

Delhi: Deaf students' wait to get school back won't end soon

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NEW DELHI: Close to 700 students at the only senior secondary school for the deaf in the capital, who have been waiting to get their classrooms back from the social welfare department, have been told to wait for two-and-a-half-years more. As the students study in packed classrooms, which are in a dilapidated state, the department is yet to vacate half of the school premises it occupied in 2005.

Tired of raising this issue, the National Association for Deaf (NAD) has called for a protest at the Vikas Bhawan on Thursday. More than 1,000 deaf people will gather and call upon chief minister, Arvind Kejriwal, asking him to get the premises vacated.

The department, under whose jurisdiction Government Lady Noyce Senior Secondary School at Feroze Shah Kotla falls, has been occupying the premises since 2005. Initially, the shifting of the department to the school premises was a temporary situation till it could find a new place, but almost 40% of the premises has been taken up.

A S Narayanan, president for NAD said, "After several meetings with the department officials and advocacy, the department said it still needs another two and a half years' time to shift into the new place at Kingsway Camp. The disability sector has already waited for the past eight years! It is extremely unfair to make the deaf children wait for another two and a half years."

While officials refused to comment, social welfare minister Rajendra Pal Gautam said the issue has never been brought to his knowledge. “Nobody has ever approached me with the complaint. The department has been functioning there for many years and the school and the office have separate gates. I will definitely look into the issue if a complaint is made to me,” Gautam told TOI.

Despite the space being occupied by the department, the school speaks of apathy on the part of the government. As TOI visited the premises on Wednesday, the paint on the walls could be seen peeling off. The washrooms are dirty, and the taps, window glasses broken.

Parts of the playground have been occupied for parking by the department. One area has been turned into a dumping ground for garbage. The electric wires are protruding from the walls and left uncovered.

As it is a residential school, the school has hostels for both boys and girls. But the students complained of poor quality food being served.

“Children are stuffed in classrooms and the student-pupil ratio not followed. There are vacancy for teachers but the department is not interested in recruitment. The government does hardly anything. Those living in the hostels have to pay money,” said a teacher of the school on condition of anonymity. The school has vacancy for around 100 teachers currently.

The principal of the school, PC Paswan, could not be reached for a comment.