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## Schools see slump in after-class sports

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**Calcutta:** Schools are facing a challenge of a different kind — students not signing up for sporting activities after school hours.

The numbers keep dwindling more in higher classes when academics is prioritised, mainly by parents, several principals said.

In Lakshmi Pat Singhania Academy, out of 2,000 odd students on its rolls, only 15 to 20 students attend the after-school sports.

The Newtown School has faced a situation where children who have enrolled their names have not turned up for trials.

“We have seen that students are interested in pursuing a sport, but it is parents who refused to support. On the day of the trial, barely 30 per cent of students of those who have given their names turn up,” said Satabdi Bhattacharjee, principal, The Newtown School.

The number of those who finally attend the coaching is dismal given the school’s total strength, Bhattacharjee said.

Lakshmi Pat Singhania Academy has noticed the decline in numbers more after the pandemic.

“At least before the pandemic for each activity, there were at least 40 students. Now, there are 15 to 20. Physical fitness is not part of their daily regime,” said Meena Kak, director, Lakshmi Pat Singhania Academy.

The school offers cricket, basketball, athletics and skating after school, and students can take up to two activities in a week.

“Academics is prioritised over sports as they grow up,” said Kak.

Children have a routine to follow after school hours and



Football at The Newtown School



Archery at Sushila Birla Girls' School

they cannot change that for a sport, said Bhattacharjee.

Schools hire professional coaches to promote the sports. But not enough children turning up makes it a loss, a principal said.

Sushila Birla Girls' School is offering archery for the past year, but the number is not encouraging enough.

“We are hoping that things will turn and numbers will go up,” said Koel Dey, principal, Sushila Birla Girls' School.

“Archery is not a common sport that many schools offer, and there is a possibility of rising in the sport much more. Among those who have trained, we have seen girls playing at the state level within a span of one year,” said Dey.

Olympian Rahul Banerjee mentors the girls.

From addressing parents during orientation meetings to social media promotion, schools try out ways to enhance the interest level among parents and students.

“Banerjee had addressed our parents during the orientation meeting to talk to them about archery,” said Dey.

At The Newtown School, the online forms are sent multiple times to generate attention among parents, but the result is not encouraging, a school official said.

Many parents said that offering a sport after school becomes a deterrent for many to attend.

“We have arranged for carpool for my daughter. If she is to attend an activity after school once a week I will have to make separate arrangement to pick her up, which is not feasible,” said a mother of a Class III child in a school in central Calcutta.

Schools feel their hands are tied and they cannot accommodate more sports during school hours.

“Already there are games and physical education periods. If more specialised coaching is to be accommodated, it would mean giving up on academic classes,” said Kak.