India is home to more than 6 million out of school children between the age group 6-13 years (Ministry of HRD 2014), even though the RTE Act 2009 aims to provide free and compulsory education to all children from 6-14 years in neighbourhood schools. Lack of safety and security in schools is one of the major reasons for children remaining out of schools. Thus, Right to Education Forum applauds the initiative by Ministry of HRD to come up with the Guidelines to ensure safety and security of children in schools.

Since the guidelines would be catering to both private and government schools, we hope that the distinction between School Management in private and government schools would be made since the compositions are fairly different.

RTE Forum’s recommendations:

1. The **RTE Act 2009** ensures that children are protected from corporal punishment and it also provides a mechanism whereby children can register their complaints. The NCPCR is the apex body to examine and review the safeguards for rights, recommend measures for their effective implementation and also look into complaints. However, it is disheartening to see that only 12.7% schools in India are compliant with the provisions of the act (UDISE 2016-17). Thus, to ensure safety and security of children in schools, it is very important that all existing laws (E.g. RTE Act), policies and guidelines are properly implemented in letter and spirit. Additionally, there should be allocation of adequate resources for smooth implementation of policies.

2. **Sensitisation/ Orientation workshops** on safety and security for teachers, SMCs, all staff members of schools and also local authority to be regularly organised and roles and responsibilities of each to be clearly defined. Regular training of teachers on safety and security- at least once a year to be organised.

3. **Emergency situations:** The guideline should also comprise a comprehensive plan to tackle emergency situations as many schools in India are located at areas prone to natural calamities like earthquake, flooding etc. There should also be a separate budget allocated for this.

4. **Textbooks** must provide details of children’s safety and security like physical, social discrimination, emotional, infrastructural, sexual harassment, health and hygiene, neglect of their education and disaster and emergency situations.¹

5. **Residential schools:** While ensuring safety and security in schools, it is crucial that residential schools, both government and private and hostels are also considered to address safeguarding concerns in these places. Safety concerns also arise outside the school premises e.g. during school excursions, sports activities etc. Thus, it is pertinent to address these as well.

6. **Role of SMCs and School Management:** While in government schools, SMCs can play a crucial role in ensuring safety and security, the School Management to be directly responsible for compliance of safety and security norms. The timeline for compliance should also be mentioned. Periodic audit of safety and security to be also conducted. School Development

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7. Plan prepared by the SMCs should include safety and security norms as well. The SDP should be further included in the district and the state plan and resources for the same to be allocated.

8. **Child Protection Officer:** Appointment of a staff member in each school as a Child Protection Officer who will undergo appropriate trainings to handle all dimensions of safety in line with the recommendations made in the guideline.

9. **Child Protection Policy:** Ensuring that a child protection policy is available in all schools and all staff are oriented on the same. Each school would need to develop its own context specific child protection policy for itself.

10. **IEC Materials:** Display of IEC materials related to safety, security, protection and rights of children on the school premises to generate awareness on the issue for all students and staff members.

11. **Child Welfare Committee:** Role of CWC should be defined in accordance with the provisions under section-27 of the Juvenile Justice (Care & Protection of Children) Act, 2015 and read with rule-15 of the Juvenile Justice (Care & Protection of Children) Model Rules. This would be critical to ensure that there is a linkage at the district level that may serve as the nodal agency for action (i.e. ensure availability of materials, trainings, support data flows and grievances).

12. **Punitive measures against non-compliance:** In case a private school is not complaint with the safety and security norms within a defined timeline, then a process of escalation of complaints must be established. However, if the school still doesn’t comply with the norms, then fines to be imposed on the school. In case of further non compliance by the school, punitive measure in the form of nationalisation of the school to be done.

13. **Regulatory framework for private schools:** Government must take immediate steps to ensure all private schools adhere to the conditions under which recognition is granted and no unrecognized schools are permitted to run. The appropriate government department should take action to nationalize or shut down unrecognized schools or schools running in violation of conditions under which recognition is granted especially in instances of continued contravention. This to be done only after the students are moved to adjoining government schools so their education is not affected.