

Are Higher Primary Schools ignoring Lower Primary classes?

**Lessons and evidence from 1121 higher primary schools of North East
Karnataka**

**S. Giridhar and D.D Karopady
Azim Premji Foundation, Bangalore**

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ABSTRACT

This paper is based on the analysis of data from the evaluation of 1887 government lower and higher primary schools under the Learning Guarantee Programme in North East Karnataka in July – September 2005. The programme, a joint initiative of the state government and Azim Premji Foundation, ran as a pilot in seven districts of North East Karnataka during 2002-2005. A key element of the program is that it sought voluntary participation of schools. The 1887 schools volunteered and were assessed on the criteria of enrolment, attendance and learning achievements of the children in grades 1 to 4. The learning achievement scores of the children in Language (Kannada) and Math were taken into account as one of the three criteria for evaluating the performance of the schools. Of the 1887 schools that volunteered, 766 were lower primary schools and 1121 were higher primary schools.

While over 10.4% of the lower primary schools were able to meet the qualifying criteria stipulated by the Learning Guarantee Programme, only 5.7% of the higher primary schools were able to meet the same criteria. Given the general impression that higher primary schools have generally better infrastructural facilities as compared to lower primary schools, there seemed to be no justification as to why the higher primary schools were performing more poorly. It was necessary to probe further, analyze the performance of the schools in detail and try and understand the reasons. The data used for this study is from the results of the assessment of learning outcomes of 192868 children in classes 1 to 4 in the 1121 higher primary schools and 61709 children in classes 1 to 4 in 766 lower primary schools.

The study establishes beyond doubt that on all counts related to the learning achievement of children in lower classes (1 to 4), higher primary schools delivered less than the lower primary schools. In order to ensure that this is a fair conclusion the performance of schools has been compared within similar bands of Pupil Teacher Ratio (PTR) and school strength. The study shows that the average performance of children from higher primary schools in Language in classes 1 to 4 is a good 3.1.percentage points lower than the scores recorded by the lower primary schools. This trend of starkly lower performance is also seen when a comparison is made of the percentage of children who score more than 80% marks as well as when one compares the percentage of schools whose averages are above 70%. In the same vein, a much higher percentage of higher primary schools have an average achievement of less than 30%.

While presenting the empirical evidence, it is useful to share a few case studies of some of the higher primary schools who form a part of the study. There are indications that higher primary schools are probably guilty of short sightedness. Perhaps because there is a history of a public examination for class 7 in Karnataka till as recently as 2003, one would find during visits to higher primary schools in February, a pervasive feeling of siege as all teachers join this last ditch effort. Being an annual affair till 2003, this perhaps becomes a perpetual cycle of denying children in lower classes the attention due to them. Even though the public examination for class 7 has been discontinued for the past few years, old habits die hard. The fact that schools in the state follow the 'no detention policy' in classes 1 to 4 may also be a contributory factor. The higher primary schools concentrate their resources and efforts in coaching the children of the higher classes and tend to put the more experienced teachers in higher classes. The teaching learning process is even more glaringly rote driven. The Head teacher who is so pivotal to an effective school is not apparently able to provide personal time, supervision or guidance as other administrative chores take precedence.

The purpose of this report is to highlight to administrators and managers in the education system to look closely at the way higher primary schools are performing their duty with regard to the learning of children in lower primary classes. The strong empirical evidence is presented to drive home this point.

The findings of this study show that there is an urgent need for the state to study in depth how the teaching resources are deployed in these schools. There is clearly a need for the academic and administrative system in the state to mentor and counsel the teachers of the higher primary schools to pay the required attention to

children in classes 1 to 4. It also makes eminent sense because if these children were to acquire the knowledge and skills that gives them a foundation for further learning, the teachers' task later on with these children will become easier and more enjoyable. It may also be critical to provide the head teachers of the higher primary school an orientation in leadership skills. Research has shown that good schools have been characterized by very effective and committed head teachers – much like a smart CEO of an organization. There is no reason why the higher primary schools with their better resources – well qualified teachers, better infrastructural facilities etc. – cannot quickly reverse this trend with some prudent re- organization of their priorities.

SECTION A: Snap shot of Learning Guarantee Programme 2005:

This study is based on the evidence that has been gathered through the Learning Guarantee Programme. The focus of this report is to derive insights from a comparison of the relative performances of the higher primary and lower primary schools. Therefore this section will only briefly touch upon the Learning Guarantee Programme to provide readers with the context and necessary overview of the Learning Guarantee Programme. For readers interested in fuller details on the Learning Guarantee Programme, these are available in earlier reports¹.

Learning Guarantee Programme is a joint initiative of the state government and Azim Premji Foundation. The programme ran as a pilot in 7 districts of North East Karnataka between 2002 and 2005. The seven districts of north east Karnataka have a total of 9270 lower and higher and primary schools. Of these 1121 higher primary schools and 766 lower primary schools chose to participate in the programme. These schools offered themselves for evaluation. The criteria for assessment were enrolment, attendance and learning achievements of the children in their primary grades.

The twin objectives of Learning Guarantee Programme may be summarized thus: One objective is to create a spirit of accountability among schools and education functionaries for the learning of every child. The other, is to advocate a classroom teaching learning reforms through systemic shift in assessment - from the traditional test of rote learning to test of a child's understanding, application and problem solving ability.

In the pilot program in Karnataka, every child in classes 2, 3, 4 and 5 was tested through oral and written tests for competencies of their previous class. The tests were not based on the text book but were designed specially to evaluate learning, understanding and application of the expected competencies of the children. The evaluation of schools in the Pilot programme was done in July – September of each year and hence the children were assessed for the previous grade's competencies in Language and Mathematics. Oral tests were administered for about 15 minutes per child for each subject, while children were provided 90 minutes for written tests for each subject. A team of 4 independent evaluators conducted these tests. A school that has about 80 children in Classes 1 to 4 (or 2 to 5) would take 4 members of an evaluation team, 3 days to complete the evaluation. Children were not given more than one written test on any day. During this evaluation, the team also collected data pertaining to enrolment and attendance of every child.

For the evaluation of the 1887 schools in North East Karnataka, 460 evaluators were engaged for three months (74 working days in July, August and September). These evaluators were volunteers who were at least a graduate and in quite a few cases had an additional degree in Education or social work. They were selected through written test and personal interview. The selected candidates were trained in a 4 day residential programme – including a one day live trial of evaluation in a school – in batches of around 60 evaluators. The 460 evaluators in Karnataka formed 115 teams of 4 members each. Each team was assigned a maximum of 18 schools to complete in 3 months.

¹ "The Learning Guarantee Programme", Seminar 536 – April 2004

" Learning Guarantee Programme: 2003", Learning Curve, Issue II, March 2004

"The Learning Guarantee Programme: A Learning Journey 2002-05", D D Karopady and S. Giridhar, UNESCO – Pratham November 2005

" Assessment Reforms Through Voluntary Participation of Schools" , S. Giridhar, D D Karopady and Umashanker Periodi - NCERT Pupil Assessment Workshop , March 06

"Strengthening the government school system: Lessons from promising practices", Kameshwari Jandhyala and Vimala Ramachandran, May 06, Report commissioned by Department of Elementary Education, MHRD, GOI and International Labour Organisation, New Delhi

At the block head quarters, a team of transcribers were assigned the task of converting the child wise score sheet into an “Intelligent Character Reader sheet” that could then be scanned and processed by the computer. Using the ICR top sheet eliminated possible errors at the data entry stage.

Monitoring, supervision and technical support to these evaluators to ensure integrity and morale was provided by a team of 55 area coordinators, three program supervisors and the program leader. There was no complaint from any of the 1887 schools assessed who acknowledged the fairness and integrity of the process and the results of these evaluations.

Karnataka government adopted this process subsequently when they assessed over 40000 schools under the Karnataka School quality assessment Organization in January 2006.

A detailed evaluation process manual is available in English, Kannada and Hindi.

Qualifying schools in the Learning Guarantee Programme met the following criteria:

Enrolment:	100% of children in the 6 – 11 age groups in the habitation are enrolled in school
Attendance:	Minimum of 90% of the enrolled children attended at least 75% of total number of working days in school during the academic year
Learning achievement:	Minimum of 60% of all children enrolled in classes 2, 3, 4 and 5 scored 90% on competency based tests

Snap shot of the Learning Guarantee Programme	
1887 schools out of the 9270 schools in the seven districts of North East Karnataka voluntarily participated in the Learning Guarantee Programme.	
Of the 1887 schools that participated, 766 schools are lower primary schools (Class 1 to 5) and 1121 are higher primary schools (classes 1 to 8).	
Total number of children assessed in the 1887 schools: 254577	
Total number of children assessed in the 766 lower primary schools: 61709 Total number of children assessed in the 1121 higher primary schools: 192868	
94.4 % of the 1887 schools fulfilled the criteria of demonstrating 100% enrolment	
56.35 % of the 1887 schools fulfilled the criteria of enrolment <u>and</u> regular attendance of at least 90 % of the children enrolled in the school	
7.63 % schools could meet the learning criteria in addition to the enrolment and attendance criteria. Thus any reference in this paper to “qualifying schools” is for the schools that <u>met all three criteria</u> .	

SECTION B: Schools that participated in Learning Guarantee Programme: The basis for empirical evidence

Were there some signs right in the beginning that higher primary schools were not going to perform that well? Perhaps not but perhaps we did not pick up the signals. When we turn the pages of our diary, a noting made on 4 and 5 February, 2003 catches our attention. That was the time when schools had just sent in their applications to participate in the program and the first assessment of schools was going to be held about 6 months later during the next academic year.

4 and 5 February 2003: We had been to 4 GHPS in Marvi Block of Raichur district and to 4 more GHPS in Sedam Block of Yadgir district the next day. At virtually each of these schools, the head teacher's primary concern was the forthcoming public examination for class 7. The portions had to be completed, revision and drills and practice tests had to be completed and the atmosphere was "all hands on the deck". The image of the harried lady head teacher in Konkal is vivid. She has over 500 children enrolled in her school, but hardly 60% of the children in lower classes attend school. She does not have time to follow this up nor does she have time to supervise a remedial teaching programme for the lower classes. All her concentration for the past few months has been on the 7th class public examinationit is going to be a searching examination for the head teacher!

Was this a representative indication of the state of affairs? A year later the first signals from the Learning Guarantee Programme came in and it showed that there were more Lower Primary schools which qualified as winners as compared to the higher primary schools, a trend that remained through the next two years:

L G P Evaluation	LPS			HPS		
	Schools evaluated	Qualifying schools	% success	Schools evaluated	Qualifying schools	% success
2003	493	24	4.9 %	403	16	4 %
2004	576	57	9.9 %	864	24	2.8 %
2005	766	80	10.4 %	1121	64	5.7 %

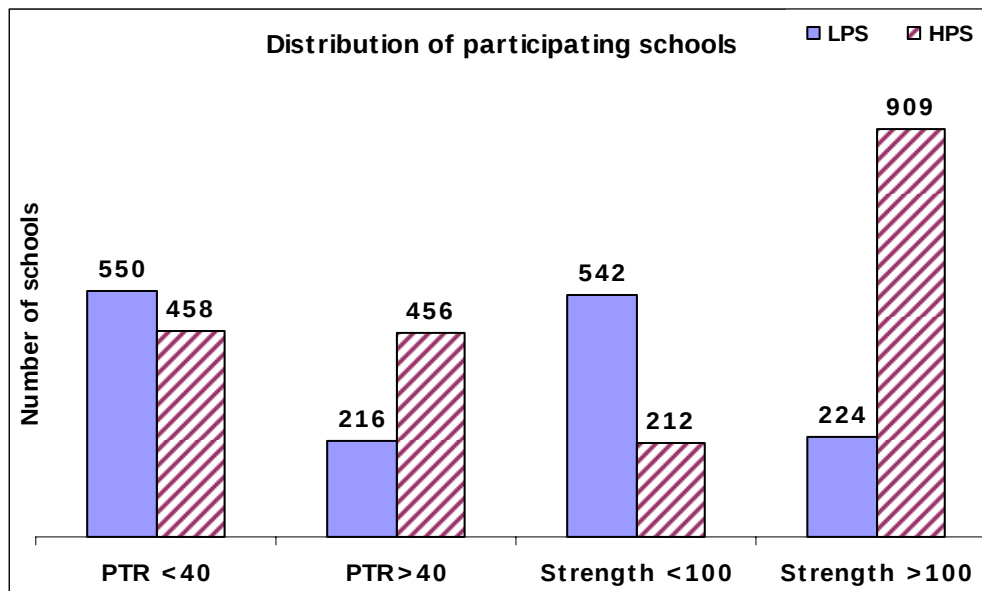
One of the options that the programme offered to volunteering schools was that they could choose the year that they will offer themselves for evaluation. That is why in the table above, one sees the progressive increase in the number of schools evaluated from 896 in 2003 to 1887 in 2005. It is interesting to note that of the 766 lower primary schools that opted for participation, 493 schools (64%) volunteered for evaluation in 2003, 04 and 05 while of the 1121 higher primary schools that participated, only 403 schools (36%) volunteered for evaluation in 2003, 04 and 05.

Some more insights into these schools:

There were 3990 Lower primary schools in the seven districts of North East Karnataka in 2002-03 when the program was launched. Of these schools, 766 volunteered for the Learning Guarantee Programme; i.e. a participation of 19.2%. Similarly, of the 5280 higher primary schools in North East Karnataka, 1121 schools came forward, i.e. a participation of 21.2%

The average school strength in classes 1 to 5 in the participating LPS was: 87
The average school strength in classes 1 to 5 in the participating HPS was: 172

Figure 1



It is relevant to note that the average school strength in the participating schools is 16% lesser than the average school strength for North East Karnataka. Similarly when we compared the mean pupil teacher ratio for participating schools with the mean pupil teacher ratio for all of North East Karnataka, the PTR was 16% lesser among the participating schools.

Thus there seemed to have been clearly an element of self selection by the schools for the Learning Guarantee Programme. Since all the comparisons and inferences in this report will be from the participating schools, readers might like to remember that the situation in non participating schools may be more aggravated.

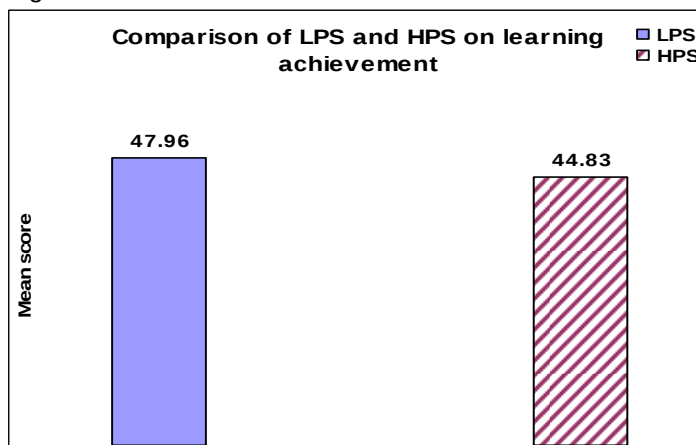
Section C: Evidence from school assessment in 2005

The first indication of the difference in performance has been documented in the previous section of this report. Only 5.7% of higher primary schools met the criteria of the Learning Guarantee Programme while 10.4% of lower primary schools met the same criteria. The performance of schools on the criteria of the Learning Guarantee Programme is of course the point to begin this examination. At the same time it would be necessary to examine the performance across a spectrum. What does the comparison of HPS and LPS on the criteria of mean learning achievement scores? What does the analysis of the percentage of children in the lower range of learning achievement scores tell us about these two categories of schools?

It is necessary to remember that although we attempt to look at schools performance on learning achievement by slicing this in a variety of ways, essentially we are only using the test scores which is just one aspect of school performance. What we thus compared schools on were the following parameters:

- The performance of schools meeting Learning Guarantee Programme criteria
- The mean learning achievement scores in schools
- The percentage of schools with mean scores > 70%
- The percentage of children who scored > 80% marks
- The percentage of schools whose mean scores were < 40%
- The percentage of schools whose mean scores were < 30%

Figure 2



The average score of the 1121 HPS is 44.83 while the average for 766 LPS is 47.96. These mean scores as mentioned earlier are on the basis of oral and written tests in Kannada and Mathematics for classes 1, 2, 3 and 4.

The table below presents these details in HPS and LPS:

Mean score	Class 1	Class 2	Class 3	Class 4
	Math			
HPS	44.6	44.3	38.3	40.4
LPS	46.5	45.9	40.5	44.3

Mean score	Class 1	Class 2	Class 3	Class 4
	Kannada			
HPS	42.7	44.5	42.6	48.5
LPS	42.7	45.6	44.3	51.9

The mean score of LPS is greater than that of HPS in both subjects for all the four classes, with the sole exception of Kannada in Class I, where the mean scores for both HPS and LPS is the same. While in some subjects and classes the difference is a couple of percentage points, there is a sharper difference in Class 4 for both Math and Kannada.

Figure 3

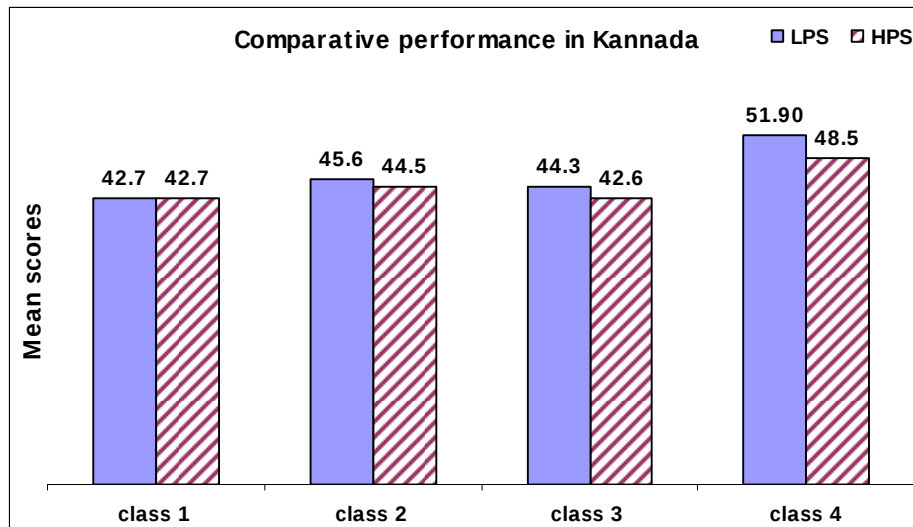
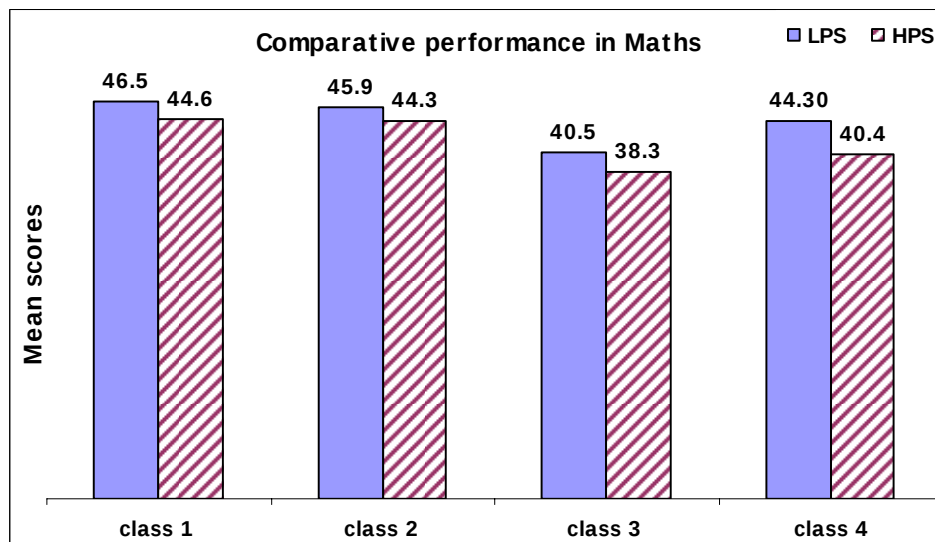


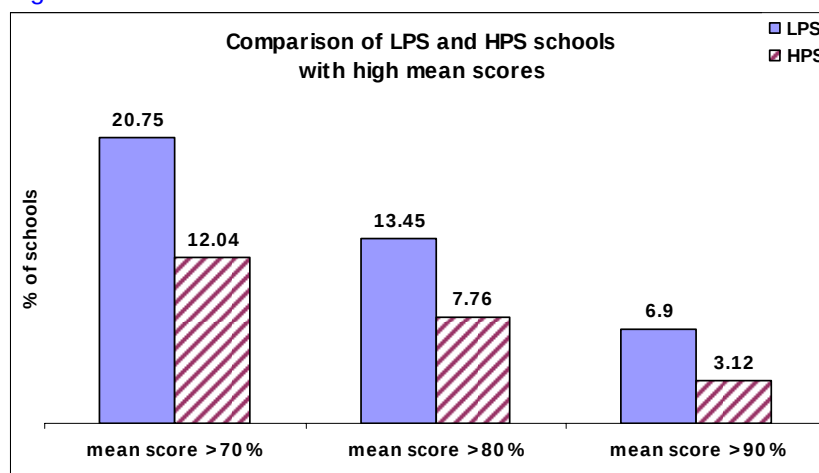
Figure 4



Math scores drop in both LPS and HPS in Class 3. The recovery in of the Math score in Class 4 for LPS is more evident than for HPS. In Kannada, the improvement of the score from class 1 to class 4 is more pronounced in LPS than in HPS.

The following graph depicts that when we compare the performance of the HPS and LPS on the proportion of schools whose mean scores are higher than 70% or 80% or 90% we see that on all the three yardsticks the LPS outperform the HPS.

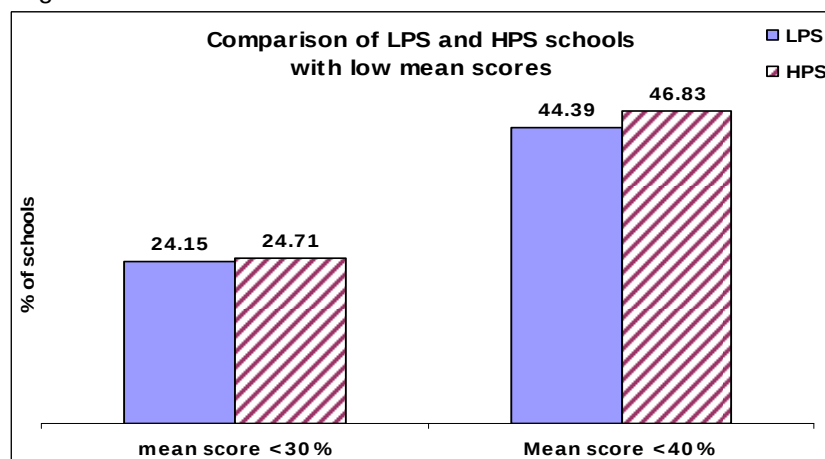
Figure 5



One in five LPS schools has a mean achievement score of > 70% while one in nine HPS schools has such a score.

While comparing schools on performance, there is enough warning in literature that the researcher gets swept away comparing schools for only the top layer performance? In other words, schools that concentrate on only their better performing students could shine unfairly as compared to schools that work with every student and not just on their star performers. It is necessary from an equity angle to check if schools meet certain minimum threshold levels of achievement. It was with a view to cover this aspect that we analyzed the data to examine the distribution of schools with low average achievement.

Figure 6



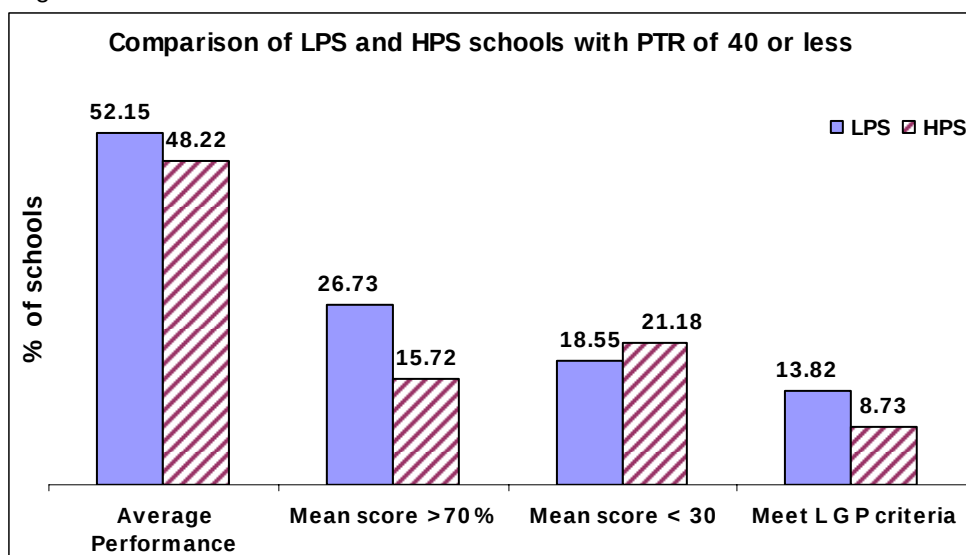
Here too one finds the performance of HPS poorer than the LPS.

Are the odds stacked against the higher primary schools? We examined two immediate factors for which we had data to compare and arrive at some understanding. One was the Pupil Teacher ratio and the other was the school strength in classes 1 to 4. The fairest way of conducting this analysis was to compare the performances of the LPS and HPS schools that are in similar bands OF Pupil Teacher ratio and school strength. First a comparison on PTR:

In an earlier study of the correlation of Pupil Teacher ratio and school performance that we had done, we had established that schools that have a pupil teacher ratio in excess of 40:1 have less than 2 % chance of meeting criteria such as the Learning Guarantee Programme. Therefore we decided that in order to compare school performances of higher and lower primary schools, not much purpose would be served in comparing schools whose PTR is greater than 40:1. Instead meaningful insights and granulation would perhaps emerge if we compared the performances of schools whose PTR is less than 40:1.

Examining the schools in the band of PTR less than 40 on the same parameters shows that on each and every parameter, the performance of HPS is poorer than LPS. Thus, while 40 out of 458 HPS (8.73%) meet Learning Guarantee Programme criteria, 76 out of 550 LPS (13.82 %) meet the same criteria. The story remains the same when you compare the proportion of schools whose mean scores are greater than 70% or 80% or 90% and when we compare the proportion of schools whose mean scores are less than 30%. This is what the graph depicts below:

Figure 7



In fact when a comparison of the higher primary and lower primary schools with PTR < 25 is made, the difference in performance emerges even more sharply. The LPS performance improves significantly at PTR below 25 while the HPS performance hardly improves. Thus, on all the parameters discussed in the report the difference is magnified.

Type of School	PTR Range	# of Schools	Average Performance	Performance > 70 %		Meeting L G P criteria		Performance < 30 %	
				# of schools	% of schools	# of schools	% of schools	# of schools	% of schools
HPS	<25	69	49.11	10	14.49	2	2.9	16	23.19
LPS	< 25	210	57.37	75	35.71	45	21.43	31	14.76
HPS	< 40	458	48.22	72	15.72	40	8.73	97	21.18
LPS	< 40	550	52.15	147	26.73	76	13.82	102	18.55

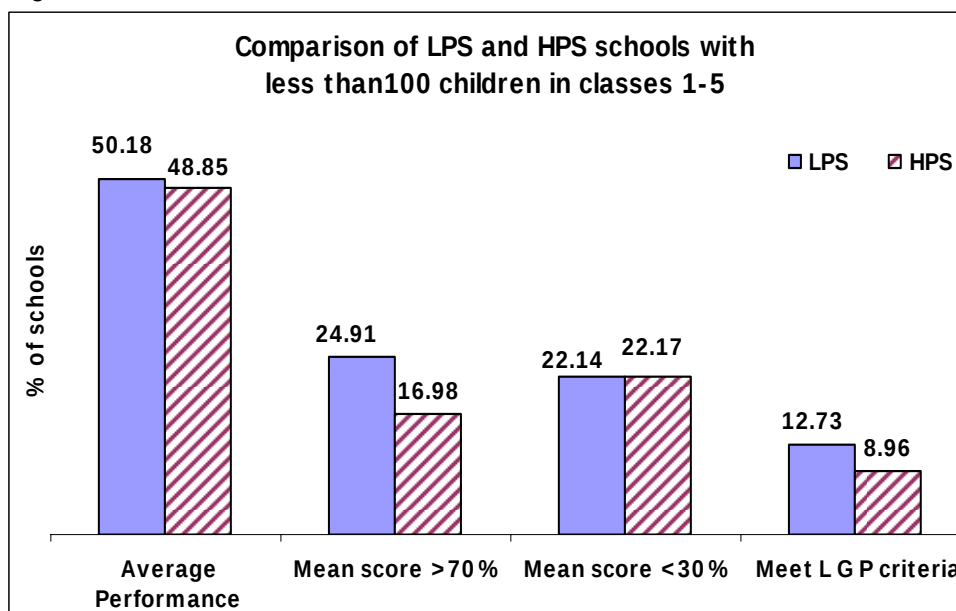
We chose to highlight the schools at a PTR band of below and above 40:1 because that is the existing norm that states are seeking to fulfill. However our earlier study² has shown that the 40:1 Pupil Teacher Ratio norm has inadequate rationale. The study shows that less than 2% of the schools with Pupil Teacher Ratio in excess of 40:1 are able to demonstrate that a majority of their children are learning. The study suggests that it may be worthwhile for administrators to re-visit the PTR norm and work towards PTR below at least 30. The Tapas Majumdar committee recommendation too is for the PTR norm of 30:1. In the light of this it becomes relevant to compare performances of the HPS and LPS schools whose PTR is below 30:1.

Type of School	PTR Range	# of Schools	Average Performance	Performance > 70 %		Meeting L G P criteria		Performance < 30 %	
				# of schools	% of schools	# of schools	% of schools	# of schools	% of schools
HPS	< 30	146	52.53	30	20.55	15	10.27	25	17.12
LPS	< 30	328	55.09	101	30.79	60	18.29	51	15.55

The performance of LPS improves as the PTR goes below 40 (and improves significantly when it goes below 25:1) and on the other hand the performance of the LPS deteriorates when the PTR becomes adverse. However – and disturbingly so - the performance of HPS schools seems to remain more or less the same irrespective of whether the PTR is more favourable or less favourable. HPS do not seem to raise their performance if the PTR is improved.

One can see a similar situation to an extent when we examine the factor of school strength. See graph below

Figure 8



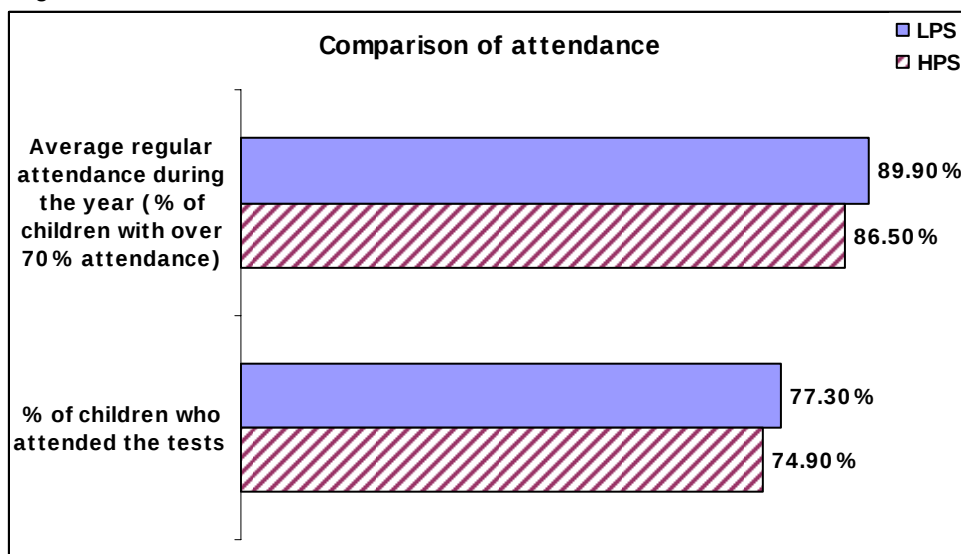
² “The criticality of Pupil Teacher Ratio: Empirical evidence from 766 lower primary schools of North East Karnataka”, S.Giridhar and D.D. Karopady, October 2006

Again on all parameters barring one, the HPS performance suffers in comparison to the LPS. The one parameter where the HPS does not suffer (where its performance is equal to that of LPS) is the proportion of schools with mean scores below 30%.

Comparison of attendance

Even on the attendance parameter, we found that the lower primary schools performed better than higher primary schools.

Figure 9



As seen from the above table, both in terms of average attendance of children during the academic year 2004-05 as well as attendance on the three days that the LGP test was conducted, the attendance in higher primary schools was lower than the attendance of the lower primary schools.

More evidence from rest of Karnataka

Towards the end of 2005, the Government of Karnataka carried out an evaluation of 6464 schools (32 from each of the 202 blocks in the state) using the Learning Guarantee Programme model. Of these, 352 schools met the criteria of the Learning Guarantee Programme.

It is interesting to note that in these 6464 schools too, there is clear evidence of HPS performing far below the LPS. Of the 3357 HPS that were assessed, 103 schools met the Learning Guarantee Programme criteria, a success rate of 3.1%. On the other hand of the 2722 LPS that were assessed 249 schools qualified; a success rate of 9.1%.

Karnataka has since conducted an assessment of over 40000 schools under Karnataka Schools Quality Assessment Organization (KSQAO) in January 2006. There is more corroborative evidence from this data too. The results further reinforce the theme of this report. For instance, in Huvina Hadagali Taluk of Bellary district, only 10.1% of higher primary schools scored over 60% while 30.6% of lower primary schools scored over 60%.

Ground realities in higher primary schools

What is the situation in these higher primary schools out there in rural North East Karnataka? What is a typical day in these schools? How different are they from the lower primary schools? What are some crucial ground realities that may be the reason that HPS probably do less for lower primary classes than the less endowed lower primary schools?

We and our team of field researchers spent a week in Bellary district with some of the rural government higher primary schools that had participated in the Learning Guarantee Programme. We decided to visit schools that had done reasonably well in the Learning Guarantee Programme but not enough to demonstrate that a majority of their children were learning. Some of these schools were also government designated model higher primary schools. We did not visit schools that had done very poorly. We also visited a higher primary school that was a winning school in Learning Guarantee Programme, i.e. clearly a fine school.

The pattern that emerges has a lot of positive elements and also some illuminating negatives. We saw that the higher primary schools that we visited were well endowed. These schools were neat and clean, were spacious, had compound walls and they had enough and more rooms for their classes. While a few rooms in the schools may need repairs, the schools had separate rooms for the head teacher, store room, kitchen for mid day meals, a play ground, toilet for boys and girls, some have separate room for the library and even a science laboratory. The class rooms were clean, airy and well lit as they had a few windows and the door open.

At Model HPS Holagundi, a school that improved its performance consistently over the 3 years of the Learning Guarantee Programme and met the criteria in its third attempt one saw both passion and innovation. There is evident team work; there is an attempt to involve the community and share progress with them and there are some absolutely passionate dedicated teachers.

N D Rekha, who has been teaching Class 3 children for many years in this school, is full of ideas. She brings to her children a whole lot of experiences through anecdotes, photographs and a scrap book that looks so much more interesting than the hackneyed teaching learning material that one finds being used mechanically in classes. Rekha's class has 52 children and she was quite emphatic that she can manage such a class well. We saw in her an ability to somehow get across to all the children, seated in 8 rows on the floor in the room.

The schools started sharp at 10 AM with a well organized assembly and we found all teachers present (except those on deputation or sanctioned leave) at least 10 minutes before start of school. Each class has a room for itself. The school strength in the schools that we visited were in excess of 400 and therefore for the higher classes (Classes 6 and 7) they had two sections each and separate rooms for each of these. These schools had 12 or 13 teachers apart from the Head Teacher so that the average PTR in these schools was below 40:1. Each of the lower classes (1 to 4) had an exclusive teacher assigned to the class while the remaining teachers were assigned specific subjects for classes 5, 6 and 7. It is interesting that the physical education teacher in these schools is a true all rounder, well clued in about every aspect of the school and also doubles up as a subject teacher in emergencies. The noon meals are extremely well organized and there is a clock work precision in the way the food is distributed and the seating of children. Children find at least 10 to 15 minutes to play after their mid day meal and before afternoon classes begin. Children appear very cheerful and the class room atmosphere is not oppressive. We did not see evidence of physical punishment barring the exasperated "friendly thump" on the backs of some frisky children!

What are the commonly observed negatives? For one, the Head Teacher is really hard pressed to supervise the lower classes. During the day one does not see the head teacher doing the rounds of lower primary classes or interacting with their teachers. The head teacher seems to spend a large part of the day in his/ her room and is generally surrounded by a few teachers at any point of time. The one time the head teacher is in touch with all teachers is when he or she supervises the mid day meal. Some head teachers do appear stressed with the challenge of managing 12 to 13 teachers.

The head teacher has the autonomy to design the classes and deploy the teachers. But we see that mechanically, higher classes are broken into sections while the lower primary classes are all in one room even when 60 to 70 children are enrolled. The time table is a rigid dictator in higher primary schools. Thus each period is 40 minutes (and to be fair the teachers virtually use every minute) and whatever be the state of the lesson, the teacher stops when the bell rings and moves to another subject and lesson. This is in stark contrast to the lower primary schools where the teachers are able to exercise great autonomy in the way they schedule their classes. For instance, in the LPS, teachers can teach a subject or lesson for about 60 to 70 minutes so that there is a logical start and finish point with time to review and summarize and ensure that almost all children are keeping pace.

The emphasis that we observed in the HPS is on rote learning. It is done with great diligence and rigour. The lesson is transacted in a regimented fashion, the questions at the end of the lesson are memorized, and the teacher takes the trouble to check if every child has memorized the answers. So much so that when we asked some of the children to narrate the story in the lesson in their own words they could only rattle off the lesson because they had been so sincere in memorizing the lesson. The teachers, whom we observed in these schools, generally were essentially in a monologue mode. There seems to be no attempt at forming groups and encourage children to learn from each other through such peer support. While teachers did their best to ask many of the children questions to see if they were following the lesson, they certainly did not think it desirable to allow children space to think and raise questions. In fact one teacher feared that such a process would encourage the children to wander away from the lesson and derail the class.

There is a history and legacy of concentrating more time and resources on the higher classes. Till 2003, Karnataka had a public examination for class 7 and the head teacher and his staff would spend considerable time and resources in preparing the children of class 7 with revision, drill, extra classes. In the pre 2003 days, the visiting functionaries (BRC, education Coordinator) too would largely concentrate on these higher classes.

Coupled with this is the situation where schools in the state follow the 'no detention policy' from Class 1 to class 4, a practice which may further reinforce the schools' concentration of efforts on the higher classes. Head teachers say that with the discontinuation of the public examination, there seems to be a change in this and a more even spread of their time and supervision for all classes.

The differential attention to lower primary and higher primary classes is a matter of concern. The need for supervision and guidance is critical.

It is in these situations that the criticality of a sagacious Head Teacher becomes sharply evident.

The very experienced Mr. Shekhar Naik, 51, Head Teacher of Model HPS Itagi, says that now the visiting functionaries are spending time in lower classes. He also feels that the introduction of semester system from class 5 has reduced the stress in higher classes and he does not have to put in those kinds of "mad February" efforts as he used to earlier. Naik (his views quite representative of the other HPS head teachers) says that we actually need the best teachers for lower classes but may not be placing such teachers currently. In his own way in the last two years he has changed and swapped teachers when he felt that they were not perhaps suited to teaching very young children in lower primary classes.

On the importance of supervision and guidance to the lower primary classes, Naik's good intentions of wanting to visit every lower class once a week and observe the processes are sincere but are not being implemented. Naik for instance maintains a meticulous diary where he records his observations during visit to class rooms but there is only an average of one entry per month.

At HPS Nagathibasapura which is a designated model school, on the day of our visit we saw that children of Class 4 were completely left to their own devices since the teacher was on sanctioned leave that day. The head teacher had made no immediate arrangements to ask another teacher to take care of the class for the day nor did he step in himself for even one period to spend time with them and give them some assignments.

The introduction of KSQAO assessment has some interesting fallout! For instance, KSQAO has announced that in January 2007, they will assess Class 3 and Class 5. One could see that the HPS that we visited were not taking any chances and ensuring that their classes 3 and 5 were given all the attention by their class teachers. One cannot but wonder that if KSQAO announced that they would *assess any two of the five lower primary classes* would these HPS then do things differently and ensure all five lower primary classes were given all attention?

We found these observations very illuminating. For these were not apathetic schools but well meaning schools whose limitations were in sharp contrast to their sincerity. There seems to be a dire need for education functionaries to support these HPS with their lower classes; there is a need for a leadership and basic management orientation for head teachers and there is a need for the head teachers and the teachers of the lower primary classes to exercise the autonomy that is available to them in being flexible with their daily time table while being in line with the overall teaching plan for the month or semester

The April 2004 study of ICDS³ by the Educational Resource Unit has some interesting insights on how teaching resources are (not) deployed equitably for class 1. For instance, the shifting of Anganwadis to primary or higher primary schools was a positive factor; the Anganwadi workers (AWW) felt that this also enhanced their status: they were seen as teachers and not merely as child-care workers. However at the school it also meant that "...Anganwadi workers had to manage not only the AWC children but were often asked to take charge of Class 1 children as well...."(Page 13).

Further ahead in the same report (page 33 and 34), is a noting of significance to this study: "...Observations at the centres revealed that "...The AWCs located in the schools functioned from 9 am to 1 pm in winter and 8 am to 12 pm in summer. In two Anganwadi Centres, the children were sitting with class 1 student, with the AWW minding the entire group. Given the high pupil-teacher ratios in UP the AWW were elevated to the status of a teacher and given the responsibility of class 1."

The above noting indicate the general inclination of schools to utilize the least qualified, least equipped persons to take care of the first formal class of a child and using their other teachers for higher classes. It is what Prof A K Jalaluddin (discussion notes May 2005, Bhopal) called the building of a backlog from class 1 onwards forcing upon the teachers the need for remedial teaching and other measures as the children moved to higher classes.

Concluding observations

The entire structure of this report has been built by comparing the performance of higher primary schools with lower primary schools and care must be taken that while doing so we do not lose perspective of the current situation with regard to the quality of learning. ***In fact the report does not present LPS as better off than HPS. On the contrary the report brings to readers' attention that HPS are worse off than LPS!***

The education department – both administrative and academic wing- should dig deeper into this kind of evidence. In many states (and in Karnataka as in this study), nearly 50% of the schools are higher primary schools. They are generally situated in larger villages and habitations with the result that perhaps twice the number of children study in the lower primary classes of these HPS as compared to the smaller LPS in smaller villages and habitations. For instance in this study, the number of children studying in classes 1 to 4 in HPS outnumber the children in LPS by a ratio of nearly 3:1. On the one hand we know that the infrastructural facilities at higher primary schools are better than many of the lower primary schools. On the other hand there is also talk (and action) that these higher primary schools should serve as nodal schools to provide

³ "Analysis of positive deviance in the ICDS programme in Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh," Version 2, 14 April 2004, Educational Resource Unit, New Delhi, Lucknow and Jaipur

academic support to networked schools in their vicinity. But based on the kind of empirical evidence that we have seen here and the insights from the qualitative observations, the higher primary schools may not be remotely in a position to do.

There seems to be an urgent and clear need to build the leadership qualities of the head teachers of the higher primary schools. Managing over 10 to 15 teachers and a school strength of 400 children calls for leadership. The training of head teachers should focus on this. Clearly the fact that many of the children after 4 to 5 years of primary schooling have not acquired what is appropriate at that stage makes the task of teachers in the subsequent classes very difficult. Prudence dictates that if these schools could get their lower primary classes right it will make their own task in higher classes so much easier and fulfilling. To begin with, why not encourage schools to position the 'most capable teachers' for the lower classes and explicitly state this openly? The autonomy with regard to deployment of teachers, the flexibility with time tables – all these and more are all part of the leadership role of head teachers. Our academic support structure in the states must examine how these qualities can be developed in our higher primary school head teachers.

It is hoped that the empirical evidence and insights from observation of high school ground realities will trigger serious introspection and action by education administrators to redress the state of affairs in higher primary schools in India. .