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Hidden disabilities no more a barrier for students' inclusive growth

Thanks to the teachers in government schools who are going the extra mile in identifying students with neurodevelopmental disorders and supporting them with empathy and sensitivity

2 Min Read



Mohit doing a sorting exercise

Backbencher, abusive and impulsive are the kind of words that defined Rakesh, a student of Government Middle School in Ranchi district of Jharkhand. Tagged as a slow learner with a low level of concentration, Rakesh always had difficulty with his reading and writing.

He struggled with a low self-esteem and pressure of studies at school until Rehan Akhtar, his teacher, noticed something amiss in him.

“I started noticing his behaviour regularly and realised that he had a learning disability that was affecting his academic growth,” says Akhtar, adding that with proper care and attention, Rakesh started showing positive results and is more confident in public speaking as compared to his past record.

Teachers attend special training that addresses core issues of retaining children with neurodevelopmental disabilities (NDD) in government schools.

Rakesh is a student with neurodevelopmental disorder (NDD) identified by Akhtar in his school after he attended Project Inclusion training that addresses the core issues for retaining children with hidden neurodevelopmental disabilities (NDD) in government schools.

“Earlier teachers were not aware of the concept of neurodevelopmental disabilities and slow-learner students were regarded as reckless, disruptive and rule-breakers. But after attending the training session, I have been able to treat these students with empathy and sensitivity,” he adds.

Akhtar says that after the training, he can relate to students with learning disabilities in his classroom. “Apart from applying teaching techniques learnt during the training, I also design group activities to make learning easy and interesting for such students with special needs.”

Similar is a story about Mohit, who had Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder since childhood, but his problem was neither noticed by his parents nor teachers. Things changed for him after his teacher, Anjula Kumari, attended the mental health education training by the Project Inclusion team.

“He would leave his seat in the classroom every now and then. He was disorganized and lacked concentration. Thankfully, the situation has changed. Now, he is one of my favorite students in the class,” says Anjula Kumari of Lakshmi Gajendra, Middle School, Itki, Ranchi.

Project Inclusion was launched in Jharkhand in 2017 and by Mar 2018, 2,095 teachers had been trained and educated to identify cases of neuro-developmental disabilities or children with special needs (CWSN). As a result, teachers submitted over 1,200 case studies of students showing symptoms of neurodevelopmental disorder, and each of these students are now undergoing clinical assessment. Out of 185 assessments, 178 have been confirmed as children with an NDD.

Project Inclusion training in Jharkhand has increased awareness of mental health issues and subject knowledge of teachers about problems faced by CWSN which was found to be

too low prior to the training.

“Project Inclusion training session has proved to be very useful in identifying the children with NDD. This will benefit the schools as well as the society,” says Ramnath Ram, BEEO Burmu in Ranchi.

The program aims to change the teachers’ attitude toward children with special needs, reduce dependence on special educators and resource teachers and increase awareness and positive mindset toward mental health issues.



Mohit with his teacher Anjula Kumari

Currently operational in six other states apart from Jharkhand, Project Inclusion has proved to be a highly replicable and sustainable program that offers solution to teachers at a time when there is a critical shortage of special education resources.

“It is important to acknowledge the hidden disabilities that these children are struggling with, so their due right can be provided to them. By bringing CWSN to the forefront and making inclusive education a reality for them is what Project Inclusion is doing –empowering teachers to identify and help these children improve their learning abilities and self confidence,” says Simmi Mahajan, head, Project Inclusion. ■