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Parents opt for holistic schools

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Calcutta: Academic performance may still matter, but for a growing number of parents, it is no longer the only factor when choosing a school for their child. A strong shift towards holistic education is changing how schools are being assessed, said several city principals.

"Parents are interested in academics, but they want schools to give equal emphasis to sports and co-curricular activities," said Seema Sapru, principal of The Heritage School. "They want children to be exposed to different activities so they can discover their strengths. Without opportunities, they wouldn't even know what they're good at."

This growing demand

for all-round development is evident from what parents are looking for during the admission process. In earlier years, parents would focus almost entirely on board exam results. Now, it's also about what lies beyond the classroom.

In most apartment blocks, play areas are limited or indoors. Schools can fill that gap.

The Heritage School, for instance, has expansive open spaces with over 25,000 trees, plants and shrubs. "Parents want their children to play in the open," said Sapru.

A mother who recently enrolled her two-year-nine-month-old daughter in nursery echoed this. "We want her to try several activities, especially in the early years."

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"With both of us working, we can't take her to multiple classes after school. So, we wanted a school that provides those opportunities," the mother said. "Every child won't be a topper, but each can be good at something."

To help parents get a better sense of what's on offer, some schools now allow "school tours".

"The tours are usually held on Saturdays, when students are not in class. During these visits, parents ask detailed questions about how we ensure that children have access to all the facilities," said Satabdi Bhattacharjee, principal of

The Newtown School.

"It reflects their clear interest in a well-rounded education. In fact, around 80% of parents tell us during interactions that they are looking for a school that balances academics with co-curriculars," she added.

The new generation of parents is also more open-minded. Suman Sood, director of BD Memorial Junior School, noted that earlier, parents would directly ask about exam results. "Now, they first want to know what kind of activities the school offers," she said. "They have also become less rigid, they no longer question why junior students are graded instead of being marked."

For many schools, this evolving expectation means becoming "a complete package".

"Parents want everything under one roof," said Nupur Ghosh, vice-principal of Mahadevi Birla World Academy. "If a school can help children develop both academic and co-curricular skills within school hours, it naturally becomes the preferred choice."

The textbook-only model of education is finally being phased out. "What children learn in the classroom must have real-life connection," said Ghosh. "And it's the role of the school and teachers to help them make that connection."

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Holistic education