

Autistic child fit to attend school with shadow teacher: Panel

Boy Wasn't Violent & Didn't Disrupt Class, Finds Report

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Mumbai: An eight-year-old autistic boy, who was ousted from Jamnabai Narsee School in Juhu last year, is "fit to be allowed to attend regular school with a shadow teacher", said a report submitted by an expert panel to the Maharashtra State Commission for Protection of Child Rights on Tuesday.

The report was based on the observations of the commission-appointed panel, comprising child developmental experts and led by Dr Samir Dalwai, who reviewed the child in a classroom setting. The report said the boy did "not show any signs or inclination of hurting himself or others" during the observation period, as had been alleged by the school.

In July 2012, the boy's par-

ents received a letter from the school requesting them to transfer the child to another institute as his behaviour was disturbing other students. Armed with the provisions under the Right To Education (RTE) Act, the parents moved the Maharashtra State Commission for Protection of Child Rights in August 2012.

According to the RTE Act, every child has the right to education and schools have to take steps to integrate special children with conditions such as autism, learning disability or cerebral palsy.

Earlier, the Bombay high court and the commission had asked the school to allow the child in the classroom for a month along with a shadow teacher. This was the first court case in the country where a spe-

DECODING THE MENTAL CONDITION



ABOUT THE DISORDER

- ▶ Autism is a range of complex neurological disorders characterized by social impairment, communication difficulties, and restricted, repetitive and stereotyped patterns of behaviour
- ▶ Children may have the most severe form called classical autism or milder forms known as Asperger syndrome
- ▶ Experts say 1 out of 88 children under eight years of age will have some form of autism



SIGNS TO WATCH OUT FOR

- ▶ Autistic children may not respond to people or may focus intently on one item to the exclusion of others for a long time
- ▶ They will not respond to their names, will avoid eye contact and can't understand social cues
- ▶ They may have repetitive movements such as rocking and twirling
- ▶ They may have self-abusive behaviour such as biting or banging the head

HOW TO HANDLE AUTISTIC CHILDREN IN CLASSROOMS

- ▶ Before giving instructions, make sure the child is paying attention. Use simple language, not complicated words
- ▶ Too much noise and bright colours can distract the child
- ▶ Visual timetables help children with autism to see what is going to happen and when; this reduces their anxiety
- ▶ Use social stories and comic strips to teach social skills
- ▶ Try to teach a new topic in as many situations as possible
- ▶ Give the child time to process information
- ▶ Avoid non-literal language such as metaphors, sarcasm and idioms

cial child was allowed to attend a regular school with a shadow teacher, said Dr Dalwai.

The panel was to observe the boy for a month, but the experts could do so only for two

weeks as the academic session was coming to an end. The report was submitted to the com-

mission on Tuesday and both the parties—the school and the parents—have been asked to de-

liberate on the report and decide if it is acceptable in the next three days.

The report said that despite his prolonged absence, the child showed remarkable adaptation and willingness to attend school. "There was no violent or self-destructive behaviour, which is aided by the presence of a shadow teacher," said the report. The school had claimed that the child was a threat to other students as well as to himself due to his developmental problems, but this "was not the case", said the report.

In his report, Dr Dalwai said, "His classmates responded with utmost love, concern and affection... They were seen willingly and lovingly helping him with his tasks... They were happy to include him."

But the report added that the parents should accept that their child's achievements may not be on a par with other students. It also recommended the school to have a comprehensive

programme in place for the student that will require regular coordination between his teachers, resource team, shadow teacher and parents. "With the school actively providing a comprehensive programme in letter and spirit, the child's participation and progress will improve," said the report.

And, the school should also provide whatever assistance is available, from the regular as well as the resource staff. "The parents also need to provide additional therapy and treatment as advised by their physician and therapy team," it said.

The school representative refused to comment on the observations in the report. "I am travelling. I do not know what happened at the hearing. Also the school's stand remains the same. We do not wish to comment on this case," said principal Sudeshna Chatterjee.

The commission is headed by secretary A N Tripathi and acting chairperson Ujjwal Uke.