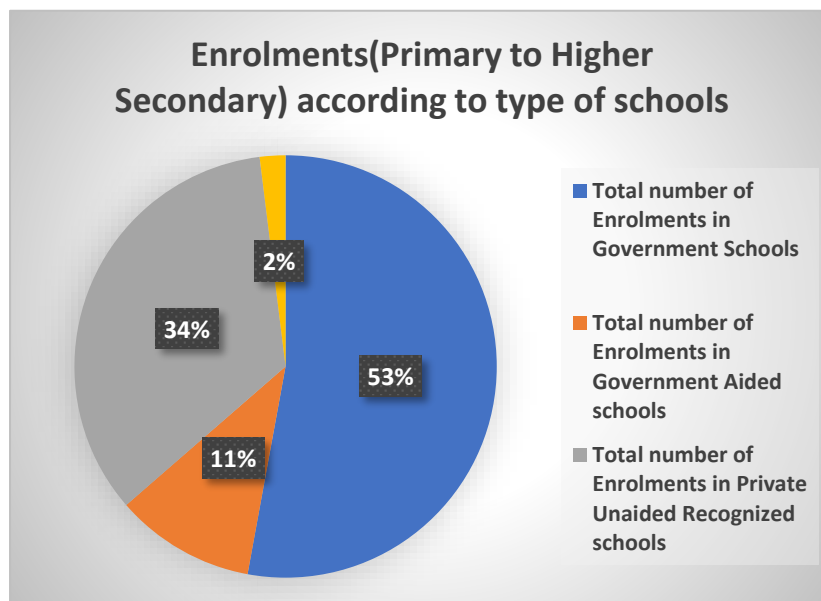
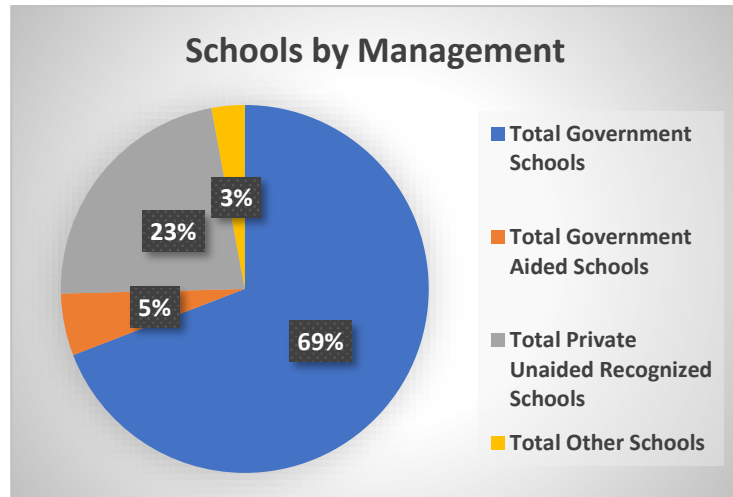


## The Case for Prioritising Government School Education

### A problem of scale

India's government school system serves over 13 crore students across more than 10 lakh schools.<sup>1</sup> This represents approximately 55% of all school-going children in the country.

The Indian education system is among the largest in the world. Government schools in India have more students than the entire population of Japan.<sup>2</sup> Over half of the children in India attend government schools or rely on the government, directly or indirectly, for their education. This number is far lower than in other developed countries. The U.S., for instance, has 90% of its students in public schools (83% in traditional public schools and 7% in public charter schools),<sup>3</sup> while 90% of students attend public schools in Japan until the 9<sup>th</sup> grade.<sup>4</sup>



<sup>5</sup>However, what sets government schools apart is the fact that they are often the only option for millions of families. Government schools are the only institutions serving remote villages, tribal areas, urban slums, and marginalised communities. In more urban areas, despite government schools offering completely free education, private school preference is higher. Domestic workers, drivers, daily wage labourers and others take on an additional financial burden to send their

<sup>1</sup> "INDIA'S SCHOOL EDUCATION SYSTEM SERVES 24.8 CRORE STUDENTS ACROSS 14.72 LAKH SCHOOLS WITH 98 LAKH TEACHERS: ECONOMIC SURVEY 2024-25." Accessed December 8, 2025. <https://www.pib.gov.in/www.pib.gov.in/Pressreleaseshare.aspx?PRID=2097864>.

<sup>2</sup> "Statistics Bureau Home Page/Population Estimates Monthly Report." Accessed December 8, 2025. <https://www.stat.go.jp/english/data/jinsui/tsuki/index.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Schaeffer, Katherine. "U.S. Public, Private and Charter Schools in 5 Charts." *Pew Research Center*, June 6, 2024. <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2024/06/06/us-public-private-and-charter-schools-in-5-charts/>.

<sup>4</sup> University, © Stanford, Stanford, and California 94305. "Japanese Education." Accessed December 8, 2025. [http://spice.fsi.stanford.edu/docs/japanese\\_education](http://spice.fsi.stanford.edu/docs/japanese_education).

<sup>5</sup> *Supra note 1*

children to private schools because of the perceived quality gap between government and private schools.<sup>6</sup>

Therefore, if the quality of government schools goes up, the private schools will be forced to up their game to attract the students. Improving government school education is key to improving the quality of education in India.

The foundation of India's future depends on how well we educate the 13 crore children in government schools, and therefore on how we improve the system of government schools. If we fail to improve government schools, we are not just maintaining the status quo. We are actively deepening inequality.

## The Investment Paradox

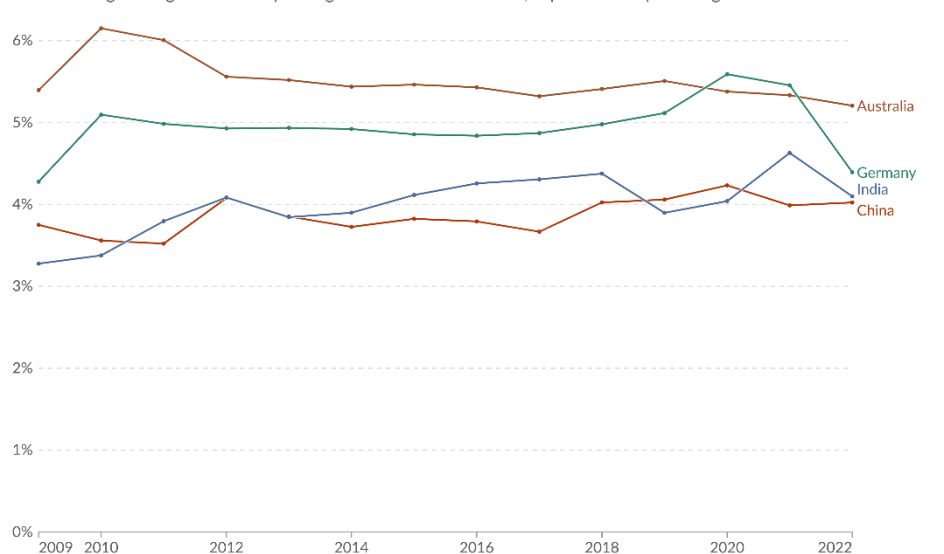
India's Union Budget in 2025-26 allocates Rs 1.28 trillion to education.<sup>7</sup> On average, the government spends 3%-4.1% of its total GDP on education.<sup>8</sup> The government spends up to Rs. 85,000 per child in government schools like Kendriya Vidyalayas,<sup>9</sup> with an average of over Rs 55,000 per child in government schools.<sup>10</sup>

Despite these investments, learning outcomes remain dismal. The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2024 revealed that only 33.7% of Class III students in government schools are at least a Class

II-level in reading and arithmetic - meaning two out of three children in Class III have already fallen behind grade-

### Government spending on education as a share of GDP

Total annual general government<sup>1</sup> spending on all levels of education, expressed as a percentage of GDP<sup>2</sup>.



Data source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2025); Tanzi & Schuknecht (2000)

OurWorldinData.org/financing-education | CC BY

<sup>6</sup> Chaturvedi, Megha. "If Government Schools Are Free, Why Don't We Send Our Kids There?" India Today, August 4, 2025. <https://www.indiatoday.in/education-today/featurephilia/story/if-government-schools-are-free-why-dont-we-send-our-kids-there-2765866-2025-08-04>.

<sup>7</sup> Standard, Business. "Budget 2025: India's Education Budget Grows, but Lags behind Global Trends." February 6, 2025. [https://www.business-standard.com/education/news/union-budget-2025-education-allocation-growth-global-comparison-125020600340\\_1.html](https://www.business-standard.com/education/news/union-budget-2025-education-allocation-growth-global-comparison-125020600340_1.html).

<sup>8</sup> "Economic Survey." Accessed December 2, 2025. <https://www.indiabudget.gov.in/budget2023-24/economicsurvey/index.php>; World Bank Open Data. "World Bank Open Data." Accessed December 2, 2025. <https://data.worldbank.org>.

<sup>9</sup> "How Have States Designed Their School Education Budgets?" CBGA India, n.d. Accessed December 2, 2025. <https://www.cbgaindia.org/study-report/states-designed-school-education-budgets/>.

<sup>10</sup> J, Prashanth Perumal. "Should Govts Give ₹55,000 per Year to Every Student Instead of Running Schools?" Education. *The Hindu*, September 21, 2024. <https://www.thehindu.com/education/55000year-can-govt-give-this-as-cash-to-each-student-instead-of-running-schools/article68667142.ece>.

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level expectations.<sup>11</sup>

As the numbers show, this is not a resource problem. It is an efficiency problem: a car's engine needs proper maintenance, clean oil, and all parts working in harmony to run smoothly. Similarly, our education system requires more than just money. It needs better implementation, motivated teachers, community engagement, and better tools at every level.

### **The Benchmark Effect**

Strong public institutions raise the bar for everyone. When government schools are excellent, private schools cannot get away with mediocrity.

In countries with outstanding public education systems like Finland, Japan, and South Korea, the quality of public schools is so high that they set the standard. Private schools compete on quality, innovation, and specialised offerings rather than being perceived as "better than government schools."

In these countries, attending a public school is not seen as a compromise or a last resort. It is seen as a perfectly acceptable choice even for families who can afford private education. The result is that education is driven by pedagogical excellence rather than solely by profit motives, and educational opportunities are more evenly distributed across society.

A developed country is not a place where the poor have cars. It's where the rich use public transportation. Education is a mission, not a market. A strong government school system is essential for equitable growth and long-term societal development. It ensures that education remains focused on learning outcomes rather than becoming a commodity in which only those who can pay receive quality. It reduces the pressure on middle-class families who stretch their budgets to avoid government schools. Most importantly, it ensures that every child, regardless of their family's economic status, has access to education that can genuinely transform their life.

"Vinoba focuses on strengthening India's future by improving learning in government school classrooms across rural and urban India. Government schools serve the nation's most disadvantaged communities, making them the most critical lever for systemic impact."

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<sup>11</sup> "ASER 2024." *ASER: Annual Status of Education Report*, n.d. Accessed December 2, 2025. <https://asercentre.org/asere-2024/>.