parents Association, said: "Many schools don't even understand what hybrid learning actually means. Some are not giving the option at all; their classes are still entirely offline."

Hybrid mode means "parents should have the choice of online or offline classes. Schools simply don't want to give that option", she said. "In private schools, there is no reason not to offer the hybrid option. It is easily doable."

Parents say the rigidity defeats the purpose of hybrid learning. "If we cannot choose whether our child should attend classes in person or online, calling it hybrid is misleading," a parent whose child studies in Class II in the same school said. "They call it hybrid learning, but we don't really get the freedom to choose."

said Deepali, a resident of Dwarka. "When pollution spikes, the school still demands that my child be in class for most of the week." She feels the schools are using the hybrid format as a "technical escape hatch", rather than offering real flexibility.

EXPERTS SAY

We are demanding hybrid because children who are unwell should not be forced to attend classes in person... Pollution affects children the most

Education experts pointed out that younger children or those with health vulnerabilities ended up being the biggest sufferers. The seasonal pollution cycle requires planning, Gautam said, and suggested that the schools allow a 10-15 day "pollution holiday" along with hybrid or online options for all grades. "We are demanding hybrid because children

who are unwell or sensitive should not be forced to attend classes in person... Pollution affects children the most. Many end up needing nebulisers."

She also pointed out that the schools "do not take govt advisories seriously. Govt should issue orders, not advisories, and also provide a helpline where parents can report a school refusing to offer hybrid mode."

Schools, on the other hand, have their own challenges. Rooma Pathak, principal of MM Public School in Pitampura, said that last year's frequent switches between online and offline modes created disruptions in lessons. "Online classes are tough to do with younger children. You can't expect a Class III student to stay focused on a screen for three hours. They log in and vanish," she said.

Govt schools face additional hurdles such as screen access to students. A principal from a north Delhi govt school said: "Some homes have only one phone, and parents take it to work. Or it's shared among siblings. Without adult supervision, students get careless."