

# Once dropouts, these children start taking lessons once again

**COMEBACK STORY** Belonging to economically weaker sections, they were categorised as out of school children



Students all cheer during Children's Day celebrations at Government Model Senior Secondary School in Sector 47, Chandigarh, on Thursday. HT PHOTO

Srishti Jaswal

srishti.jaswal@htlive.com

**CHANDIGARH:** Starting his schooling at the age of 11 was difficult for Rohit Kumar. He was categorised as an 'out of school child' (OOSC) in 2017, but the support of the teachers at the special training centre (STC) in the Government Model Senior Secondary School (GMSSS) Sector 47-D, made his education possible.

Without formal elementary education, Rohit was able to score an 'A' grade in his mathematics examination held in September this year.

"It was very difficult but after a few months of taking classes with the other students, I began to understand the lessons," Rohit said.

He was forced to drop out of school when he was in Class 3 in Bihar's Patna due to his family's constant migration. The son of an ironsmith, Rohit has two siblings and identified as a school dropout when he shifted to Chandigarh.

His two-year journey at STC began the process of him entering

the mainstream into the formal education system after he was admitted into Class 6 in 2017.

As many as 4,000 OOSC who have been identified by the Chandigarh administration have a similar story and are now entering the mainstream. A majority of these children are victims of socio-economic conditions.

They belong to disadvantaged communities including Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, migrants, children with special needs, urban deprived children, working children and children from displaced families as per Sarva Siksha Abhiyan's documents.

There are 143 STCs with 139 teachers in Chandigarh and each centre caters to approximately 25 to 30 students. The grant for OOSC is sanctioned per child for schools. As per SSA documents, the 6-month training cost per child is ₹3,000, and for 9 and 12 months training, it is ₹4,500 and ₹6,000 is granted respectively.

34-year-old Ruchi Sharma, who has been teaching these children for last 11 years said, "The

main challenges are to convince parents about the importance of their children's education, incentivise students to attend school daily and to ensure that they don't dropout again."

Asif Ansari, 12, a student educated under an STC said that for the first three months, he was taught daily living skills including personal cleanliness along with reading and rhyming.

"After a student attends school for a couple of months initially, we perform the assessment test to see if they are ready to go to the next level of learning or not," added Ruchi.

Nannu, 9, who was freshly enrolled in a STC in June, said, "I like to attend classes here as we are taught with care."

Two brothers, Akash, 7 and Vikash, 8, studying together said, "We like attending these classes because we get food."

Cluster resource centre coordinator, Sukhdev Kaur added, "These children are also given mid-day meal which incentivises them to continue their education and not drop out."