



ENLIGHTENED INDIA FOUNDATION

NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION | EST.2021



EIF EVIDENCE & INSIGHTS UNIT | 2026

Rural Learning Assessment Report

Kangra District, Himachal Pradesh



20

VILLAGES
SURVEYED



187

HOUSEHOLDS
COVERED



200

CHILDREN
ASSESSED

About the Organization

Established in 2021, the Enlightened India Foundation (EIF) partners with communities and institutions to build lasting, evidence-based systems for learning, governance, and advocacy led by young women. The model practices frugal program design to minimize financial overhead, creating a self-reinforcing loop where trained local women lead directly from within their own communities to turn ground-level research into action.

This operational model underpins five integrated functions:

1. Evidence & Insights Unit

Conducts structured field research directly inside villages to document real conditions in rural households, capturing actionable evidence on community issues.

2. Adaptive Skills Framework

Translates field research into targeted, practical skills modules and stress-tests them in real community settings before broad deployment.

3. Learning Hubs

Establishes safe learning spaces run by local young women who deploy the customized curricula while documenting new frontline grievances.

4. Civic & Governance Lab

Conducts governance workshops and aggregates data to create structured, data-backed reports that young women present to local authorities to build accountability.

5. Advocacy

Compiles the complete body of field evidence and governance reports to present to government departments and officials to drive systemic change.

Across all functions, EIF's approach is grounded in a single principle:
sustainable change is built by investing in local capacity, not external delivery alone.

This community-embedded model enables EIF to generate data that reflects realities on ground rather than external assumptions and forms the foundation of the Rural Learning Assessment presented in this report.

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Foreword

When we began working in rural communities, we quickly realized that enrollment data was telling only part of the story. Children were in school, but many were not learning at the level their grade required. The gap between what we assumed and what we observed has shaped everything we have built since.

Enlightened India Foundation was established on the belief that understanding a community's needs accurately is the first condition for serving them well. Before programs can be designed, before interventions can be targeted, the reality on ground must be documented and not assumed.

This report is an expression of that commitment. The Rural Learning Assessment 2026 is EIF's first large-scale field-based study of learning outcomes among rural children in Kangra district, covering 200 children across 20 villages. It examines not only what children know, but the conditions that shape how and whether they learn comprising their access to academic support, their exposure to digital tools, and the structural factors that determine opportunity.

The findings are clear. A significant proportion of children are not learning at grade level. Foundational gaps, particularly in mathematics, emerge early and widen through the middle grades. These patterns are not reflections of individual failure, but indicators of systemic gaps that require targeted response.

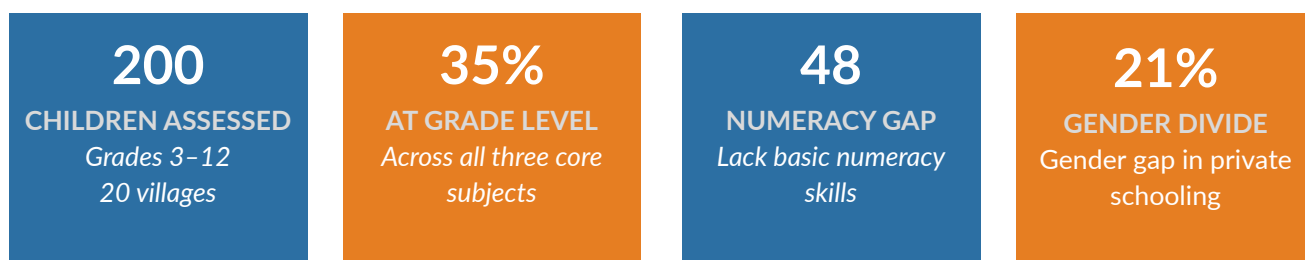
This report is shared with educators, partners, and decision-makers in the hope that ground-level evidence can inform more effective action. The goal is simple: to ensure that educational responses are not aligned with assumptions, rather with the realities children are actually experiencing.

Smita Choudhary
Co-Founder & President,
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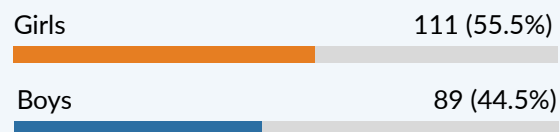
What This Report Found

This report presents findings from a field-based learning assessment of 200 children across 20 villages in Kangra district. The survey assessed foundational English and numeracy skills, grade-level competency, and the conditions shaping how children learn.

SURVEY AT A GLANCE



Gender Distribution



School Type Distribution

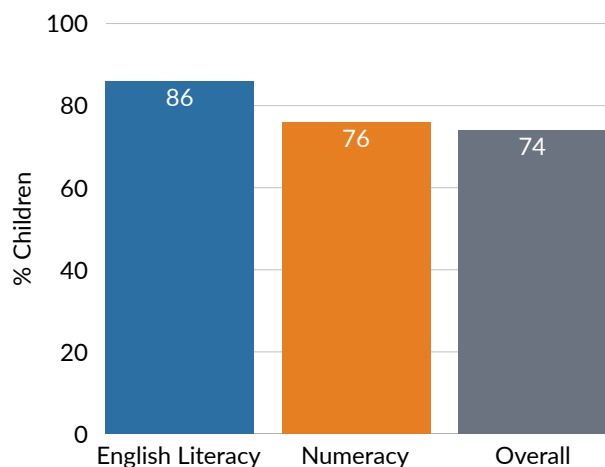
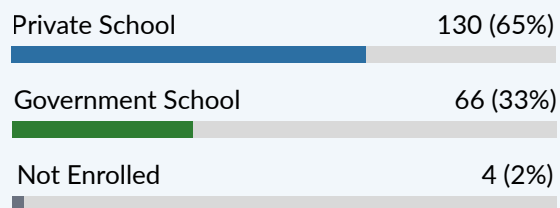


Chart 1: Foundational English & Numeracy (Grades 3–12)
% of children demonstrating foundational literacy and numeracy (n=200). By learning skill

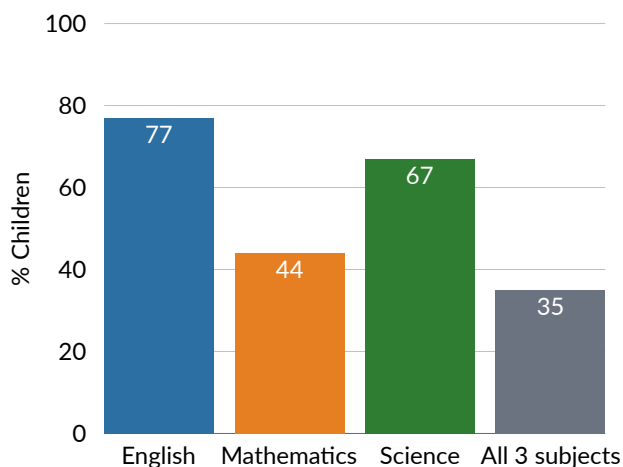


Chart 2: Grade-Level Proficiency (Grades 3–10)
% of children at grade level in core subjects (n=175). By subject

KEY FINDINGS

1

The gap between enrollment and competency is severe

Being in school does not mean learning at grade level. 65% of surveyed children are performing below their enrolled grade level in at least one core subject. Foundational numeracy gaps are nearly double the size of literacy gaps, showing a systemic weakness that begins in early primary.

2

Mathematics presents an acute, subject-specific crisis

Mathematics is not just a weak area; it is in crisis. Grade-level competency falls sharply from early primary, hitting a severe low point of 16% at Grade 5. While English and Science outcomes remain relatively stable, Mathematics requires urgent, localized intervention.

3

The middle grades are the critical point of learning collapse

The transition from primary to upper primary (Grades 4-7) produces the sharpest academic decline in the dataset. This collapse disproportionately impacts girls, whose Mathematics pass rates plummet to 17% during the upper primary stage, compared to 47% for boys.

4

Structural inequalities drive the gender learning gap

The disparity in learning is not about ability; it is about access to support. 77% of boys attend private schools compared to just 56% of girls. Consequently, boys receive significantly more private tuition and home learning support. Alarming, home academic support for girls drops sharply around Grade 4, precisely when academic difficulty increases.

5

Near-universal digital access is not translating to learning

While 89% of children have regular internet access, only 5% use their devices solely for education. The vast majority use smartphones for entertainment, and 46% have never received basic digital safety awareness training, exposing a massive gap in digital literacy.

IMPLICATIONS & WAY FORWARD

Priority areas for action

- **Prioritize Foundational Numeracy Early**
Basic mathematics must be secured in Grades 3-5 before the curriculum advances.
- **Reduce support inequalities**
Academic support, including private tuition and household engagement, must be made equitable across gender groups to prevent the upper primary drop-off for girls.
- **Target the middle school transition**
Grades 4–7 require focused intervention before foundational gaps compound further.
- **Integrate digital tools meaningfully**
Device access must be paired with structured educational use and mandatory, school-led digital safety training.

Background & Purpose

Across India, improvements in school enrollment have not consistently translated into improvements in learning outcomes. While most children attend school, many continue to face challenges in acquiring the foundational English and numeracy skills essential for further learning and rural areas present a distinct context where these challenges interact with home environments, support access, and digital exposure in ways that are not yet fully documented.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The Kangra Rural Learning Assessment was conducted to examine actual learning levels among school-aged children and to understand the broader structural factors shaping those outcomes. This study deliberately moves beyond basic enrollment figures to ask a more critical question: what can children actually do, and what conditions determine whether they succeed?

WHAT THE STUDY SET OUT TO EXAMINE

- 1 Assess foundational English and numeracy skills across the surveyed children.
- 2 Evaluate grade-level learning outcomes across English, Mathematics, and Science.
- 3 Identify disparities in outcomes across gender and school types.
- 4 Analyze the impact of private tuition and home learning environments.
- 5 Document patterns in digital device exposure and safety awareness.
- 6 Capture educator perspectives on classroom realities and learning barriers.

SCOPE OF THIS REPORT

Learning Levels

Foundational skills and grade level performance

Structural Factors

Gender, schooling, tuition access and home environment

Digital Exposure

Device access, usage and digital safety awareness

The Central Premise

Sustainable rural development cannot be planned on assumptions. To close the gap between schooling and actual learning, interventions must be grounded in the localized realities of classrooms, households, and the structural divides that dictate who gets to learn and how.

Methodology

The Kangra Rural Learning Assessment 2026 was designed to evaluate foundational and grade-level academic competencies among school-aged children, alongside the structural factors influencing their educational outcomes — including home learning environments, academic support access, and digital exposure.

SURVEY AREA

NU

11 Near Urban Villages

Villages located closer to urban centres. Captured differences in learning environments with greater access to institutions and infrastructure.

AU

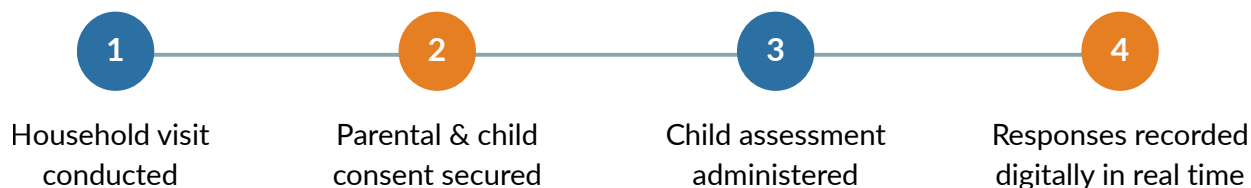
9 Away From Urban Villages

Villages located farther from urban centres. Enabled comparison of learning conditions in more remote settings with limited support access.

SAMPLE COVERAGE & ASSESSMENT PARAMETERS

- **Total Children Assessed:** 200 (Across 187 households in 20 villages)
- **Gender:** Girls: 111 (55.5%) | Boys: 89 (44.5%)
- **School Type:** Private: 130 (65%) | Government: 66 (33%) | Not Enrolled: 4 (2%)
- **Assessment Scope:**
 - **Foundational & Demographic Data:** Captured for all 200 children across all grades (including the 4 not enrolled).
 - **Grade-Level Competency Data:** Restricted strictly to 175 enrolled children in Grades 3 through 10.

SURVEY PROCESS



DATA COLLECTION PROCESS

All data was collected in the field through direct household visits and school interactions

● Core Team Administration

Assessments were administered by two core EIF team members, eliminating variance introduced by external enumerators and ensuring consistent application of the survey instrument across all villages.

● Real-Time Data Validation

The digital workflow enabled immediate validation of responses during field collection, allowing the team to identify incomplete or inconsistent entries on-site before leaving each household.

● Digital Recording

All responses, demographic details, and assessment results were recorded in real-time using Microsoft Forms on mobile devices – eliminating transcription errors and enabling immediate data validation.

● Dashboard Synthesis

Collected data was rapidly synthesised into data visualisation dashboards, enabling early identification of patterns across villages and grade groups before full analysis was completed.

QUESTIONNAIRE STRUCTURE

1. DEMOGRAPHICS & ENROLLMENT	• Child Age, Gender & Grade • Type of School • Medium of Instruction
2. LEARNING SUPPORT	• Learning support at home • Private tuition or coaching
3. DIGITAL ACCESS & USAGE	• Access to smartphone at home • Access to internet • What does the child mostly use the phone for?
4. DIGITAL SAFETY & AWARENESS	• Has anyone explained how to stay safe online or on a mobile phone?
5. ASSESSMENT OUTCOMES	• Foundational Literacy (English) achieved? • Foundational Numeracy (Mathematics) achieved? • Grade Level achieved? • Grade Level achieved post step-down, if applicable?

Educator Survey

To complement the child assessment data, a structured digital survey was administered to 62 teachers and educators across local government, private, and supplementary educational institutions. This captured critical ground-level perspectives on classroom realities, subject-specific struggles, and digital device usage. Educator survey findings are presented in Part D, Section 1.

ETHICAL SAFEGUARDS

● Parental Consent

Consent was secured from a parent or caregiver before engaging any child in the survey or assessment. Participation was entirely voluntary and could be withdrawn at any stage.

● Score Confidentiality

Individual assessment scores were not disclosed to peers, parents, or publicly. Results are reported only in aggregate form to protect the dignity and privacy of all participants.

● Data Anonymisation

No child names or personally identifiable markers were recorded in the digital forms. Individual responses cannot be traced back to any specific child or household.

● Respectful Interaction

All household visits and child interactions were conducted with respect, discretion, and cultural sensitivity. Assessments were administered in a non-pressured, conversational setting.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

● Geographic and Sample Scope

The survey represents a snapshot of 200 children across 20 villages within Kangra district. While the data identifies clear systemic patterns, the sample size and localized geography mean findings may not perfectly extrapolate to other districts or states with different socio-economic or educational infrastructures.

● Single-Time Assessment Snapshot

The survey captures learning outcomes and household conditions at a single point in time. The findings should therefore be interpreted as a snapshot of the surveyed period rather than a long-term measure of progress.

● Assessment Floor (Step-down Limits)

To protect the dignity of the child and avoid unnecessary discouragement during the field interaction, the grade-level assessment limited "stepping-down" to only one grade below their current enrollment. Consequently, while the data accurately identifies that a child is not achieving grade level, it does not quantify the exact depth of the gap for severely lagging students.

● Field Assessment Design

The assessment was designed as a field-based competency evaluation rather than a standardized examination. Findings should therefore be interpreted as indicators of learning patterns and structural trends rather than exhaustive measures of academic ability.

Learning Assessment Design

Each child from grades 3 - 12 was assessed in foundational skills covering foundational English literacy and numeracy skills. Grade-level assessment for children enrolled in grades 3-10 was conducted across three core subjects - English, Mathematics & Science. Together these two layers establish both what children can do fundamentally and how they perform relative to their enrolled grade.

FOUNDATIONAL ASSESSMENT

FL	Foundational English	4 marks
	- Word reading - Sentence reading - Basic comprehension - Grammar — fill in the blank	1 mark 1 mark 1 mark 1 mark
COMPETENCY		3 or more out of 4

FN	Foundational Numeracy	4 marks
	- Number reading - Basic addition - Basic subtraction - Fraction comparison	1 mark 1 mark 1 mark 1 mark
COMPETENCY		3 or more out of 4

Overall Foundational Assessment

FL and FN scores are combined out of 8. Children scoring 6 or above are considered to have achieved overall foundational competency across both English language and number skills.

GRADE-LEVEL ASSESSMENT

GE Grade Level English	GM Grade Level Mathematics	GS Grade Level Science
Grades 3 - 10: 3 questions at child's enrolled grade level testing reading, comprehension and grammar	Grades 3 - 10: 3 questions testing reasoning, problem solving and basic conceptual knowledge at grade level	Grades 3 - 10: 3 questions testing fundamental & conceptual understanding appropriate to child's enrolled grade
ACHIEVED: 2 OF 3 CORRECT	ACHIEVED: 2 OF 3 CORRECT	ACHIEVED: 2 OF 3 CORRECT

Bilingual Assessment Provision

Questionnaires for Foundational Numeracy, Grade-Level Mathematics, and Science were provided in both Hindi and English. This allowed children to engage with the material in their preferred language.

THE STEP-DOWN ASSESSMENT PROTOCOL

To ensure gaps were identified accurately without exhausting the student, the assessment followed a strict one-step downgrade protocol. Assessment beyond one grade below the child's enrolled level was deliberately avoided to prevent discouragement and unnecessary burden. The objective was to identify systemic learning gaps, not to test the limits of a child's endurance.

STEP 1

Child assessed at their currently enrolled grade level

STEP 2

If competency not attained, assessed one grade below

STEP 3

Learning level recorded at achieved grade level

SAMPLE FOUNDATIONAL ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

FL Literacy • English

1. **Read aloud:** Please read this word aloud - garden
2. **Read aloud:** Please read this sentence - The children are playing in the park.
3. **Comprehension:** What are the children doing?
4. **Fill in the blank:** She ___ going to school today. (is / are)

FN Numeracy • Mathematics

1. **Read aloud:** Please read this number - 347
2. **Addition:** What is $48 + 26$?
3. **Subtraction:** What is $62 - 19$?
4. **Fractions:** Which is bigger: $\frac{3}{4}$ or $\frac{1}{2}$?

GRADE-LEVEL ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS • GRADE 6 SAMPLE

GE**Grade Level English**

1. **Read aloud:** The travellers rested because they were tired.
2. **Comprehension:** Why did the travellers rest?
3. **Fill in the blank:** She has ___ her work. (done / did)

GM**Grade Level Mathematics**

1. What is $\frac{3}{5}$ of 20?
2. What does a ratio compare?
3. How many sides does a hexagon have?

GS**Grade Level Science**

1. Why does a stone sink in water but wood floats?
2. Why does wet cloth dry faster on a sunny day than a cloudy day?
3. Why do animals need oxygen?

Key Insight

Questions were designed to assess applied understanding rather than rote recall. The Grade 6 sample shown reflects the difficulty and format calibrated for that stage. All assessments were conducted verbally or in writing depending on the task, in a non-pressured, conversational setting to encourage natural responses from children.

Foundational English & Numeracy

Foundational English literacy and numeracy underpin further learning outcomes. Before examining grade-level performance, this section assesses how many children (out of 200) have acquired these core competencies and where gaps persist.

HEADLINE RESULTS



LITERACY VS NUMERACY – COMPARATIVE GAP

The data reveals that foundational numeracy gaps are nearly twice the size of English literacy gaps. Across the surveyed sample, Foundational Numeracy (FN) attainment rates are consistently lower than Foundational English Literacy (FL). This gap indicates that mathematics is a persistent and system-wide challenge rather than a grade-specific anomaly.

Foundational English



Foundational Numeracy



STATE-LEVEL CONTEXT: ASER 2024 REFERENCE POINT

To contextualize our findings, we compared results with ASER 2024 estimates for rural Himachal Pradesh (ASER Centre, 2024). While ASER provides state-level estimates and assesses reading in the child's home language using standardized benchmarks, our survey is limited to selected villages in Kangra district and evaluates English literacy alongside a broader set of arithmetic skills; comparisons should therefore be interpreted as indicative rather than directly equivalent.

Even within these constraints, a similar pattern emerges: ASER indicates stronger literacy outcomes relative to numeracy, and the Kangra sample reflects the same trend.

DEMOGRAPHIC & STRUCTURAL PATTERNS IN FOUNDATIONAL LEARNING

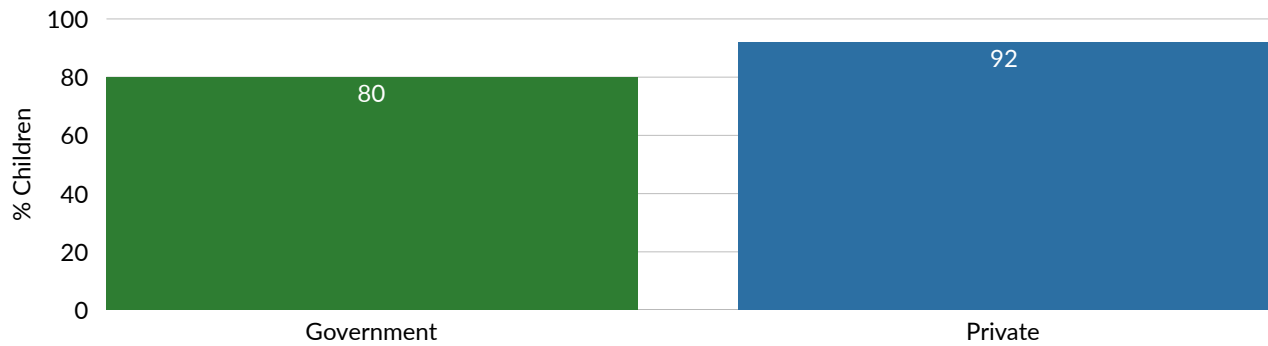


Chart 3: Foundational English & Numeracy (Overall) - % children achieving overall foundational skills. By school type

1

A consistent attainment gap exists between school types

A steady disparity exists between government and private institutions. Private schools consistently outperform government schools across all foundational metrics, showing an approximate 12-percentage-point advantage in overall foundational learning outcomes (92% attainment vs. 80%).

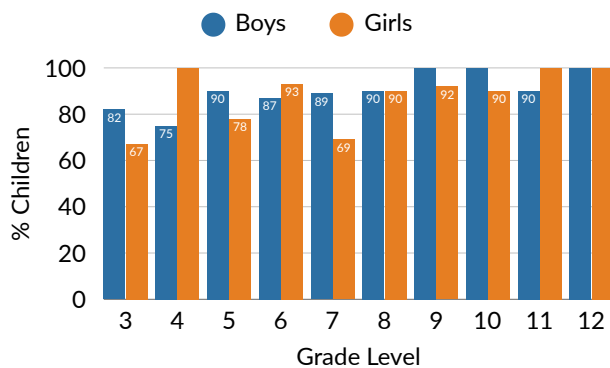


Chart 4: Foundational literacy (English)
% children achieving foundational literacy. By grade and gender.

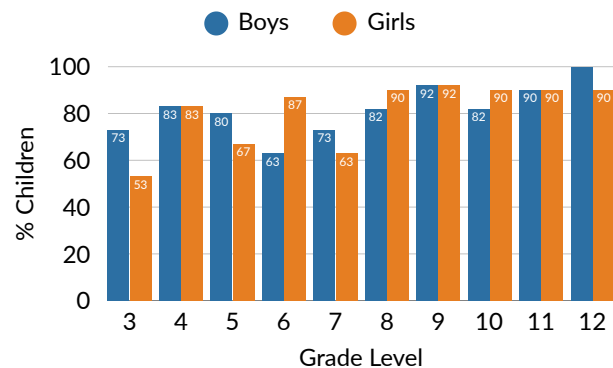


Chart 5: Foundational numeracy (Mathematics)
% children achieving foundational numeracy. By grade and gender.

2

Both genders struggle with early numeracy, but girls hold a slight edge in English literacy

While girls hold a slight advantage in foundational English, neither gender has secured early numeracy. Significant proportions of both boys and girls lack these core competencies at Grade 3, establishing a baseline deficit that carries forward into their primary schooling.

3

Grade 7 represents a critical point of foundational decline

Attainment rates do not steadily improve year over year; rather, performance noticeably dips around Grade 7 across both English literacy and numeracy for all students. This indicates that the transition to middle school, coupled with rising academic complexity, not only challenges grade-level learning but also exposes and exacerbates unresolved foundational gaps.

4

Foundational skills are eventually secured, but only in higher grades

While the early and middle school years show significant foundational struggles, outcomes improve in later years. Attainment rates for both English literacy and numeracy approach or reach 100% by Grades 11 and 12. This suggests that students who remain resilient and stay within the educational system eventually master these core competencies, though often much later than the curriculum expects.

DATA SPOTLIGHT: THE DOUBLE DEFICIT

While analyzing individual subjects is critical, the data reveals a compounding structural challenge: **24 children (12% of the surveyed sample) have not attained either foundational English literacy or foundational numeracy.**

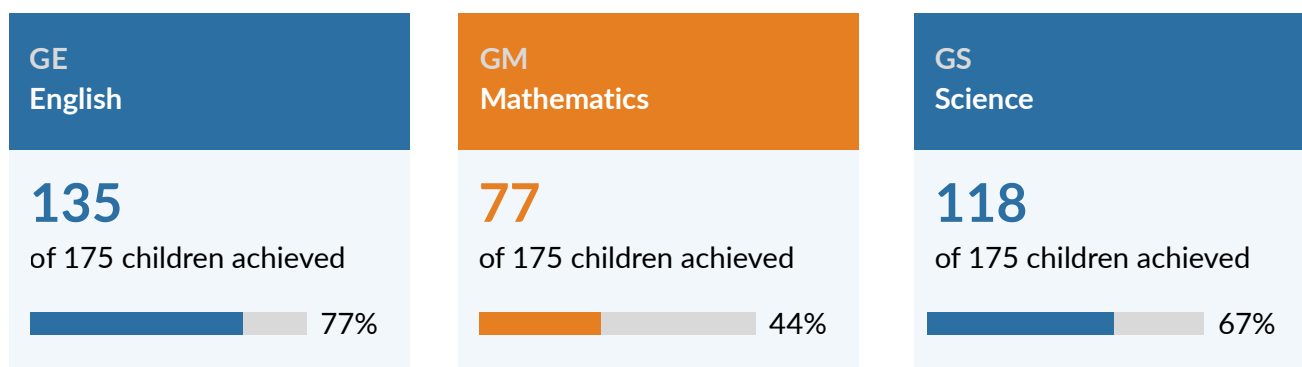
When a child falls behind in both core metrics, they face a "double deficit" that effectively locks them out of independent learning across all other subjects. This dual gap reinforces the need for holistic, multi-disciplinary remedial support in the early grades, as students cannot be expected to engage with complex grade-level curriculums if they are struggling to read the questions or recognize the numbers.



Grade-Level Competency Across Subjects

Foundational literacy and numeracy establish whether children can read and count. Grade-level assessments go further—evaluating whether children can attain the conceptual and applied expectations of their currently enrolled grade. This section examines how many children are genuinely learning at grade level across English, Mathematics, and Science.

HEADLINE RESULTS



35%
LEARNING AT GRADE
LEVEL ACROSS
ALL THREE SUBJECTS

Only 61 of 175 children met grade-level expectations across all three subjects simultaneously. A child may achieve grade proficiency in English but not in Mathematics, or achieve Science but not both others. The overlap is significantly smaller than any individual subject figure suggests.

65% children are below grade level in at least one subject

SUBJECT PERFORMANCE & TRENDS

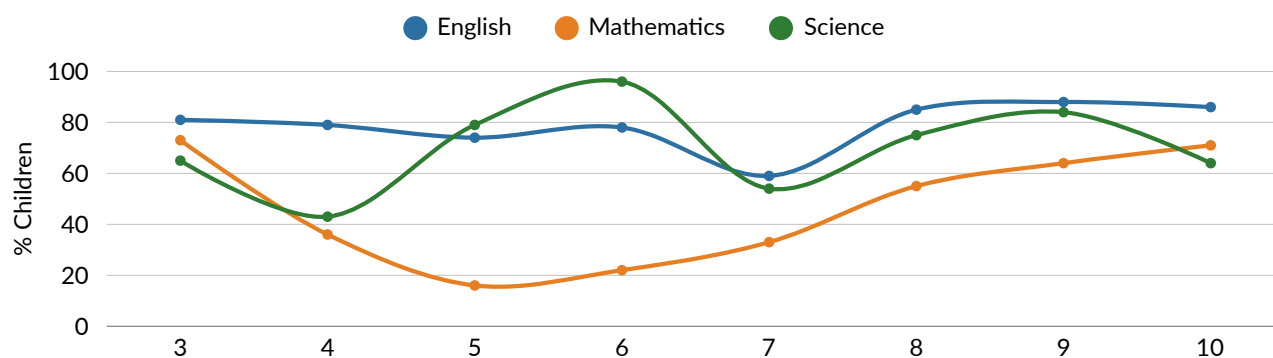


Chart 6: Grade level competency.
% children achieving grade level competency. By subject and grade.

1

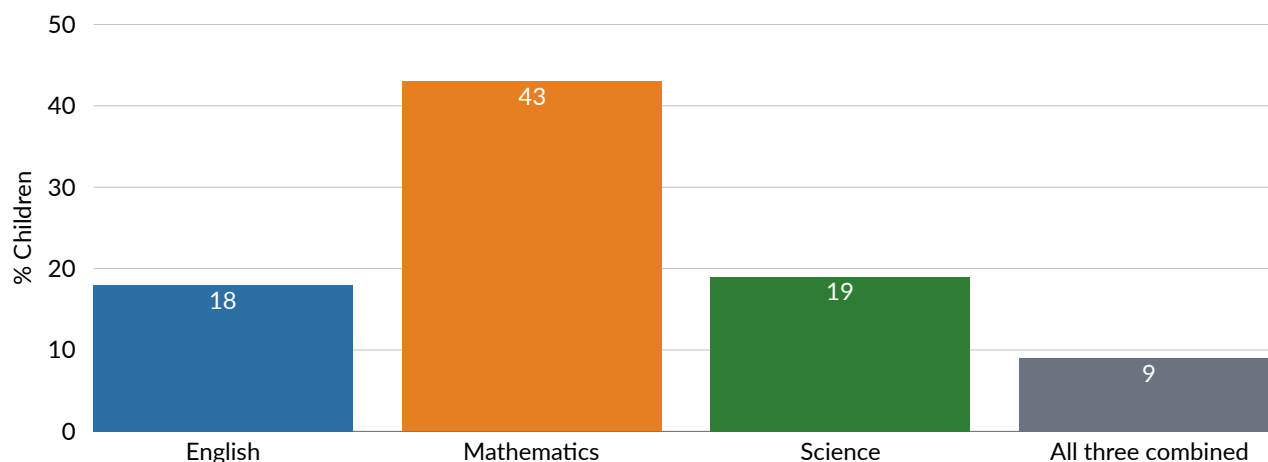
English remains the most stable subject across schooling years

As illustrated by the grade-level tracking, English attainment rates remain relatively consistent, rarely dipping below 60% at any grade level. Unlike other subjects, English competency appears significantly more resilient to the structural pressures and academic leaps that affect upper primary and middle school learning.

2

The Mathematics crisis is acute and localized

The decline in Mathematics competency is not a slow fade; it is a sharp collapse. Attainment rates fall dramatically from Grade 3, hitting a severe low point at Grade 5 (16%), before beginning a slow recovery toward Grade 10. This abrupt pattern points to a specific curriculum transition failure in the primary years, rather than a cumulative drift.



*Chart 7: Previous grade competency post step-down
% children not achieving previous grade level competency. By subject.*

3

The Step-Down Protocol confirms the depth of the Mathematics deficit

When children were unable to attain their enrolled grade level, they were assessed one grade below via the Step-Down Assessment Protocol. Even with this accommodation, Mathematics remained the highest area of non-attainment, with 43% of children still unable to demonstrate competency at a grade level below their enrollment. In contrast, only 18% did not attain the stepped-down level in English, and 19% in Science.

4

Science performance is volatile but recovers strongly

Science competency experiences significant fluctuations, dipping at Grade 4 and Grade 7, but peaking notably at Grade 6 (nearing 100%). While it mirrors some of the instability seen in Mathematics, students demonstrate a stronger, more resilient ability to recover and grasp Science concepts as they move into high school.

DEMOGRAPHIC & STRUCTURAL PATTERNS IN GRADE-LEVEL LEARNING

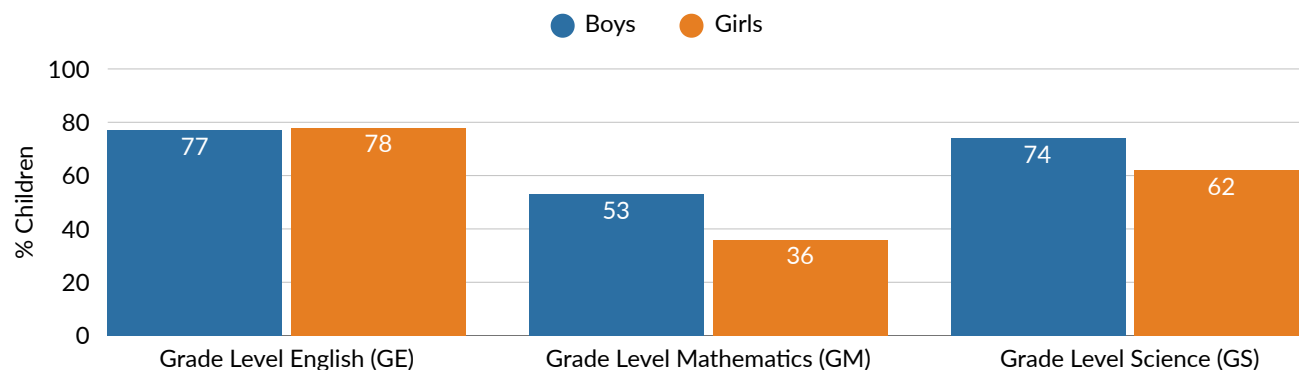


Chart 8: Grade level competency - % children achieving grade level competency. By subject and gender.

5

A severe gender gap exists in Mathematics and Science

While boys and girls achieve nearly identical competency in English (77% vs. 78%), massive disparities emerge in STEM subjects. Boys achieved a 53% attainment rate in Mathematics compared to just 36% for girls—a 17-percentage-point gap. A similar dynamic appears in Science, where boys outpace girls 74% to 62%.

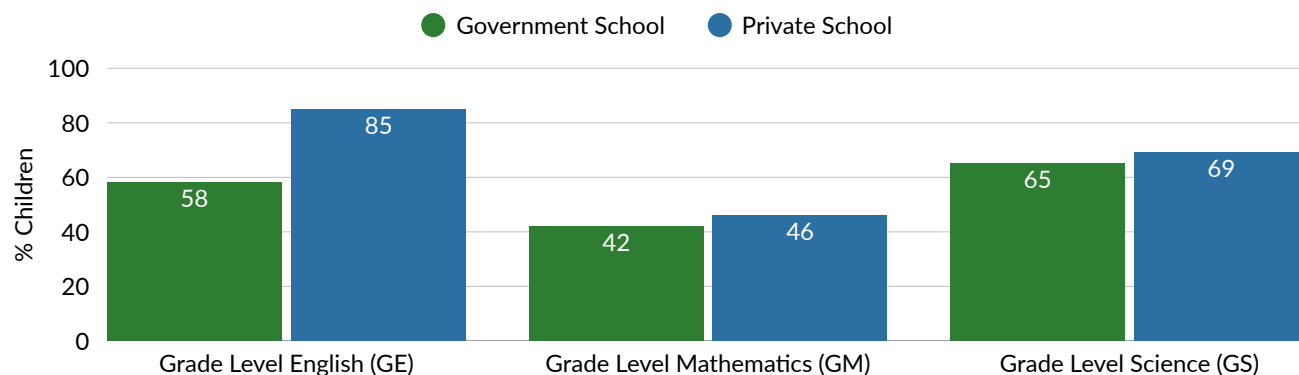


Chart 9: Grade level competency - % children achieving grade level competency. By subject and school type.

6

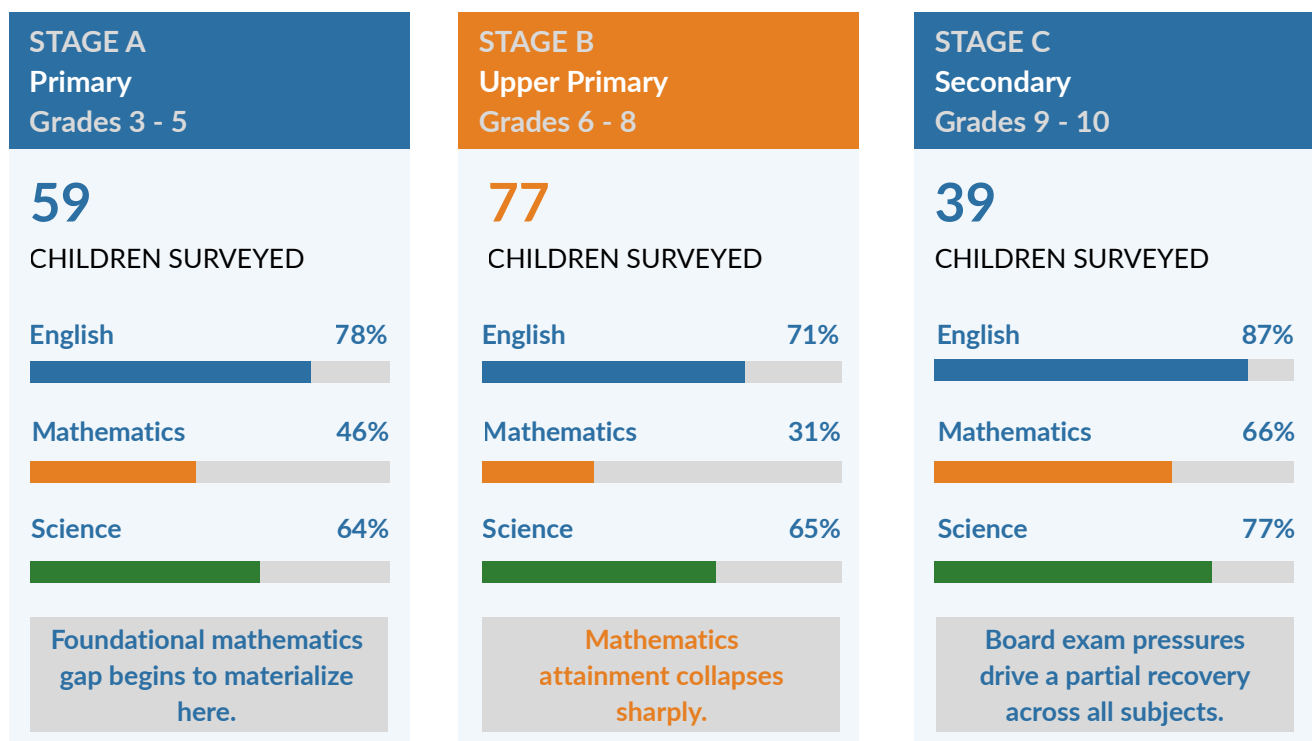
Private schools show a consistent competency advantage

Across all three individual subjects, private schools outperform government schools. The gap is most pronounced in English (a 27-percentage-point difference), while the gaps in Mathematics and Science are narrower. Consequently, overall grade-level competency (attaining all three subjects simultaneously) is noticeably higher in private institutions (40%) compared to government schools (27%).

Learning Progression Across School Stages

School systems are typically divided into three stages – primary, upper primary, and secondary. This section examines how learning outcomes shift across these stages, identifying where children maintain competency, where it deteriorates, and whether it recovers at higher levels.

STAGE BY STAGE OVERVIEW



PROGRESSION TRENDS & GENDER DISPARITIES

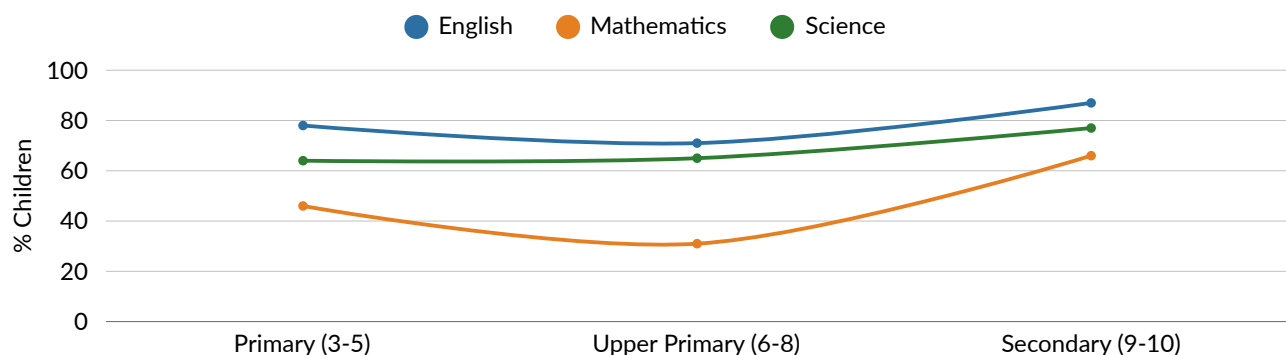
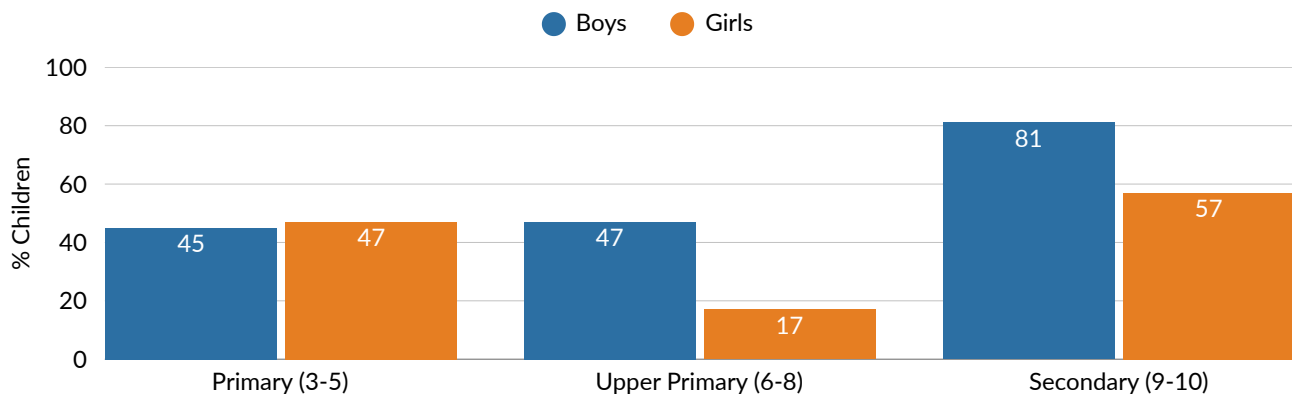


Chart 10: Grade level learning progression.
% children achieving grade level competency. By subject and school stage.

1

A steep decline hits Mathematics in the Upper Primary stage

The data reveals a distinct "U-shaped" curve for mathematics competency across the schooling stages. While English remains relatively stable and Science holds steady, Mathematics attainment collapses significantly during the Upper Primary years (Grades 6-8), falling to just 31% overall before showing a partial recovery in the Secondary stage.



*Chart 11: Grade level gender performance in Mathematics
% children achieving grade level competency in mathematics. By gender and school stage.*

2

The mathematics decline is deeply gendered, and girls lag in recovery

The sharp drop in Upper Primary mathematics is not experienced equally. While both genders start at a nearly identical baseline in Primary school (Boys: 45%, Girls: 47%), girls experience a far more severe drop during the Upper Primary stage, with attainment falling to just 17% compared to 47% for boys. Furthermore, girls lag significantly in the subsequent recovery phase.

3

Board exam pressures drive a Secondary stage recovery

In the Secondary stage (Grades 9 and 10), mathematics competency shows a strong, genuine recovery, rising to 66% overall. Because Grade 10 culminates in critical board exams, this period represents a high-stakes educational environment where both teachers and students approach academics with much greater focus and intensity, leading to a surge in attainment.

4

The gender gap narrows but persists through high school

While the intensified academic focus of Grades 9 and 10 benefits all students, the disparities established in middle school carry forward. Boys, buoyed by more consistent support through the middle years, jump to an 81% attainment rate in the Secondary stage. Girls also see massive improvement due to the board exam push, recovering to 57%. However, because they lost significantly more ground during the Upper Primary years, they remain noticeably behind their male peers despite the late-stage recovery.

Gender & School Type Patterns

The single largest structural inequality in the dataset is the distribution of students across school types. The data reveals that institutional access is heavily gendered, creating a foundational divide before learning even begins.

1

The Private School Gender Gap

While girls make up the majority of the overall surveyed sample (55.5%), boys hold a disproportionate monopoly on private education.

- **77%** of all surveyed boys attend private schools, compared to only **56%** of girls.
- This 21-percentage-point difference highlights a stark reality: when educational budgets are allocated within households, families are significantly more likely to invest in private schooling for male children.

2

The Feminization of Government Schools

Conversely, government schools are predominantly attended by female students.

- Girls account for 71% of all government school students in the dataset.
- Because private schooling correlates with more structured learning environments and consistently better grade-level outcomes, this distribution fact alone shapes much of the gender gap in competency observed across this report.

Boys		Girls	
89 44.5% of sample		111 55.5% of sample	
In Private School	68 (77%)	In Private School	62 (56%)
In Government School	19 (21%)	In Government School	47 (42%)
Not Enrolled	02	Not Enrolled	02

21%
POINT GAP

77% of boys attend private school versus 56% of girls — a 21 percentage point difference. This is the single largest structural inequality in the dataset. Private schooling correlates with higher tuition access, more structured learning environments, and consistently better grade-level outcomes across all subjects.

Key Insight

Government schools are predominantly attended by girls — 71% of government school students in the sample are female. Private schools, which offer greater access to structured learning and tuition support, are attended disproportionately by boys. This single distributional fact shapes much of the gender gap in outcomes observed across Part B in this report.

Access to Academic Support

Beyond school type, two additional support structures shape how children learn – private tuition and home learning support. Neither is available equally across gender groups, and their distribution by grade reveals critical patterns in when and for whom support is provided.

1

The Gender Gap in External Reinforcement

Boys consistently receive more academic reinforcement outside of standard school hours than girls do.

- **Home Learning Support:** 59.6% of boys receive home learning support, compared to just 51.4% of girls.
- **Private Tuition:** 33.7% of boys are enrolled in private tuition, compared to only 24.3% of girls.
- This approximate **9-percentage-point gap** across both categories limits consistent reinforcement for girls. It directly explains the severe drop in female mathematics competency during the Upper Primary years, as girls are left to navigate complex curriculum transitions without the safety net of external tutoring.

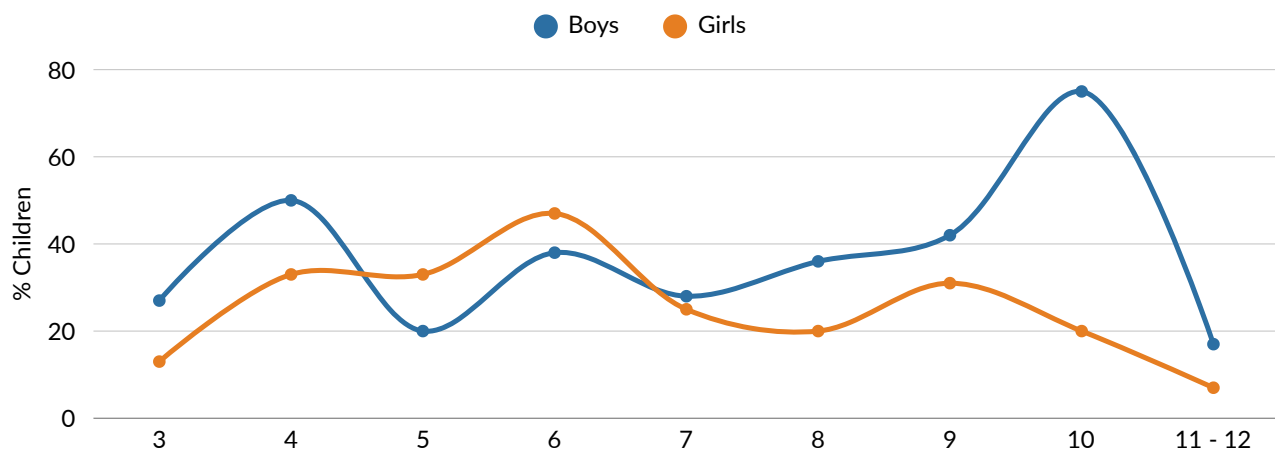


Chart 12: Distribution of children with tuition access
% children receiving tuition. By grade and gender.

2

Tuition Spikes During Transition and Exam Years

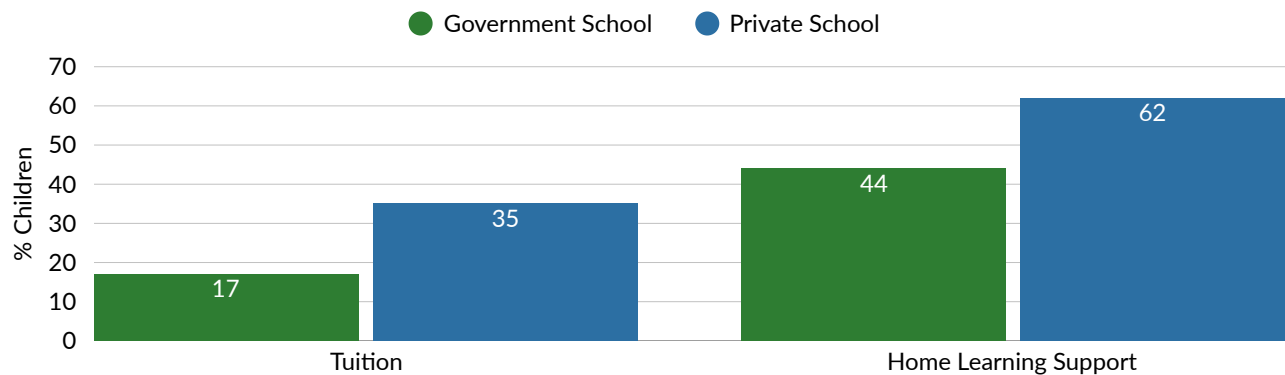
The allocation of private tuition is not steady; it is highly reactive to grade-level pressures. Tuition access rises in early primary (peaking around Grades 4 and 6), dips during the middle school years, and then spikes dramatically in Grades 9 and 10. This sharp increase—which heavily favors boys—aligns perfectly with the pressures of impending board exams and explains the Secondary stage "recovery" in mathematics attainment noted in Part B.

3

The Compounding Private School Advantage

Access to both home learning support and private tuition is heavily skewed toward students already attending private schools.

- Private school students are more than twice as likely to receive private tuition (35%) compared to government school students (17%).
- They also experience significantly higher rates of home learning support (62% vs. 44%).
- This reveals that the private school advantage is actually a compounding effect: these children benefit from both a more resourced institutional environment and a highly resourced home environment, widening the attainment gap further.



*Chart 13: Tuition & Home Learning Support
% children receiving academic support. By school type.*



Digital Exposure & The New Learning Environment

In the modern educational landscape, digital device access is a primary structural factor. However, unguided access presents distinct challenges for foundational learning and focus.

1

State Context: The ASER 2024 Digital Benchmark

According to ASER 2024 (ASER Centre, 2024), smartphone access in rural Himachal Pradesh is near-universal: 96.7% of children have a smartphone at home and 94.3% report being able to use one. Among children aged 14–16, over 90% of smartphone users reported using social media in the week preceding the survey, indicating high levels of digital exposure.

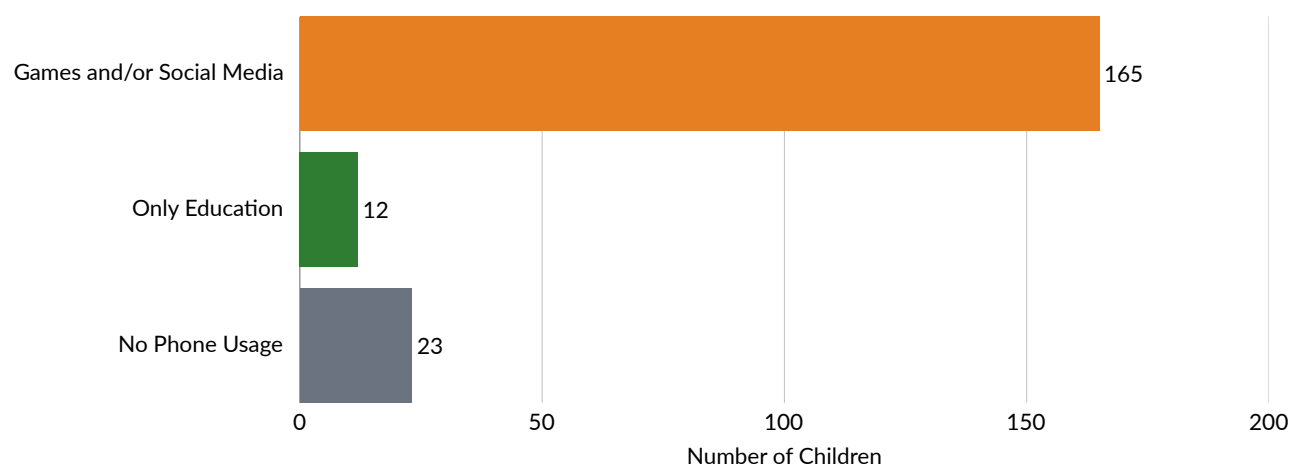
2

Local Realities: High Access, Low Academic Utility

While device access in our localized Kangra sample mirrors these high state averages, the quality of that digital engagement reveals a massive structural gap.

- 88.5% of surveyed children (177 out of 200) have regular access to a smartphone, and 89% have regular internet access.
- Despite this near-universal access, only 12 children (7%) utilize these devices strictly for educational purposes.
- In stark contrast, an overwhelming 165 children engage with games and social media.

The vast majority of screen time is dedicated to unguided entertainment rather than supplementary learning, actively competing with the time needed for homework and private study.



*Chart 14: Mobile phone usage among children
Number of children using mobile phones. By purpose of use.*

3

The Digital Safety Gap & Parental Absence

Despite widespread daily usage, foundational digital safety awareness remains a critical vulnerability.

- Nearly half the sample—46% of children (92 students)—reported having absolutely no digital safety training.
- For the 54% who have received training, that knowledge is almost entirely school-led (102 children).
- Only 6 children reported receiving digital safety guidance from their parents.

This severe lack of home-based safety awareness leaves students highly vulnerable to excessive screen time and unmoderated content exposure. It also highlights a crucial disconnect: parents are providing the devices but are either unavailable or unequipped to provide the necessary guardrails.

108

Reported exposure to digital safety training

54% of children reported having received some digital safety awareness.

Awareness is mostly school-led (102 children), with minimal parental role (6).

92

No reported digital safety training

46% of children reported not receiving any digital safety training.

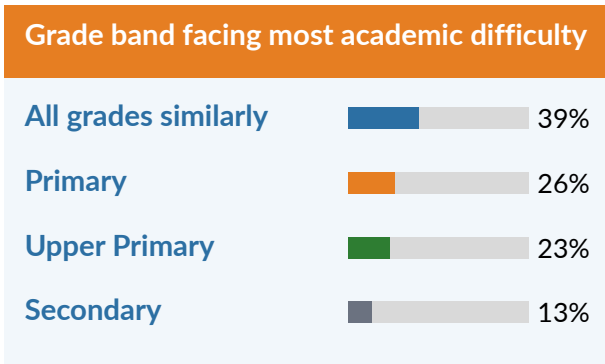
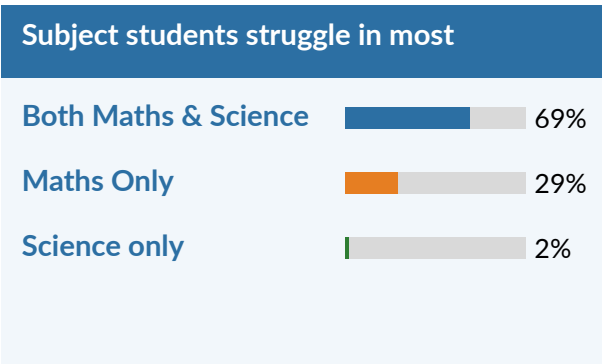


Teacher Perspectives & Classroom Realities

A structured survey was administered to 62 teachers and educators across participating schools in Kangra district, covering academic difficulty, subject struggle, reasons for underperformance, tuition effectiveness, and digital device use among students. Their responses provide a ground-level view of learning challenges, the role of digital devices, and the factors they observe shaping student outcomes in their classrooms.

1 A blind spot exists regarding middle-grade academic decline

While 98% of educators accurately identify Mathematics (or Mathematics & Science together) as the primary struggle area, they largely miss the distinct timeline of this decline. Assessment data shows a severe learning collapse specifically in Upper Primary, yet 50% of educators stated that all grades face similar difficulty, and only 26% correctly identified Upper Primary as the most difficult stage. This suggests the middle-school drop-off has become normalized in classrooms, underscoring the need for regular, structured assessments to complement classroom observation.



2 Academic struggle is driven by weak foundations and high distraction

When identifying why students struggle, educators pointed to two nearly equal factors: "Weak foundational learning" (53%) and "Distractions" (50%). This indicates teachers view poor baseline skills and high external distraction as compounding issues derailing student performance.

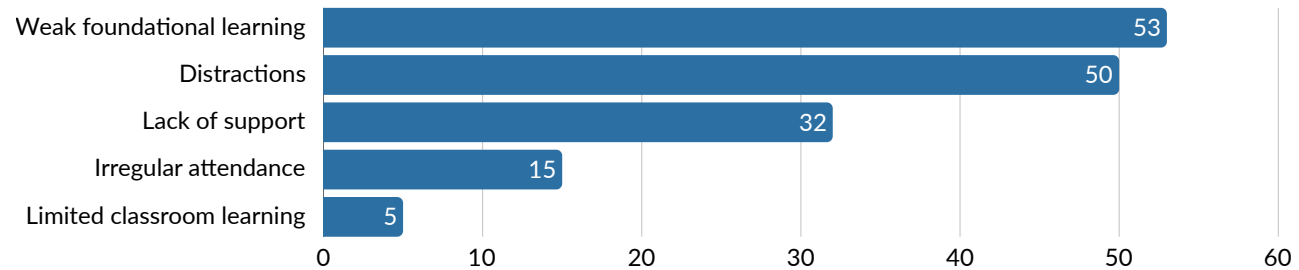


Chart 15: Primary reasons for academic difficulty identified by educators
Number of responses. By order of priority

3 Frequent smartphone use is a recognized classroom reality

According to the survey, 74% of educators report "frequent" student smartphone use, aligning with the pervasive usage patterns found in the household data. This confirms that habitual digital access is a constant reality that teachers actively observe impacting their students' daily lives.

4 Educators overwhelmingly view devices as entertainment or harmful

Most educators do not see smartphones as learning tools. 58% categorized usage as "Entertainment," 26% deemed it "Harmful for studies," and only 5% viewed it as educational. Furthermore, educators pointed heavily to specific digital risks, citing Gaming Addiction (36 responses) and Social Media Dependency (32 responses) as the primary threats to their students.

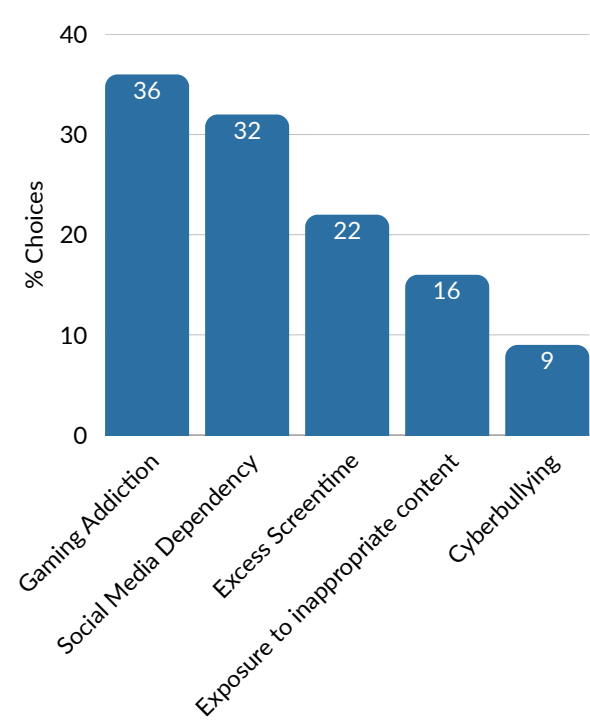
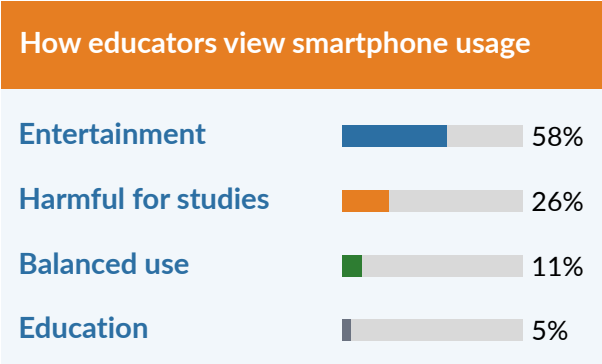
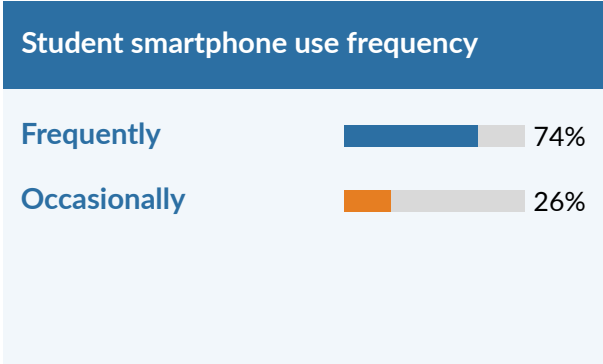


Chart 16: Digital use observed among children (as reported by educators)
Number of responses. By type of digital use observed.



Key Findings

The following findings are drawn from direct child assessments, household surveys, and educator responses across 20 villages in Kangra district. They represent the most significant and consistently observed patterns in the data.

THE OVERALL LEARNING & FOUNDATIONAL CRISIS

1

The gap between enrollment and competency is severe

While enrollment is universal and there are no dropouts within the surveyed population, 65% of surveyed children are performing below their enrolled grade level in at least one core subject. Only 35% (61 out of 175 children) met grade-level expectations across English, Mathematics, and Science simultaneously.

2

Mathematics presents a systemic challenge

Grade-level Mathematics sees the lowest competency rate at 44% overall. This is deeply rooted, as foundational numeracy gaps (48 children not attaining competency) are nearly double the foundational literacy gaps (28 children not attaining competency). Even when children were assessed one grade below their enrollment via the Step-Down Protocol, 43% still did not attain competency in the mathematics assessment.

THE UPPER PRIMARY COLLAPSE & GENDER LAG

3

Learning rapidly declines in middle school

Across the school stages, learning outcomes experience the sharpest decline during Upper Primary (Grades 6-8). Mathematics competency plummets to an overall low of 31% during this stage, proving this is a subject-specific curriculum transition failure rather than general student disengagement.

4

The middle-grade drop disproportionately impacts girls

Both genders begin primary school with similar mathematical competency, but during the Upper Primary stage, boys' attainment falls to 47%, while girls' competency collapses to a critical 17%.

5

Board exams force a recovery, but girls remain behind

In the Secondary stage (Grades 9-10), the pressure of board exams drives a strong recovery. However, because girls lost so much ground during the middle grades, they only recover to a 57% attainment rate in Mathematics, lagging significantly behind the boys' 81% attainment rate.

THE STRUCTURAL DIVIDE: SCHOOL TYPE & ACADEMIC SUPPORT

6

Private schools provide a massive and consistent advantage

Overall foundational attainment rates are 92% in private schools compared to 80% in government schools. At the grade level, 40% of private school students attain competency in all three subjects compared to just 27% in government institutions.

7

Access to private schooling is heavily gendered

77% of boys are enrolled in private schools, compared to 56% of girls, indicating a substantial gender gap in access to private schooling. As a result, girls are disproportionately represented in government schools, comprising 71% of the government school sample.

8

Girls lose household support exactly when academics get harder

Overall, boys receive more consistent home support (59.6%) and private tuition (33.7%) than girls (51.4% and 24.3%, respectively). Crucially, home learning support for girls drops sharply by Grade 4, aligning perfectly with their sharp drop in academic performance.

DIGITAL ACCESS VS. EDUCATIONAL UTILITY

9

Connectivity does not equal learning

Device access is near-universal (89% have regular internet access), but only 12 children out of the 200 surveyed utilize their devices solely for education.

10

A massive gap in digital safety

46% of children have never received any basic digital safety training. Where safety awareness does exist, it is almost exclusively institutional: out of 108 children with safety knowledge, 102 cited their school as the source, while only 6 cited their parents.



Conclusion & Way Forward

This study set out to understand whether children in rural communities are not just attending school, but actually learning. The findings point to a consistent and systemic gap between access and outcomes.

THE CENTRAL FINDING

The challenge is not that children are outside the system; all children surveyed remain active within the educational infrastructure. Rather, it is that the system is not responding to how learning gaps actually develop. Children are enrolled, but many are not achieving grade-level competency. They are digitally connected, but lack safety awareness and educational utility. Support systems exist, but they are unevenly distributed by gender and often arrive too late to prevent learning decline.

Improving enrollment alone will not improve learning outcomes. Closing this gap requires a shift from broad access to targeted action—ensuring that support reaches the right child, at the right time, in the right way.

WAY FORWARD

Addressing these gaps requires targeted, stage-specific, and equitable interventions across the learning ecosystem. The six priority areas below are drawn directly from what the data shows — not from general recommendations, but from the specific patterns observed in this survey.

01 Prioritise Foundational Numeracy Early

Numeracy gaps emerge at Grade 3 and persist through schooling. Early intervention in Grades 3-5 is the only reliable point of prevention.

02 Intervene Before Middle Grade Collapse

Grades 4-7 represent the most critical window. Targeted bridge programs and structured academic support must be deployed before Grade 6, as the decline is already well underway by the time late-stage tuition appears.

03 Ensure Consistent Support for Girls

The learning decline for female students is linked to reduced structural support, not ability. It is critical to maintain continuous academic support from Grade 4 onward and engage families to sustain girls' active participation in learning.

04 Integrate Digital Access with Learning and Safety

Access without guidance is not beneficial. Digital safety education must become a core, structured part of the curriculum, alongside active parental awareness programs.

Acknowledgements

The Enlightened India Foundation expresses its sincere appreciation to everyone who contributed to the successful execution of this study.

We are deeply grateful to the core team whose rigorous fieldwork and design helped shape this initiative. We extend our appreciation to Mrs. Shivati Jasrotia for co-designing the survey questionnaire and designing the final presentation of this report. Furthermore, we recognize the dedicated efforts of Priyanka and Diksha Thakur, who executed the vital field assessments across 20 villages in the Kangra district, with special thanks to Priyanka for her collaborative work on the data analysis.

We extend our heartfelt thanks to the children, parents, and families who participated and generously shared their time with our team. We are equally grateful to the teachers and educators from the schools and institutions listed below, whose survey responses added a vital, ground-level perspective. We further acknowledge the cooperation of the communities across the surveyed villages, which made this fieldwork possible.

This report is dedicated to the children of Kangra district—and to the communities, teachers, and families working every day to give them better opportunities to learn.

SURVEYED VILLAGES

Sidhpur	Sukkar	Sidhbari	Andretta	Sheehla
Tang	Sakoh	Pathiar	Mansimbal	Lakhmandal
Mashrer	Mandal	Khaniyara	Banwala	Parour
Gopalpur	Banuri	Narwana	Rakkar	Badhsar

PARTICIPATING SCHOOLS & INSTITUTIONS

GMSS School, Dari	PM Shri GGSSS, Dharamshala	Jokta Academy
GSSS, Rakkar	Neugal Public School, Palampur	SCA Dharamshala
GSSS, Ghaniara	Thakur Duni Chand Memorial Public School, Dheera	Spire Academy
GHS, Sidhbari	Guru Study Centre	Sri Kripa Academy

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ENLIGHTENED INDIA FOUNDATION

Rural Learning Assessment Report 2026

Kangra District, Himachal Pradesh

20 Villages | 187 Households | 200 Children

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