

# Promoting Quality and Sustainable Schools

## Background Note

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***The rate of change of society in which we live forces us to redefine how we shall educate a new generation.***

### 1. Introduction:

Today, it is universally accepted that the future of a nation is built in its classrooms. *Education liberates the intellect, unlocks the imagination and is fundamental for self-respect. It is the key to prosperity and opens a world of opportunities, making it possible for each of us to contribute to a progressive, healthy society. Learning benefits every human being and should be available to all.*

And therefore, the quest to provide good quality education is an ongoing one. Quality education equips the learners with much more than the ability to read a textbook and reproduce answers. It begins with providing our children with a skill set, an ability to think creatively, analyze logically, innovate and create effortlessly.

What should be the goals in this quest of quality education for each child?

Is my eighth grader able to understand the soil in his backyard and think of vegetables to plant or the techniques that will support its produce? Can my fifth grader start a drive to collect all plastic bottles and use them to plant saplings? Can my tenth grader build solar panels to make sure the school lowers its carbon footprint?

We live in uncertain times, a volatile world which faces challenges of climate change, depletion of resources, political upheavals, gross economic and social inequalities coupled with the havoc of disease and malnutrition. As policy makers and educators we should focus on developing an education system that preserves what matters, spreads and sustains itself in ways that will create positive outcomes when combined with learning objectives.

The purpose of education has been and always will be to empower, to impart skills and knowledge that will enhance the child's philosophy or mindset. Even psychologists believe that learning occurs when there is a change in the behavior of the subject, when the learner finds his/ her education to be worthwhile and meaningful.

**The Quality of Education provided directly corresponds to Quality of life or Sustainable living.**

Quality education encompasses the following aspects: programme/ curriculum design, learning resources, pedagogy, assessment designs, teacher competency and technology. Sustainability, on the other hand is concerned with sound management of resources (environmental and others) that requires a change in thinking and practice.

Promoting Quality and Sustainable Schools is an ongoing quest of developing schools, building school culture and communities in directions that benefit all learners, now and in the future and at the same time minimize our negative environmental impact. This vision of Quality and Sustainable Schools is an approach to strive a balance between society, economy and environment.

Schools are in the best position to raise awareness, generate knowledge and create community partnerships. A school engaged in sustainable practices is invested in learning for the future. Teaching based on sustainable development will be richer and more relevant. A curriculum that promotes learning as an on-going and self-directed adventure will inculcate in learners practices that would support a lifetime of continuous learning.

While, there are major opportunities for schools to make a difference but there are also serious responsibilities. The sustainability agenda cannot be delivered with tokenism or superficial promises. We need to place sustainability at the core of the educational process rather than the sidelines.

## **2. Recommendations in NEP- 2020 on the theme**

The National Education Policy 2020 envisions a paradigm shift in how we approach education. Its recommendations on how we can usher a high quality of education at all levels are detailed below-

- Quality education shall be inclusive and equitable and promote learning opportunities for all.
- Holistic development of learners- The overall thrust of curriculum and pedagogy reforms across all stages will be to move the education system towards real understanding and towards learning how to learn - and away from the prevalent culture of rote learning. The aim of education will not only be cognitive development, but also building character and creating holistic and well-rounded individuals equipped with the key 21st century skills.
- All aspects of curriculum and pedagogy will be reoriented and revamped to attain these critical goals. Specific sets of skills and values across domains

will be identified for integration and incorporation at each stage of learning, from pre-school to higher education. Curriculum frameworks and transaction mechanisms will be developed for ensuring that these skills and values are imbibed through engaging processes of teaching and learning. NCERT will identify these required skill sets and include mechanisms for their transaction in the National Curriculum Framework for early childhood and school education.

- Reduce curriculum content to enhance essential learning and critical thinking - Curriculum content will be reduced in each subject to its core essentials, to make space for critical thinking and more holistic, inquiry-based, discovery-based, discussion-based, and analysis based learning. The mandated content will focus on key concepts, ideas, applications, and problem solving. Teaching and learning will be conducted in a more interactive manner; questions will be encouraged, and classroom sessions will regularly contain more fun, creative, collaborative, and exploratory activities for students for deeper and more experiential learning.

### **3. Way Forward (action points and challenges)**

The thrust towards quality and sustainable schools is a whole school approach where all aspects including curriculum design, transaction, pedagogy, learning environment, school environment and teacher capacities are aligned towards optimum use of available resources. This may be achieved through the following measures:

- Schools need to build internal and external capacity
- Focus on campus, curriculum and community
- Encourage inclusion and participation of learners
- Support collaborative learning
- Create experiential lessons
- Build an ethos of 'every child matters and every child contributes to the learning of others'
- Learn the value of taking action and participation
- Engage students and teachers in a culture of learning
- Change the way children interact, discuss and do things
- Evolve their own quality criteria
- Assess learning and competency in a new light

In such schools, the teaching and learning approach must have the learner at the centre and provide contexts to develop students' own ideas, values and perspectives. Teachers must consider students as active agents in the construction of their knowledge.

#### **4. Conclusion:**

Quality and Sustainable Schools need a continuous quest embedded in a structure with regular assessment and revision of quality criteria and concrete action plans.

- Schools need to become system leaders – to reorient the educative process, as they develop, implement and share outcomes to encourage, empower and support others to meet the expectations of the National Education Policy 2020.
- The need of the hour is to create a powerful strategic partnership encompassing schools, non-governmental organizations and industry that will enable schools to become models of best sustainable practices; enhance teaching and learning through active and inclusive approaches to education for sustainability; and equip young people and local communities with the capability to safeguard the future.

Thus, through this multi-dimensional, multi-disciplinary and humanistic approach, we can equip our children to adapt to change, by reorienting education and learning so that everyone has an opportunity to acquire knowledge, skills, values and attitudes that empower him/her to contribute to a more sustainable future.