

PERFORMANCE AUDIT

CHAPTER II
GENERAL EDUCATION DEPARTMENT
Performance Audit of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Kerala (SSAK)

Highlights

Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), a flagship programme of Government of India (GOI) is implemented in the State with the objective of universal access and retention, bridging of gender and social category gaps in education and enhancement of learning levels of children in the 6 to 14 age group. The programme is implemented in the State by Primary Education Development Society of Kerala (PEDSK). The Performance Audit revealed deficiencies in providing services to Children With Special Needs (CWSN), identifying gaps and areas where new schools needed to be opened, deployment of Resource Teachers, etc.

SSAK did not possess reliable data on Out of School Children (OOSC). Out of 128 OOSC surveyed by Audit, 100 belonged to ST and SC communities.

(Paragraph 2.7.1)

SSAK reckoned the number of children as CWSN without proper assessment. SSAK did not ensure delivery of adequate support services required by CWSN.

(Paragraph 2.7.2.2)

Deployment of Resource Teachers (RTs) was not related to the number of CWSN and the nature of their disability. There was a disproportionately large number of RTs trained in Mental Retardation (MR) with no RTs trained in Learning Disability and Autism. Seventy five per cent of RTs deployed by SSAK in test checked Block Resource Centres (BRCs) were trained in MR.

(Paragraph 2.7.2.5)

RTs did not utilise even one third of school working days to visit schools and provide resource support to CWSN.

(Paragraph 2.7.2.6)

Fourteen Multi Grade Learning Centres having 174 children (2013-14) were functioning in Thiruvananthapuram District even though there were schools within reasonable distance.

(Paragraph 2.10.1)

Evaluation of learning levels of children conducted by SCERT at the instance of audit revealed poor learning levels of children.

(Paragraph 2.11.2)

Deployment of Block Resource Persons without adhering to norms and lack of adequate on-site support by Cluster Resource Centre Coordinators led to inadequate academic support to teachers.

(Paragraph 2.11.3)

2.1 Introduction

Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan is a flagship programme of the Government of India (GOI) launched in the year 2000-01. In Kerala, the implementation of the programme was started in 2002-03. This comprehensive programme is being implemented with the objectives of universal access and retention, bridging of gender and social category gaps in education and enhancement of learning levels of children in the 6 to 14 age group. SSA also focussed on providing Inclusive Education to all CWSN in schools. SSA ensures that every child with special needs, irrespective of the kind, category and degree of disability, is provided quality Inclusive Education. The programme also aimed at identification of Out of School Children (OOSC) and developing context specific strategy to provide special training for them. The programme seeks to open new schools and construction of additional classrooms, toilets and drinking water facilities to strengthen existing school infrastructure. It envisages enhancing the capacity of teachers by providing periodic teacher training and through academic resource support. It also provides text books and support for learning achievement. After the enactment of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 (RTE Act, 2009), the SSA framework for implementation was revised to align various provisions under SSA with the legally mandated norms, standards and free entitlements mandated by the Act.

The State followed a four year primary education cycle from class I-IV and a three year upper primary cycle from class V-VII. While Standards I to IV were categorized as Lower Primary Section, Standards V to VII were categorized as Upper Primary Section and Class VIII was attached to High School Section. The 2011 census ranked Kerala first in the country in total literacy rate (93.91 *per cent*) and female literacy (91.98 *per cent*). The gap in literacy rate between male and female which stood at 6.34 *per cent* as per the 2001 census, when the SSA was launched was reduced to 4.04 *per cent* during the 2011 census.

2.2 Organisational Setup

The programme is implemented in Kerala by a State Implementation Society *viz.*, PEDSK. At state level, the State Project Director was responsible for implementation of the programme. The district level functions were implemented by District Project Officers. Teachers were provided academic resource support by 168 Block Resource Centres⁹ (BRCs) and 1385 Cluster Resource Centres¹⁰

⁹ Block Resource Centres – Unit at block level (In the state the unit is at sub educational district level) to provide training and on-site support to schools and teachers. In urban areas, BRCs are called as Urban Resource Centres.

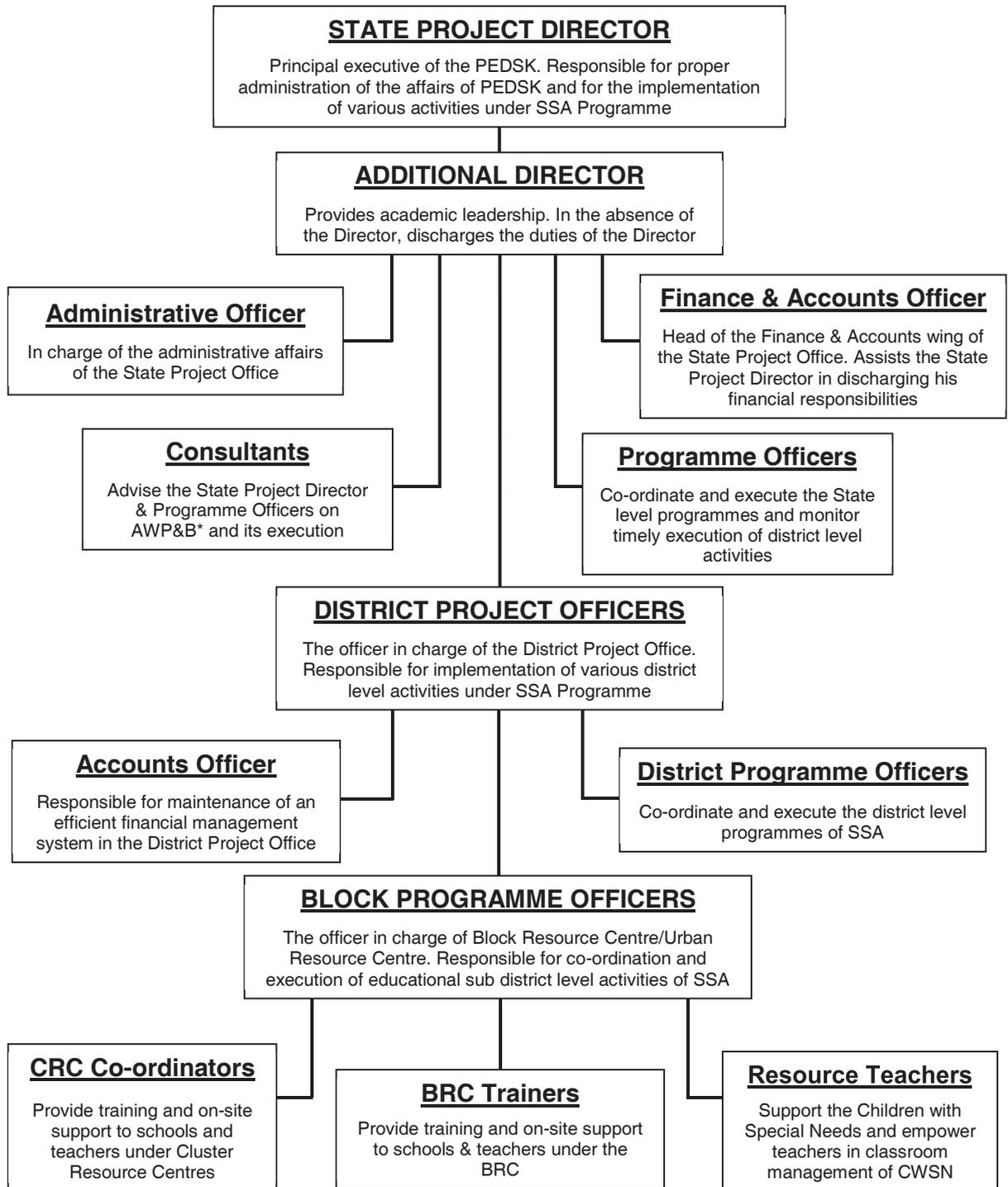
¹⁰ Cluster Resource Centres – Unit at cluster level to provide training and on-site support to schools and teachers.

(CRCs). The organisational set up of PEDSK is given in the organogram given in Chart 2.1:

Chart 2.1

Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan - Kerala

ORGANOGRAM



* Annual Work Plan & Budget

2.3 Audit Objectives

With a literacy rate of 93.91 *per cent*, Kerala ranks first in the country in literacy rate and hence the Performance Audit of SSA focussed only on the effectiveness of SSAK's interventions in specific areas of:

- bridging of gender and social category gaps in providing elementary education and providing Inclusive Education to Children with Special Needs (CWSN);
- getting Out of School Children in the age group of 6 to 14 to attend schools;
- improving the quality of education.

2.4 Audit Criteria

Audit findings were benchmarked against the criteria derived from the following documents:

- SSA Framework for implementation strategies based on Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 (Framework).
- Manual for Planning and Implementation of Inclusive Education in SSA for education of Children With Special Needs (CWSN).
- The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 (RTE Act, 2009).
- The Kerala Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Rules, 2011 (Kerala RTE Rules, 2011).
- SSA Manual on Financial Management and Procurement.
- PEDSK Rules and Regulations.
- Annual Work Plan and Budget approved by Project Approval Board, Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), GOI.
- Persons With Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights & Full Participation) Act, 1995 (PwD Act, 1995).

2.5 Scope and Methodology of Audit

The Performance Audit on 'Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan', Kerala (SSAK) covering the period 2009-14 was conducted from December 2013 to September 2014. The Performance audit on SSAK evaluated the planning and implementation of various interventions¹¹ in the State to achieve the overall objectives of the programme. Five¹² out of 14 districts in the State were selected for audit using Stratified Simple Random Sampling method. The district of Wayanad was additionally included in a

¹¹ Inclusive Education, Academic Support through BRCs/CRCs, supply of textbooks/uniforms, infrastructure development, etc.

¹² Ernakulam, Kasaragod, Pathanamthitta, Thiruvananthapuram and Thrissur

survey on “Out Of School Children (OOSC)” conducted by Audit as it has been recognised as a backward region and residents in the district face special challenges as compared to the rest of the State. The State Project Directorate of SSA, District Project Offices, 21 Block Resource Centres (BRCs) and 84 schools (42 Government and 42 Government aided) were selected for test check. Audit methodology included interviews with parents/guardians of OOSC and sample beneficiary survey of CWSN in the selected BRCs (**Appendix 2.1**). Prior to the commencement of audit, an Entry Conference detailing the scope, audit objectives, etc., was held on 30 April 2014 with the Secretary, General Education Department. The Exit Conference was held on 8 December 2014 in which audit findings were discussed.

2.6 Finances of the Programme

The expenditure on the programme was to be shared between Government of India (GOI) and the Government of Kerala (GOK) in the ratio of 60:40 during 2009-10 which was later revised to 65:35 during 2010-14. The GOI share was released directly to PEDSK in the State in two instalments. GOI would release an ad-hoc grant in April every year up to a maximum of 50 *per cent* of actual funds utilized by PEDSK in the previous year, pending approval of the Annual Work Plan & Budget. The ad-hoc grant was to be adjusted while releasing the subsequent instalment due to the State, as per approval of the Annual Work Plan and Budget for the year. The State share was released to PEDSK by the Local Self Government Institutions (LSGIs) and GOK.

Table 2.1: Year-wise details of Receipt and Utilisation of Funds

(₹ in crore)

Year	Approved Outlay	Unspent Balance of Previous Year	GOI Release	GOK Release	13 th FC Grant	Other Receipts	Total Fund Available	Expenditure	Unspent Balance at the end of the year	Expenditure against approved outlay (<i>per cent</i>)	Unspent Balance (<i>Per cent</i>)
2009-10	212.65	34.47	119.90	72.29	0	1.67	228.33	193.00	35.33	90.76	15.47
2010-11	432.19	35.33	196.61	108.55	25	2.75	368.24	251.26	116.98	58.14	31.77
2011-12	476.37	116.98	170.22	115.06	27	9.88	439.14	249.96	189.18	52.47	43.08
2012-13	523.02	189.18	134.49	127.88	28	7.92	487.47	399.22	88.25	76.33	18.10
2013-14	402.94	88.25	208.01	120.68	29	6.44	452.38	410.87	41.51	101.97	9.18
Total	2047.17		829.23	544.46	109	28.66	1975.56	1504.31		73.48	

(Source: Year-wise Annual Reports of SSAK 2009-10 to 2013-14)

The above table shows that the expenditure against approved outlay during 2009-14 was 73.48 *per cent* and the expenditure against total receipts was 76.15 *per cent*.

The expenditure during 2010-11 was low as additional allocation obtained could not be utilised due to non-issue of order for appointment of substitute teachers by GOK and non-notification of RTE rules which was a condition for purchase and supply of school uniform. Similarly, the expenditure during the year 2011-12 was low due to delay in issue of order for appointment of substitute teachers and part time teachers by GOK.

Audit Findings

2.7 Bridging of gender and social category gaps and Inclusive Education for Children With Special Needs

Bridging of gender and social category gaps in elementary education was one of the goals of SSA. Consequently, SSA aimed at reaching out to girls and children belonging to SC, ST and minority communities. Besides, SSA was also contributing to inclusive education of Children With Special Needs.

2.7.1 Gender and Social category gaps

Though bridging the gender and social category gaps in elementary education was one of the major objectives of SSA, District Project Officers in test checked districts stated that no study or survey to assess the gender or social category gaps in education had been conducted. SSAK in its Annual Reports for the years 2009-10 to 2013-14 reported that enrolment of SC/ST children was at par with general category. It was stated that there was no gender gap or social category gaps as evidenced from enrolment, retention and dropout rates.

Audit however noticed that the reports published by the ST Development Department and the SC Development Department of the State (studies conducted during 2008-10 and 2009-10 respectively) revealed that 23.93 *per cent* of ST children either dropped out or discontinued studies. Among SCs, the report of the department stated that 9.75 *per cent* of the children dropped out at the school level.

There was also a preponderance of SC/ST among the OOSC tracked by Audit. Out of 128 OOSC identified by Audit, 100 belonged to ST and SC communities. Two children belonging to SC community were not sent to school by their parents because they were members of an organisation which taught their children as per their own syllabus. In order to retain children in schools, activities like vocational training, *sahavasa*¹³ camp, training in martial and folk arts, exposure trips, training in bicycle riding, personality development camps, *padanaveedu*¹⁴, parental awareness, etc., were conducted in the test checked districts. Despite SSAK implementing these initiatives, the high percentage of children remaining out of school among different disadvantaged and social category groups at the elementary level of education is an issue of concern.

In the Exit Conference (December 2014), the Secretary did not agree with the number of OOSC reported by SC Development and ST Development Departments and stated that the figures required examination. The observation of the Secretary is not acceptable and can only be termed as presumptive in view of the fact that SSAK had not conducted any household survey to determine the number of school

¹³ *Sahavasa* camp: Camps conducted to help children to mingle with others and to face different life situations. Moral values were conveyed to them in the camp through games and activities

¹⁴ *Padanaveedu*: Neighbourhood learning centres organized to focus on SC/ST and minority students who lack learning environment at home. Under the guidance of education volunteers these students get a space and help to improve their studies

dropouts and did not possess reliable data on enrolment, retention and dropouts of children.

2.7.2 Inclusive Education for Children With Special Needs

The term ‘Children With Special Needs’ (CWSN) refers to children who are challenged with various problems such as that of vision, hearing, speech, orthopaedically impaired, learning, cerebral palsy, mental retardation, autism and multiple disability. Inclusive Education (IE) is intended to enable CWSN to attend regular schools like other children. Besides, it was also important that these children receive all the support they need to learn adequately. The key thrust of SSA was on providing IE to all CWSN in general schools. The SSA Manual for CWSN, April 2003 (SSA Manual) stipulated that expenditure up to ₹1200 per year could be incurred on a child with minimum of 40 *per cent* disability in line with the Persons With Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights & Full Participation) Act 1995 (PwD Act 1995). This was later revised to ₹3000 per year, per child from 2010-11 onwards. The total number of children identified as CWSN and expenditure per child during the years 2009-14 is given in **Table 2.2**.

Table 2.2: CWSN - Expenditure per child

Year	No. of CWSN	Budget allocation (₹ in Lakh)	Budgeted Rate per CWSN (in ₹)	Expenditure (₹ in Lakh)	Expenditure per CWSN (in ₹)
2009-10	125017	1125.15	900.00	1139.92	911.81
2010-11	122157	2809.61	2300.00	2297.41	1880.70
2011-12	124854	2994.93	2398.75	2056.04	1646.75
2012-13	164094	3445.97	2100.00	2653.22	1616.89
2013-14	178201	2370.07	1330.00	2156.01	1209.88

2.7.2.1 Projection of higher number of CWSN

Since the budget allocation for Inclusive Education was based on the number of CWSN, Audit noticed a tendency to inflate the number of CWSN in the Annual plans formulated by SSAK as explained below:

- As per the 2011 census, there were 5377882 children in the State in the age group 5 to 14 with 66519 disabled children (1.24 *per cent*). The number of CWSN covered by SSAK during the years 2010-14 was 1.84 to 2.68 times of 2011 census data.
- The Directorate of Public Instructions (DPI) had furnished the number of students in Government and aided schools with 40 *per cent* or more disability in the category of Visually Impaired (VI), Hearing Impaired (HI), Orthopedically Handicapped (OH) and Mentally Retarded (MR). The number of children reckoned as CWSN by SSAK in the above category was 2.3 to 3.2 times more than the CWSN reported by the DPI during the period 2009-14.

The Project Approval Board of MHRD while approving the Annual Plan of SSAK for 2014-15 also expressed concern on the data on CWSN and advised sample check. On sample checking, it was found that children with mild problems like those using spectacles had been included resulting in the number of CWSN being inflated.

The Secretary, General Education Department admitted in the Exit Conference (December 2014) that a sample check of five *per cent* of CWSN by SSAK led to reduction of CWSN this year (2014-15) and stated that instructions had since been given to follow the screening process meticulously.

As the sample check has resulted in reduction of number of CWSN from 178201 during 2013-14 to 136206 during 2014-15, it is reckoned that SSAK had irregularly obtained ₹5.08 crore on 41995 non-existent CWSN at ₹1210 (average expenditure per CWSN during 2013-14) per CWSN. As similar instances of obtaining ineligible assistance on non-existent CWSN in the preceding years cannot be ruled out, the issue needs to be investigated.

2.7.2.2 *Lacunae in medical assessment of CWSN for IE*

The SSA Manual advised adoption of standard tools for the purpose of initial identification of CWSN. Model check lists were to be used for initial screening of children. The Manual also stipulated that the extent of disability of a child was to be decided in an assessment camp or in a government hospital by a competent medical board. Each child identified in the initial screening was required to be assessed to determine the extent and type of disability, the development level of the child, the nature of support services required, assistive devices required and the most appropriate form of special training to be given to the child. BRCs in test checked districts failed to produce to Audit case sheets/prescriptions (medical assessment records) of all children stated to have been taken to these camps. Audit was therefore unable to obtain assurance that all identified children were indeed examined at assessment camps. Details of children reckoned as CWSN in 21 test-checked BRCs and the number of CWSN for whom medical assessment records were available are given in **Table 2.3**.

Table 2.3: Year-wise details of CWSN identified and availability of medical assessment records

Name of District	No. of test checked BRCs	Total No. of CWSN									
		2009-10		2010-11		2011-12		2012-13		2013-14	
		No. of CWSN	Assessment camp records available	No. of CWSN	Assessment camp records available	No. of CWSN	Assessment camp records available	No. of CWSN	Assessment camp records available	No. of CWSN	Assessment camp records available
Thiruvananthapuram	4	3947	1367	5461	1655	4154	1312	4775	1071	4859	1141
Pathanamthitta	3	1691	647	1595	780	1724	767	3029	496	2730	661
Ernakulam	5	3242	1609	3778	2024	3660	2325	6477	1421	6189	1546
Thrissur	6	3320	1074	3632	983	4669	1664	6248	1593	6357	2230
Kasaragod	3	1478	976	1581	1124	3197	2337	1877	1248	3515	1699
Total	21	13678	5673	16047	6566	17404	8405	22406	5829	23650	7277

(Source: Selected BRCs)

The wide variation between the number of CWSN identified and the number of CWSN for whom medical assessment records were available indicated that children were included in SSA programme without proper assessment as observed below:

- Seventeen of the 21 selected BRCs reported that assessment camps for Learning Disability (LD) were not conducted. Even though four¹⁵ BRCs stated that they had conducted camps for assessment of LD, there was no case sheet to confirm that the children were indeed examined in these camps.
- The details collected from 21 test checked BRCs revealed that medical assessment records in respect of 41.91 *per cent* to 56.85 *per cent* of Visually Impaired Children, identified during the years 2009-10 to 2013-14, were not available.
- During 2013-14, there were 4213 identified MR children in 21 selected BRCs. However, medical assessment records were available only for 1214 MR children.
- The beneficiary survey of CWSN conducted by Audit confirmed that out of 792 children (**Appendix 2.1**) covered in the survey, medical assessment records of 460 children (Learning Disability 210, Low Vision 205 and Hearing Impaired 45) were not available at the BRCs. Model check lists as stipulated by SSA were also not used for initial screening of these 792 children.

SSAK replied (December 2014) that children who were supplied assistive aids and children not requiring assistive aids were not usually taken to assessment camps every year. Hence, there was variation between the number of CWSN and the number of children in respect of whom medical assessment records were available. The reply is not tenable in view of the fact that assessment camps for LD were not conducted in 17 of the 21 BRCs test checked and even MR children requiring regular medical attention were not taken to assessment camps. Thus, the failure of SSA to take children to assessment camps resulted in failure to determine the extent and type of their disability besides inability to assess the change in degree of their disability over a period of time. Children were thus denied the appropriate support services and special training required by them.

2.7.2.3 Preparation of Individualised Education Plan

Individualised Education Plan (IEP) is a statement stating the needs, special services required and the possible achievement of a child having special needs within a specified time frame. It should also state the most appropriate learning environment for the child. The SSA Manual required preparation of the IEP jointly by the special teacher as well as the general teacher and constantly reviewed by the district/block level functionaries to monitor the individual performance of each child.

¹⁵ Chavakkad, Chittarikkal, Palode and Wadakkanchery

Data collected from 21 test-checked BRCs revealed that IEPs were prepared only in 0.76 to 2.27 per cent of CWSN during 2009-14. No IEP was prepared in any of the 792 cases of CWSN covered in the beneficiary survey conducted by Audit. Failure to prepare IEPs has resulted in inability to review the progress and monitor the individual performance of each CWSN.

SSAK replied (December 2014) that considering the lapses in previous years, instructions were since issued to prepare IEP for all categories of CWSN and to examine them periodically.

2.7.2.4 Assistance to Visually Impaired

The SSA Framework for Implementation stipulated that all children requiring assistive devices should be provided with aids and appliances, obtained as far as possible through convergence with the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, State Welfare Departments, National Institutions, ALIMCO¹⁶, voluntary organizations or NGOs. It was also stated that SSA funds could be used if aids and appliances could not be obtained through convergence.

Braille is the most important literacy tool for early childhood students who are blind or severely vision impaired. In the absence of Braille, children have to learn by listening to lessons and clear grades with the help of scribes who can read out to them and write their exams. The probability of children without access to proper Braille reading and writing skills dropping out of schools are greater as they are dependent on external assistance. Following were the details of blind CWSN identified by SSA in selected districts during 2009-14.

Table 2.4: Year-wise details of blind children under SSAK in selected districts

District	No. of blind children				
	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14
Thiruvnanthapuram	56	57	60	67	68
Pathanamthitta	0	0	0	8	4
Ernakulam	1	15	8	20	16
Thrissur	24	26	36	38	39
Kasaragod	5	10	65	32	65

(Source: District Project Offices of SSAK)

Audit noticed that the blind CWSN in the above districts were not provided with Braille Books, Braille Kits and audio equipment during 2009-14. Braille kits and Braille text books were not supplied by SSA to any of the 14 blind children covered in the survey. However, four children received Braille kits from other sources.

SSAK admitted (December 2014) that it was not providing Braille Kits and Braille Books under the impression that the blind children received these materials from Kerala Federation of Blind through DPI and that steps have been initiated to make available the materials during 2014-15. The reply indicates the failure of SSAK to effectively co-ordinate with other agencies to ensure that the blind children were provided with Braille assistive aids. Failure of SSAK to ensure that blind children

¹⁶ Artificial Limbs Manufacturing Corporation of India

obtained learning aids and the resultant difficulty of blind children to learn despite attending regular school is cause for concern.

2.7.2.5 Engagement of Resource Teachers for CWSN

Resource Teachers (RTs) were specially qualified teachers capable of teaching children with special needs in all settings. Their main role was to provide remedial assistance to a child in those content areas in which he/she is having comprehension problems in a regular classroom. These teachers were expected to assess CWSN, teach the use of aids and appliances, prepare teaching material, design specific teaching activities, provide remedial teaching, prepare individual education plan, monitor the performance of CWSN, etc. RTs also advise the general teacher on how to cope with the needs of special children in the regular classroom. It was envisaged that these RTs would travel from school to school in a block/cluster according to need.

The SSA Manual required that as far as possible, RTs were to be appointed from each area of disability *viz.*, visual impairment, hearing impairment and mental retardation. The number of RTs needed in a block would depend on the size of the block and the number of CWSN in the block. The category wise details of the number of CWSN in test checked 21 blocks and the details of RTs engaged by SSAK and their deployment across blocks is given in **Appendix 2.2**.

Audit noticed that SSAK failed to offer CWSN resource support as envisaged in the SSA Manual. In the 21 test checked blocks, 23650 CWSN were provided resource support by 189 RTs. Audit analysed the deployment of RTs with reference to the various categories of CWSN in the 21 selected BRCs during the year 2013-14 and observed as follows:

- There were only nine RTs to attend to 9880 Visually Impaired in the test checked BRCs. In 15 of the 21 BRCs, 7041 Visually Impaired were not provided the services of trained RTs. In BRC Chavakkad, only one RT was deployed to provide resource support to 834 such children. Beneficiary survey conducted by Audit also revealed that 10 out of 14 blind children were taught by resource teachers who were not Braille trained.
- None of the 3990 children suffering from Learning Disability and 310 children suffering from Autism were provided with the services of qualified RTs.
- Children suffering from Cerebral Palsy (294) in 18 of the 21 selected BRCs were also not provided with services of qualified RTs.
- In 12 of the 21 BRCs test checked, 1699 children classified as Hearing and Speech Impaired were denied the services of qualified RTs.

Audit analysed the profile of RTs to determine reasons for the skewed deployment of RTs. It was seen that 142 of the 189 RTs (75 per cent) had specialised in Mental Retardation (MR) even though only 17.81 per cent of the CWSN were categorized as Mentally Retarded. The disproportionately large number of RTs with specialization in MR resulted in children with other disabilities being deprived of

suitable resource support. Moreover, the number of RTs appointed was not commensurate with the number of CWSN. Despite the stipulation that the number of RTs needed in a block would depend on the size of the block and the number of CWSN in the block, SSAK admitted (January 2015) that no norms on ratio of CWSN to RTs had been fixed.

SSAK stated (January 2015) that from the next year onwards, posting of RTs would be made according to qualification in each category. It was also stated that most of the RTs were trained in the area of MR and that they had provided multi category training to equip the RTs to handle all categories of CWSN. During 2013-14 multi-category training was imparted for ten days to all RTs which was admittedly not sufficient. It further stated that it had since been decided to deploy RTs who have special training to support the blind in the next academic year.

The reply is not acceptable in view of the fact that SSAK failed to adhere to the stipulations contained in the SSA Manual which required appointment of RTs from each area of disability *viz.*, visual impairment, hearing impairment, etc. Failure of SSAK to draft norms for determining the appropriate disability wise CWSN-RTs ratio resulting in its inability to provide academic support to large number of CWSN is inexcusable.

2.7.2.6 Functioning of Resource Teachers

The problem of inadequate number of RTs to attend to the requirements of CWSN was further compounded by the fact that out of 161 RTs for which the school visit details were available at BRCs, 139 RTs did not utilize even one third of the school working days for providing resource support to CWSN attending schools. While 15 RTs made school visits for only one to 20 days, 74 visited for 21 to 40 days and 50 RTs for 41 to 60 days during 2013-14.

Failure of RTs to make regular school visits deprived CWSN of the much needed support and resulted in payment of remuneration to RTs for services which they had not rendered.

2.8 Enrolment and Retention in Schools

According to the RTE Act, 2009, which became operational from 1 April 2010, every child in the 6 to 14 age group shall have a right to free and compulsory education. SSA aims at universal access and retention of children.

2.8.1 Enrolment

Net Enrolment Ratio¹⁷ (NER) is an achievement indicator that reveals the level of enrolment of children of the age-group in schools. In its Annual Reports for the years 2009-10 to 2012-13, SSAK reckoned the NER of children in the age group 6 to 14 in Kerala as 100 *per cent*. NER of 100 *per cent* was indicative of the fact that all children in the eligible age group were enrolled in schools. However, the annual

¹⁷ The Net Enrolment Ratio is calculated by dividing the number of students enrolled who are of the official age-group for a given level of education by the population for the same age-group and multiplying the result by 100.

report of SSAK for 2013-14 reported a lower NER of 85.48 for primary section and 82.26 for upper primary section. Since SSAK did not possess verifiable data on the actual population in the age group 6 to 14 and their school participation status, audit could not get an assurance about the accuracy of NER claimed.

2.8.2 School Mapping

The presence of a school at appropriate locations is an essential prerequisite to universal elementary education. Universal access to elementary education requires a school within the reasonable reach of all children. Rule 6 of the Kerala RTE Rules, 2011 define the limits of neighbourhood schools¹⁸ as one kilometre and three kilometres for children in class I to V and VI to VIII respectively. In order to obtain a clear picture regarding the availability of schools and to identify gaps and areas where new schools needed to be opened, SSA Framework for implementation (Framework) require States to map neighbourhoods and link them to specific schools. It was envisaged that school mapping would include (i) environment building in the village (ii) conduct a household survey (iii) preparation of a map indicating different households, the number of children in each household and their participation status in school (iv) preparation of a village/school education register (v) presentation of the map and analysis to the people and (vi) preparation of a proposal for improved education facilities in the village which would form the basis of the School Development Plan mandated under the RTE Act, 2009. The following were noticed in this regard:

- During 2009-14, SSAK attempted school mapping twice; once in June 2010 by a Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) - Maithri, which failed to provide a clear picture on the need for establishing more schools. Again school mapping was conducted during 2013-14 by SSAK themselves reckoning distance to neighbourhood school from a ward¹⁹ as the criterion for identifying un-served areas. However, the annual plan for 2014-15 prepared on this basis and submitted to MHRD was found defective as the number of wards with no school which was stated to be zero in 2011-12 and 2013-14 annual plan proposals, rose to 1107 and 1948 respectively in the annual plan proposals for 2012-13 and 2014-15. The MHRD, in the State Plan Appraisal Report also observed that the change in status of ‘Access to school’ as reported by SSAK was sudden and inexplicable. Thus the failure to conduct an effective school mapping exercise resulted in failure to possess accurate data on un-served habitations in the State.
- Audit observed that in areas where schools were not viable, SSA norms provided for alternative provisions like residential school and transportation facilities to enable children to obtain full time schooling. As per the Annual Plan 2014-15, SSAK proposed to provide transportation facility for easier access to schools to 3641 children who were living in un-served habitations.

¹⁸ Neighbourhood Schools – Is a school located within the defined limits or area of neighbourhood, which has been notified by the State Government under the State RTE Rules.

¹⁹ Ward – Ward is the name called for the territorial area of a Local Self Government Institution for the purpose of election of a member.

The proposal was not approved by MHRD citing the reason that the State had not defined the area/limits for children eligible to avail this provision. This has resulted in children being deprived of transportation facility, making it difficult for them to reach school.

- During the course of Audit, the audit team surveyed 128 OOSC. The survey revealed that 18 children did not attend the school as school was far away from places of their residence. Out of nine children who never enrolled in school, five did not enroll as the distance to the nearest school ranged between six and 28 kilometres.

The RTE Act, 2009 fixed a target of three years, up to 31 March 2013, for the establishment of neighbourhood schools. Even 20 months (November 2014) after the target time frame set by the Act, SSAK failed to conduct a comprehensive exercise to identify gaps and areas where new schools needed to be opened.

2.9 Out of School children

A child is categorized as ‘Out Of School’ if the child is either not enrolled or has discontinued studies from the school. SSAK reported in its Annual Report for 2013-14 that Net Enrolment Ratio (NER) was 85.48 for primary section and 82.26 for upper primary section. Age-wise population data obtained from the Census department, Ministry of Home Affairs, GOI revealed that the population of children as per the 2011 census, in the five to nine age group (primary section) was 2555112 and that of children in the 10 to 14 age group (upper primary section) was 2822770. Thus, NER of 85.48 for primary section and 82.26 for upper primary section would show that at least 371002 children in the primary section and 500760 children in the upper primary section did not either enrol or had dropped out from schools. However, SSAK identified only 2188 OOSC in the age group of 6 to 14 in the State during 2013-14. The fact that there is no correlation between the number of OOSC and NER, both arrived at by SSAK, indicates that the vital education data possessed by SSAK was unreliable and could not be used for planning purposes.

During the course of audit, we surveyed 128²⁰ OOSC in the age group of 6 to 14 and conducted interviews with the children or their parents/guardians in the five selected districts and Wayanad. While 119 children were drop outs from schools, nine had not enrolled in school. Of the 55 OOSC located in Wayanad district, one child dropped out of school due to Sickle cell anaemia, a health problem typical to the district of Wayanad. The details of OOSC are given in **Table 2.5**.

²⁰ Thiruvananthapuram-18; Pathanamthitta -3; Ernakulam- 10; Thrissur-15; Kasaragod-27 and Wayanad-55

Table 2.5: Reason-wise details of Out of School Children

Reason for being OOSC	Number of OOSC				
	ST	SC	Minorities (except Christians)	Others	Total
School far away	12	5	0	1	18
Poverty	2	2	0	3	7
Illness	7	1	1	5	14
Parents not interested	3	7	0	0	10
Child not interested	40	17	3	7	67
No transportation facility	1	0	0	0	1
Poor teaching /Absence of teachers	0	0	0	0	0
Lack of toilets / furniture in school	0	0	0	0	0
Other reasons	3	0	4	4	11
Total	68	32	8	20	128

(Source: OOSC Interview records)

SSAK stated that the problem of OOSC was a serious issue and they were trying out new strategies like home visits, corner meetings, involvement of NGOs and local bodies, providing incentives, etc., to bring the children to school.

2.10 Multi Grade Learning Centres (MGLCs)

MGLCs are generally single teacher schools, functioning in remote and coastal areas, teaching children of Standards I to IV. SSA provided for opening of MGLCs as alternate schooling facilities for providing education to children in un-served habitations. They were envisaged as transitory measures to provide schooling till such time as regular, full time schooling facilities could be provided in the area concerned.

2.10.1 Mainstreaming of children in MGLCs

The RTE Act, 2009 stipulated providing of full time schooling facilities to all children. MGLCs therefore, had to be upgraded to regular schools and children studying there mainstreamed into full time schools in a time bound manner. The SSA Framework also provided for closure of such MGLCs which were not required to be converted into a regular school on account of an existing neighbourhood school. The Annual work plan & budget of SSAK for the year 2014-15 revealed that 321 MGLCs with 5797²¹ students were functioning in the State during 2013-14. One hundred and thirty four of these MGLCs with 2637 students were functioning in the test checked districts as detailed in **Table 2.6**.

²¹ Scheduled Caste 498; Scheduled Tribe 2612, Minorities 2092 and Others 595

Table 2.6: District-wise details of MGLCs

District	No. of MGLCs	No. of students
Thiruvananthapuram	23	271
Pathanamthitta	7	37
Ernakulam	7	157
Thrissur	2	10
Kasaragod	56	1433
Wayanad	39	729
Total	134	2637

(Source: Annual work plan & budget for the year 2014-15 of SSAK)

It was observed as follows:

- In May 2013, the Director of Public Instruction (DPI) submitted a proposal to GOK for upgrading 111 MGLCs (including 35 MGLCs of the 134 MGLCs) as Lower Primary Schools stating that land was available. Upgradation of these 111 MGLCs was pending as of November 2014. Failure to upgrade MGLCs resulted in children studying in these MGLCs without full-fledged schooling facility.
- In Thiruvananthapuram district, 14 MGLCs with 174 children (2013-14) out of the 23 MGLCs mentioned in Table 2.6 above, were functioning even though there were schools within reasonable distance. GOK had stipulated (March 2014) that for upgradation of MGLCs, the minimum requisite distance from the nearest Government/Aided school should be three Kilometres. Audit noticed that the distance between the 14 MGLCs and nearest schools was 0.5 to 1, 1.5 to 2 and 3 Kilometres for six, seven and one MGLCs respectively.

The Secretary, General Education Department stated in the Exit Conference that they were aware that educational volunteers working in some of the MGLCs were persuading parents to send their wards to MGLCs to avoid loss of their employment.

Failure of GOK to close down such MGLCs just to provide protection of employment of educational volunteers as stated by the Secretary is not acceptable since inaction of GOK has resulted in depriving children regular, full time schooling facilities as mandated in the RTE Act, 2009.

2.11 Quality of education imparted under SSAK

2.11.1 Supply of Text books

SSA envisaged providing text books, free of cost to all children of standards I to VIII studying in Government/aided schools. However, since GOK was supplying free books to students of standard I under State Plan, SSAK confined distribution of free text books to the children of standards II to VIII. SSAK fixed the upper

ceiling for supply of text books at ₹150 per child at the Primary level and ₹250 per child at the Upper Primary level. During 2009-14, SSAK had spent ₹248 crore under the intervention, 'Free text book supply'. Audit noticed that 69 per cent of the schools test checked did not maintain records of text books supplied to schools free of cost and distributed to students. Out of 83 test checked schools, 27 (33 per cent) reported that there was delay in supply of text books during 2013-14. One school²² did not respond.

The Kerala Books and Publications Society which prints and supplies the books stated that defective indenting by schools was the reason for delay in receipt of books in schools. The society suggested that the indents should be verified by Assistant Educational Officers/District Educational Officers for ensuring their correctness and print order should be proper for timely distribution of books.

SSAK replied (November 2014) that Text Book Department was responsible for distribution of books. SSAK further stated that it was only a funding agency and hence had no role in the printing and supply of text books. The reply is not acceptable since SSAK failed to ensure effective utilisation of its funds.

2.11.2 Assessment of learning levels of children

As per Rule 7 (1) of the Kerala RTE Rules 2011, it is the responsibility of the Government to monitor regularly the levels of learning of children in all Government, aided and un-aided elementary schools in the State and to conduct evaluation of learning outcomes in five per cent of the schools through an external agency and bring out annual reports on the quality of elementary education in the State. No such evaluation was conducted by the Director of Public Instruction during the period from 2011-12 to 2013-14.

At the instance of Audit, the State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT), Kerala conducted a study to assess the level of achievement of learners at the primary level. Sample population of children studying in Standards IV and VII were administered standardized tests in Malayalam, English, Mathematics and Science (Environmental Science for Std IV and Basic Science for Std VII) to assess learning levels since standards IV and VII were exit levels for lower and upper primary education system in Kerala. Even though the study envisaged testing children in five districts (Thiruvananthapuram, Pathanamthitta, Ernakulam, Thrissur and Kasaragod), SCERT had completed data analysis of only Thrissur district during finalization of this performance report.

The results of the study of achievement levels of children in Standards IV and VII in Thrissur district revealed as follows:

- Assessment of proficiency in writing and vocabulary skills in Malayalam of Standard IV students revealed that 33 per cent and 21 per cent of learners did not obtain even a single score in writing skills and vocabulary respectively. While performance of nearly 10 per cent of students in

²² Government Upper Primary School, Vellikulangara

Mathematics was very low, only a negligible *per cent* attained expected level of performance in Environmental Science.

- Children in Standard VII performed poorly in Mathematics and Basic science.
- A significant number of children in Standard VII could not write in Malayalam.

The results of the study indicate the necessity for GOK/SSAK to address the problem of children not having the basic level of knowledge required for them to be able to cope with the learning requirements in the next higher grade.

2.11.3 Academic support through Block Resource Persons

Teachers in Government/aided schools were provided academic resource support through a network of 168 Block Resource Centres (BRCs) and 1385 Cluster Resource Centres (CRCs). Cluster Resource Centres are sub-sections of BRCs. Block Resource Persons (BRPs) were required to provide on-site support to teachers of schools under the BRC. BRPs include Block Resource Centre (BRC) Trainers and Cluster Resource Centre (CRC) co-ordinators. CRC Co-ordinators were responsible to provide on-site support to teachers in their cluster²³. Both BRC trainers and CRC Co-ordinators reported to the Block Programme Officer (BPO). There were 215 BRC trainers/CRC coordinators in the 21 test checked BRCs.

2.11.3.1 Deployment of Block Resource Persons

The SSA Manual on Financial Management and Procurement required blocks having more than 100 schools and smaller blocks to be provided with 20 and 10 BRPs respectively in BRCs and CRCs put together. These BRPs were to be deployed in BRCs and CRCs as resource persons. Of the 21 selected BRCs, all except two (Kothamangalam and Kasaragod) had less than 100 schools, ranging from 35 to 93. Details collected from the selected BRCs for the year 2013-14 revealed that more than 10 BRPs were posted in nine of the nineteen BRCs having less than 100 schools. In Palode and Parassala BRCs having 77 and 71 schools, the number of BRPs posted was eight and 19. In the two BRCs having more than 100 schools, only eight BRPs per BRC were posted. Since the BRPs were required to provide academic support to teachers in the schools under the respective BRC, posting of BRPs without considering the number of schools indicated that the deployment of BRPs was not judicious.

The Secretary stated in the Exit Conference (December 2014) that the deployment of BRPs was a problem because they were reluctant to work in hilly and remote places. The reply of the Secretary is an admission of the helplessness of Government to deploy the BRPs across the State, based on the needs.

²³ A group of schools in a Panchayat/Municipality area

2.11.3.2 Effectiveness of BRCs

The RTE Act mandates provision of training facilities as well as good quality education. BRCs and CRCs were the most critical units for providing training and on-site support to schools and teachers. Details collected from the 21 selected BRCs revealed the following.

- BRCs were required to function as repository of academic resources including Information and Communication Technology, science and math kits, teaching/learning material in different curricular areas, including pre-school material and material for CWSN. All the selected BRCs reported that academic resources available were not adequate.
- BRCs were to organize teacher trainings based on requirements of teachers observed during school visits. Sixteen of the test-checked BRCs did not maintain data on the training needs of teachers. In the absence of data on training needs, Audit could not assess whether the requirements of the school teachers were satisfactorily met.
- BRCs had to ensure regular school visits and on-site support by BRC trainers to address educational and other issues related to school development. Audit analysed the activities of 44 BRC Trainers in 19 selected BRCs who were in service during the whole of the academic year 2013-14²⁴. It was noticed that the number of days spent by them for imparting training and school visits to provide on-site support to teachers were limited. Seventy three *per cent* of them spent less than 41 days for providing academic support to teachers during the academic year 2013-14. Thus, BRC trainers who were expected to provide adequate academic support to teachers failed in their mission.

About the deficiency of on-site support, Secretary stated that the deficiency was due to engaging BRC trainers for other non-academic works and that the situation has improved this year. The engagement of BRPs in non-academic works and resultant inability to provide academic support to teachers is an unacceptable practice.

2.11.3.3 Functioning of CRC Coordinators

In the Annual Plan of SSAK for the year 2012-13, MHRD sanctioned the appointment of 1190 CRC Coordinators. The State Government introduced a comprehensive education package in 2011 for the appointment and deployment of school teachers in General Education sector. As part of the implementation of the package, Government approved (March 2012) the lists of teachers (1419) who had worked in aided schools and were retrenched from service due to reduction in number of divisions on account of decrease in number of students and also 127 specialist teachers (teachers trained in Music, Physical Education, Sewing, etc.). As the Annual Plan of SSAK for the year 2012-13 provided for appointment of 1190 CRC Coordinators, Government deputed the retrenched teachers including 127

²⁴ Mullassery and Anthikkad BRCs had no BRC Trainer with 10 months service during the academic year 2013-14.

specialist teachers for 10 days training. On completion of the training, these teachers were appointed as CRC Coordinators under SSAK. The State Project Director of SSAK further issued instructions (April 2013) to District Project Officers to retain the teachers appointed as CRC Coordinators, until further orders.

Audit observed that since CRC Co-ordinators were required to provide on-site academic support to teachers, appointment of 127 specialist teachers as CRC Coordinators did not serve the intended purpose of providing on-site academic support to teachers. Audit also noticed that in the selected BRCs, 34 out of 124 CRC Co-ordinators had service of only up to three years in school and that 30 of them were retrenched prior to 2007-08, the academic year in which the curriculum was revised. Thus, their ability to provide on-site academic support to teachers was questionable. In the test checked BRCs, Audit noticed that out of 124 CRC Coordinators, 56 Coordinators (45 per cent) did not visit even a single school for providing on-site support during 2013-14. While on-site Support was provided by 33 Co-ordinators (27 per cent) for 1 to 10 days, 22 Co-ordinators (18 per cent) provided on-site support for 11 to 20 days.

Appointment of retrenched teachers with inadequate experience and posting of specialist teachers as CRC Coordinators indicate that the posts of CRC Co-ordinators sanctioned by MHRD were used to accommodate retrenched teachers. Besides, persons appointed as CRC Co-ordinators did not provide stipulated on-site support resulting in failure to achieve the intended objective of enhancing the capacity of teachers.

The Secretary stated in the Exit Conference (December 2014) that all CRC Co-ordinators were trained teachers and the effectiveness of specialist teachers working as CRC Co-ordinators would be examined. The fact however remains that retrenched specialist teachers appointed as CRC Co-ordinators would not be able to provide the required on-site academic support to teachers.

2.11.4 Free supply of uniform

School uniforms constitute an expense which poor families were often unable to afford, and thus became a barrier for many children to pursue and complete elementary education. SSA norms provided for supply of two sets of uniforms for all girls and boys belonging to SC/ST/BPL families in Government schools within a ceiling of ₹400 per child per annum. During 2012-13 and 2013-14, SSAK made the following provisions for free supply of uniform to all girls, SC/ST/BPL boys studying in Government schools.

Table 2.7: Details of Outlay and Expenditure on free supply of uniforms

(₹ in crore)

Year	No. of children	Amount provided in SSA Plan	Amount spent
2012-13	937901	37.52	29.36
2013-14	843472	33.74	29.20

(Source: SSAK)

Details of free supply of uniform in 42 test checked Government schools revealed that 1037 students in ten schools were not provided free uniforms during 2012-13. During 2013-14 also, 3450 children in 34 schools were not provided school uniforms. In eight schools, uniforms were issued in February and March 2014 i.e., just before the close of the academic year. The main reason for delayed supply or non-supply of uniform during the year 2013-14 was a delay of six months (December 2013) in issuing purchase guidelines.

The Secretary stated in the Exit Conference (December 2014) that delay in empanelling of vendors for supply of uniform during 2013-14 resulted in delay in issue of purchase guidelines. He further stated that from this year onwards each school would be permitted to identify suppliers for the procurement of uniform to avoid delay.

2.12 Conclusion

The objective of providing Inclusive Education to CWSN in general schools was not met. The CWSN were not medically assessed. Blind CWSN were not provided with Braille books, braille kits and audio equipment during 2009-14. Resource Teachers to train CWSN were not qualified. A disproportionately large number of RTs were trained in MR resulting in children with other disabilities being deprived of suitable resource support. The functioning of the RTs was also not satisfactory. They did not prepare IEPs to monitor the individual performance of each CWSN. Majority of the RTs did not utilize even one third of the school working days to provide resource support to CWSN. Statistical information on the number of Out of School children available with SSAK was not reliable and therefore the high enrolment figures reported, cannot be accepted as correct. School mapping exercise conducted by SSAK in 2010 and 2013 for obtaining information on availability of schools for identifying areas where new schools needed to be opened was ineffective. Several MGLCs were functioning in Thiruvananthapuram district even though there were schools within reasonable distance. Necessary instructions were not issued to shut down these MGLCs and to mainstream the children in regular schools, to protect employment of educational volunteers. Tests on learning levels of children conducted at the instance of Audit revealed very poor learning levels indicating necessity for preparing them adequately for the next grade. Deployment of Block Resource Persons and CRC Co-ordinators to provide on-site academic support to teachers in Government/aided schools was not as per norms. Post of CRC Co-ordinators were used to accommodate specialist teachers and retrenched teachers with inadequate experience and resulted in failure to achieve the objective of enhancing the capabilities of teachers.

2.13 Recommendations

SSAK may:

- Take steps to conduct medical assessment of CWSN for monitoring progress and insist on preparation of IEPs;

- Prepare norms for engagement of RTs based on number of CWSN and nature of their disability and deployment across the State as per the need;
- Conduct household survey to identify all OOSC in the State and ensure their attendance in schools;
- Focus on enhancing the quality of teaching to ensure higher learning levels among children; and
- Engage only qualified BRC Trainers and CRC Co-ordinators and deploy them as per norms.