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Respected Sh. Prakash Javadekar Ji!

As we meet for the 54th General Council meeting of the NCERT, it is important that we use this opportunity, not merely to discuss administrative issues, but engage on the core function of NCERT - the creation of textbooks for millions of students who are studying in schools across the country. At the outset, let me congratulate you for initiating the process of reviewing the textbooks in all subject areas and specifically seeking suggestions from the teachers in this regard.

Textbooks have often been changed with the change of governments. As new governments come in, they critique the earlier books. However, the tragedy of our education system is that these critiques are only ideological. Some governments bring in left-wing academicians, others bring in right-wing academicians and they criticize textbooks and curriculum on ideological grounds. However, this ideological battle ignores the very person who needs to be at the centre of this debate: the child.

The Government of NCT of Delhi has been strongly committed to improving the quality of government school education. As an Education Minister I have personally interacted with hundreds of students in the past two years, talking to them, visiting their classrooms, seeing their notebooks, discussing their curriculum and textbooks. I think it is important to review our textbooks from their perspective. We need to move beyond the dichotomy of left and right and bring the child to the centre of our discussion. I believe that the NCERT books need to be reviewed from the following perspective:

- Is the textbooks child friendly across all stage? In other words, does it help children build on their own life experiences in their quest for learning?
- Are these books appropriate for the children's existing learning levels? Is their language child-friendly?
- Do these books attract and interest children? In other words, do children look forward to picking it up and reading on their own as curious reader to know or understand some interesting phenomena or events?

I could have constituted a committee to examine the textbooks and come up with answers to these questions. But I choose to take different route. Over the last few months, I have personally read the textbooks published by NCERT, particularly the ones prepared for students of Std 1 to 8. Have met close to 200 school teachers in different groups, hundreds of students in different government schools and detailed sessions with about 20 teachers who have been teaching students of Std 6 to 10 in the government schools of Delhi for the period ranging from 3 to 20 years. In this process we

closely examined the textbooks of Hindi, English, Maths, Natural Science/Environmental Science and Social Science.

Before sharing our observations on the points that we have raised above, let me also tell you the extent of the usage of these books in government schools of Delhi. We have 1024 schools run by the Directorate of Education, Government of NCT Delhi. The authorised textbooks in our schools are the ones published by NCERT. For Std 1 to 8 having about 7.5 lacs children, the Delhi Bureau of Textbooks publishes and distributes the books prepared by NCERT. About 7 lacs students enrolled in Std 9 to 12, purchase the books published by NCERT directly from bookshops using the financial assistance provided by the government.

We reviewed these books (particularly the ones for Std 3 to 8) subject wise and our detailed inputs are enclosed. However, the excerpts of our analyses are as follows:

GENERAL COMMENTS:

1. Overall upto Std 5, the books attempts to strike connect with children but from Std 6 onwards it becomes extremely text heavy.
2. Except for the book "Social and Political Life" (Saamajik Evam Rajnaitik Jeevan) in Social Science it is not clear at times whether the book is for children or their teachers. Are textbooks intended for teachers to teach from? Are they intended for reading aloud in the classroom? Are they intended for students to read before they come to the classroom? Or after they have been taught the lesson? I believe that we need to re-think the purpose of our textbooks. I believe that we need to re-think the purpose of the textbooks.
3. In the light of the evidence available through Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) of last many years which points that more than 40% students in Std 6 cannot read a text of Std 2 level, is it appropriate to design the books with so heavy texts? Our own baseline survey done by the teachers in July 2016 of their students in Std 6 of the Government schools of Delhi found that 74% students could not read a paragraph from their own textbooks. Under these circumstances, is it appropriate to design a book where the text is organised in double column with single space and small font size making the page look extremely dense. Science textbooks starting from Std 6 onwards is precisely like that. The very design of the textbooks excludes a large segment of children in our classroom.

SCIENCE

Contrary to the intention of having an interaction with a child, the tone in the Science textbooks from Std 6 to 8 is very directional leaving little scope of any dialogue. The language in Hindi medium books is extremely difficult and uses words that even you and I would not understand easily, let alone children who are struggling with basic reading skills. The heavy language creates a scenario of exclusion of these children from gaining any knowledge on these subjects, and they are left with no choice but to memorise the information in the books. This difficult language the chain of thoughts for the child and therefore the complexity of language comes in the way of understanding the scientific concept. Meaning of the scientific term along with illustration on the same page where it is mentioned would better serve the purpose rather than giving it at the end of the chapter.

MATHEMATICS

In Mathematics, there seems to be an information overload. The activities are lost in detailed instructions. The emphasis seems more on algorithm to arrive at the right answer. All questions in the textbooks require children only to use the algorithm, rather than connect mathematics to their live. Building from concrete and connecting it with abstract is missing therefore it becomes difficult for the child to find any relation between the mathematics in her daily life with the one presented in her book. The very approach to mathematics needs to change; to first connect it with the child's life and then take it towards abstract concepts.

ENGLISH

English is not the first language of most children in our schools. In most cases, there is very little scope for the child to hear English other than those during the English period. Despite this, activities on listening and speaking are largely missing from the textbooks. Further, the writing task in primary grades textbooks is without visual or verbal clues. Text in the upper primary class books are not contemporary hence the child finds it difficult to establish connect. Many stories have difficult vocabulary and complex themes.

HINDI

Hindi textbooks, particularly those for Std 6 to 8, the choice of text assumes that by the time children come to upper primary classes they can read text whether narrative or informative quite fluently. However, if that is not the case than the text, due to varied form of languages in different prose and poetry comes in the way of child understanding. For example, there are many stories related to Gandhiji's life that would be of interest to children and that can communicate the desired values to them but the choice for Std 7, "Ashram Ka Anuamanit Vyay" leaves the child to deal with items which are not in use anymore and calculation of cost with little clarity on what it seeks to teach.

SOCIAL SCIENCE

Social Science comes across as a vast subject having three textbooks in upper primary classes- Social and Political Life, Geography and History. I would like to compliment you on the quality and creativity of the 'Social and Political Life' (SPL) textbooks. Many other textbooks need to learn from these SPL books, especially its attempts to relate the subject with the world around the child. In terms of design, the textbook of SPL looks the most interactive with several examples. However the examples, instead of being illustrative for the child are mentioned as exhaustive or so it turns out to be. For example, in the textbook of Std 6, page 99 there is a question to the child to state the nature of inequality faced by a charter in the textbook. This promotes rote learning and does not encourage the child to critically reflect on inequality that she/he encounters in their own life. Out of all the Social Science textbooks, the one's which seem most child-unfriendly are the geography books- being content and concept heavy, without any attempts to relate the subject to the life of the child. In Std 7, the chapter "Hamari Prithvi ke Andar" several information related to the interior of earth is explained in just three pages. These are pure facts and the way it is presented leaves no option for the child to just cram it and reproduce in exams. One small size map is used to illustrate several phenomenon. History textbook is the most overloaded in terms of content, of all the three in Social Science subject. In Std 6 itself there are 12 chapters. There are too many cross referencing across different chapters. The Std 7 textbook covers the content which is taught in two full papers in

the undergraduate degree in Delhi University. Towards the end of chapter it says, "Aao Phir Se Yaad Karen" (Let us memorise again). This approach reiterates the fact that history can be learnt only by memorising key dates and events.

These are some of the examples. Please refer the enclosures for more detailed analyses.

We are sharing our inputs with you with the expectation that the next series of NCERT textbooks would be significantly better than the current series. We would like to suggest that at the beginning of each chapter or topic, the objectives of teaching that topic/chapter, how it connects with the previous topics/chapters and what learning outcome is sought to be achieved by teaching that should be stated. This approach might help you in determining what should be included and what should be left out.

Delhi government conducted an extensive exercise where 24,000 teachers were involved in the creation of supplementary material, 'Pragati', that attempts to overcome the shortcomings in the textbooks, as felt by the teachers themselves. I am also including some sample copies of 'Pragati', for your reference, as to how textbooks can be made more engaging and child-friendly.

I hope you find our inputs useful and we look forward to next edition of the NCERT textbooks that caters to the emerging learning needs of today's children.

Regards



Manish Sisodia

Deputy Chief Minister and Education Minister

Mr. Prakash Javadekar,
Chairperson NCERT &
Minister for Human Resource Development
Government of India

Copy to : Education Ministers of all states.

Enclosures

1. Annexure 1: Science and EVS
2. Annexure 2: English
3. Annexure 3: Maths
4. Annexure 4: Social Science
5. Annexure 5: Hindi