

# Gujarat govt sets up call centre with realtime tech to keep an eye on its school teachers

**PAGE 1**  
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THIS IS one phone call that government school teachers across Gujarat cannot afford to miss.

And once they answer, the voice at the other end will ask them a series of questions from a template about the location of their assignment for the day, the task, and who assigned it. If they are on leave, they will have to provide details, including the number of days and the approval

authority.

This, in short, is the state government's new "realtime technology enabled" surveillance plan to "keep an eye" on over 1.95 lakh school teachers after the new academic session starts on June 10.

The aim is to improve the quality of education by ensuring that teachers stick to their assigned tasks on a daily basis. Officials say the system was devised after various discussions and reports concluded that poor monitoring of teachers resulted in absenteeism and "non-seriousness".

It's not just the teachers, though. Even those who moni-



The control room functioning on a pilot basis in Gandhinagar. *Express*

tor them will be handed GPS-enabled tablets and tracked through geofencing by which an alert will be triggered when a mobile device enters or leaves a specified area.

The entire operation, officials say, will be run from a tech-equipped "command and control centre", which is being set up in Gandhinagar. The centre will initially be staffed by 50 dedicated members, hired in equal numbers from the Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) and the office of the Director, Primary Education (DPE). It will include a call centre to be run under Vinod Rao, Principal Secretary, Education.

**CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**



## Gujarat teachers

Speaking to *The Indian Express*, Rao said: "We do not want to follow the carrot and stick policy for teachers but instil a feeling among them that their work is being monitored on a realtime basis and there is no escape from it."

*The Indian Express* visited a pilot control centre and found about 30 staff members equipped with headphones in front of computers, typing out responses from teachers on Google forms. The data is fed into Excel sheets to record responses for each day. Staff at the

centre say they make about 500 calls a day but expect that number to reach 1,250 once the centre officially begins operations.

Officials say the call centre feedback would be verified with online data collected by other means at different hours of the day to keep track of teachers, principals, and cluster and block resource centre coordinators. "Our online attendance system has already made teachers realise that they are being monitored in real time," said Rao.

Officials say each caller would ask about 10 questions, on an average, from a set that has been "strategically framed jointly by a team of experts under SSA's quality enhancement cell and approved by the SSA officials". The questions will change on a regular basis, depending upon the activity or projects being carried out in a school.

The call centre system is also being seen as a solution to instances of "cheating" by some teachers. "Earlier, a government school teacher or co-ordinator would not answer a phone call from their superiors. Instead, they would call back after collating information expected from them or after reaching the school they were supposed to be in. We could not question them because of a government resolution that does not allow teachers to use mobile phones in class," an Education Department official said.

According to a senior government official, teachers would be exempted from this mandatory clause to answer the feedback call.

