

MHRD REPORT ON MID-DAY MEAL SCHEME

'63% schools still use firewood for cooking'

Report also slammed state education department for poor coverage of the scheme

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A RECENT review of the Mid-day Meal Scheme (MDMS) by the Union Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) has revealed that around 63 per cent schools in the state still use firewood for cooking, instead of the preferred LPG.

The MHRD's review report has also slammed the state education department for poor coverage of the scheme.

As per the report, of the total 86,707 schools covered under MDMS in the state, around 84,523 schools have in-house kitchens. Of this, only 31,546 (37 per cent) schools use LPG, it added.

"The state government must take action to get this practice discontinued and encourage school kitchens to use LPG for cooking mid-day meals," the report stated.

The large-scale use of firewood by schools has also been criticised by environmentalists who said the method leads to air pollution, it added.

Officials of the state education department claimed they have already initiated the process of replacing the age-old method, of using firewood for cooking, with LPG.

Following a review of the

ISSUES IN RECENT REVIEW

■ Surrender of Rs 34.15 crore sanctioned for 5,693 kitchen sheds and the interest accrued there on Rs 116 crore approx, as on February 2016, is still awaited

■ Construction of 12,694 kitchen-cum-stores has not yet started

■ Payment of honorarium to cook-cum-helpers through cheque in 13 districts

■ Cook-cum-helpers not engaged in Mumbai, Thane and Palghar regions, where MDM is served through a centralised kitchen

■ In Palghar, and NGO is serving meals in schools of rural areas, travelling as far as 55 kms

■ 31,546 (37 per cent) schools use LPG

scheme in February 2017, MHRD has also pointed out poor cover-

AADHAAR CARD MUST TO AVAIL MDM

Mumbai : In a separate notification issued on February 28, the government has also mandated that all MDM beneficiaries must have an Aadhaar Card, or at least started the process of getting one. The notification has also clarified that in case a student has not even applied for an Aadhaar, his/her identity needs to be certified using government documents.

age of the scheme in five districts of Maharashtra.

The financial capital of the state — Mumbai — for the fourth consecutive year, has topped the list of poor performing districts for MDMS, the report had pointed out.

The districts, which reportedly have the lowest coverage of children under MDMS include, Mumbai (64 per cent), Hingoli (66 per cent), Washim (68 per cent), Raigad (68 per cent), Jalna (68 per cent), Latur (71 per cent), in both primary and upper primary schools.

The MHRD officials, however, lauded the state government for developing a daily MDMS monitoring system.

Last year, officials of the

union ministry had questioned the state on why as many as 207 schools in Mumbai have stopped serving mid-day meals.

"We found out that many parents had complained about the quality of food being served in these schools, hence they preferred giving home-cooked food to their wards," said Nand Kumar, principal secretary of the state school education department.

The low standard and quality of food, served under the Mid-day Meal Scheme, was also pointed out by the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) 2015 report.

The report had revealed that around 97 per cent of the samples of the food being served under the scheme in Mumbai schools over the past five years, failed to meet the standards.

On an average, 66 per cent of the 269 selected schools did not provide cooked meals on all school days between 2010 and 2015, the CAG report, on general and social sector for the year ended March 2015, had pointed out.

This report was tabled during the ongoing monsoon session of Maharashtra Legislature.

The state government's data of the number of schools and students covered under the Mid-day Meal Scheme from 2014-15

to 2017-18 reveals that the numbers have dropped.

According to the data, in academic year 2014-15, 97,62,850 students were covered under MDMS in 86,177 schools, in 2015-16 93,94,423 students were covered in 86,660 schools and in 2016-17 95,43,137 are covered in 86,867 schools.

The state government's statistics for the academic year 2017-18 states that as many as 92,19,397 students are covered in 86,707 schools. The number of beneficiaries under the MDMS in the state showed a decline.

A school education department official said: "There are different reasons for poor performance in different districts for MDMS. Like drought-affected areas had students not attending schools due to shortage of water.

Many schools in some of the districts complained of not receiving advance money towards the cooking cost."

The officials added that there was a delay, in disbursing advance for cooking cost, of more than a month in Sangli, Satara, Sholapur and Pune. The delay was over three to four months in areas of Gondia, Gadchiroli, Chandrapur, Wardha and Nagpur. Besides, there were also issues of irregular payment of remuneration.