



THE LEGALITY OF DUMMY SCHOOLS IN INDIA

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INTRODUCTION

India is a country with a rigorous education system, fostering a highly competitive nature among the students. In order to excel and build their future career, students enrol in private coaching institutes to clear competitive exams like the Joint Entrance Exam (JEE), National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET), Common Law Admission Test (CLAT) and many more to get into top institutions to complete their higher education. In the labyrinthine pursuit of securing a seat in these selected few top institutions, the aspirants often have to navigate several challenges. Amidst this journey lies a curious phenomenon, known as “Dummy Schools”.¹

A school is a place where teaching and learning occur, and where students attend classes regularly. A dummy school, in its literal sense, is a mock-up or imitation of a real school. Dummy schools are also known as “non-attending schools” or “paper schools”. These operate as regular educational institutions that are board-affiliated and officially enrol students, especially preparing for competitive entrance tests, but do not require them to attend classes regularly in person.² Students appear only for board and practical examinations, as schools fulfil the 75% attendance requirement to write the exam by facilitating the concept of “Phantom attendance”. This allows students to focus full-time on coaching by exempting them from the traditional classroom routine.

However, the narrative surrounding dummy school is far from simple; with many advantages of the system, it is also shrouded in questions about its functioning. This blog analyses the rise

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¹ "Unmasking Dummy Schools: Decoding the IIT JEE Conundrum" ([iitianguide.com](http://iitianguide.com/unmasking-dummy-schools-decoding-the-iit-jee-conundrum/)) <https://iitianguide.com/unmasking-dummy-schools-decoding-the-iit-jee-conundrum/> accessed 18 October 2025.

² India Today Online, ‘CBSE warns Class 12 students in dummy schools over board exam eligibility’ (26 March 2025) <https://bestcolleges.indiatoday.in/news-detail/cbse-warns-class-12-students-in-dummy-schools-over-board-exam-eligibility> accessed 18 October 2025.

of dummy schools, their impact on students' careers and personalities in both positive and negative ways, ethicality and most importantly, it's legality.

THE RISE OF DUMMY SCHOOLS

Research has shown that over the past two decades, India has witnessed an unprecedented mushrooming in the dummy school industry. One of the reasons for this expansion has been the deeply rooted belief in the Indian society that clearing “prestigious entrance exams” is equated with family honour and the only way a child's life will be secured. This mentality leads to an intense competition for limited seats in elite professional institutions and ultimately the creation of coaching cities, one of them being Kota in Rajasthan, where students come to study from different corners of India. They get into one of the many coaching institutions present in the city and, side by side, enrol on a nearby dummy school affiliated with a board like CBSE or other state boards.³ Dummy schools unofficially partner with coaching centres and take in students.⁴ The appeal of dummy schools lies in their promise: more time for focused preparation, no distractions from school syllabi, and alignment of study material directly with entrance exam patterns. For an anxious parent and an ambitious student, it sounds like the golden ticket to success. These schools serve a specific purpose: to bridge the gap for students who find themselves at the crossroads of a gap year or in need of extra time for preparation. They offer a straightforward path to students to not only fulfil the eligibility criteria but also acquire the school leaving certificate, mark sheet, all without having to attend the school, and just taking the exam.

PROS OF DUMMY SCHOOLS

A study conducted by the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Delhi shows that students who took coaching classes performed better than those who did not. The study also revealed that coaching helped the aspirants improve their speed and accuracy, which are important for these exams. By studying at a coaching centre, students can easily score 75 per cent or more in their Class 12 board exam, which is a prerequisite for appearing in the major competitive exams.⁵

³ Hindustan Times Online, 'CBSE set to bar "dummy school" students from Class 12 board exams' (27 March 2025) <https://www.hindustantimes.com/.../cbse-set-to-bar-dummy-school-students-from-class-12-exams-101743101772233.html> accessed 18 October 2025.

⁴ The Times of India Online, 'Dummies over traditional schooling...' (28 February 2024) <<https://timesofindia.com/.../articleshow/108088211.cms>> accessed 18 October 2025

⁵ : Mindler, 'Should My Child Join a Dummy School in Class 11?' (11 June 2024) <https://www.mindler.com/blog/is-dummy-school-a-good-option/> accessed 18 October 2025.

The main reason that students do not wish to go to a regular school while preparing is because of the major difference in the study provided by the school for the board exam and the study needed to clear the competitive exams. Although it is the same syllabus for both the board exams and the competitive exams but the exam pattern varies. Competitive exams require studying outside of the contents provided in a textbook, and also the questions asked are more on the objective side (MCQs) rather than subjective on which the board exams focus on. Kulbhushan Sharma, President of the National Independent Schools Association (NISA), said, "Why can't the government align the syllabus and question patterns of entrance exams with the school curriculum? Why do students have to study so much more than what's in their textbooks? The entire system seems designed to benefit coaching industries and render schools irrelevant. We urgently need radical policy changes."

Another reason is that coaching institutes have well-experienced and paid educators. For instance, they are often IIT graduates teaching the JEE aspirants. On the other hand, regular schools have minimum wage-paid teachers who may not always be highly qualified.

Aspirants also choose dummy schools to take advantage of state-specific quotas for admissions to medical and engineering colleges. For example, candidates who complete their senior secondary education in Delhi become eligible for the Delhi state quota in medical colleges, giving them an additional incentive to enrol in dummy schools in the capital.

In short, the main advantages for students to select dummy schools are:

- They learn time management, discipline and goal setting.
- They save time by reducing distractions from non-academic activities.
- They get more time for self-study and coaching classes.
- The pressure to balance the classes and the coaching is released.
- They only have to focus on the subject that matters from an exam point of view.
- There is no distraction related to school projects and assignments.
- There is no time wastage by studying one thing twice in both school and coaching.

CONS OF DUMMY SCHOOLS

Every coin has two sides, so do dummy schools. If the student is getting a focused window for exam preparation, he/she must be missing out on social activities organised in schools. The absence of extracurricular activities would deprive them of overall personality and social

growth. The lack of balance between academics and extracurricular activities might impact emotional well-being and adaptability.⁶⁷ The students also lose important knowledge and perspectives that non-science subjects provide.

The practice of dummy schools encourages parents to push their children into a competitive race, often at the expense of their holistic development.⁸ The psychological impact of competition culture is proven to be fatal as it comes with costs like degraded mental and physical health, stress, anxiety, underdevelopment of social skills, emotional intelligence and a bleak future (in case of failure). They fail to recognise that schools provide more than just academics; they help children develop their personalities, make friends, learn life skills, and engage in various activities, not just exam preparation.

Every year, while coaching institutes advertise the success of a few toppers, thousands of other students who followed the same path find themselves underprepared for both the board exams and competitive entrances. Why? Because not every student thrives under the same pressure-cooker methodology. In many cases, students fail to meet the minimum board exam criteria (often 75% for JEE Main or NEET eligibility), making their entrance scores moot. The students enrol in dummy schools following the trend and pay the double fee payment that they charge to facilitate the phantom attendance, and the students have to bear it even without the guarantee of success in the exams.⁹¹⁰

The National Education Policy 2020 emphasises the need for holistic development rather than just rote learning. Schools offer opportunities to build various skills and gain different experiences. The dummy schooling system prevents students from achieving overall growth and goes against the educational policy.

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Hindustan Times, 'The Rise of Dummy Schools in India' (14 July 2024)

<https://www.hindustantimes.com/brandstories/exam-content/the-rise-of-dummy-schools-in-india.php> accessed 18 October 2025

⁸ GoFillForm, 'What are dummy schools - Impact of dummy schools in India' (6 May 2025)

<https://www.gofillform.com/resources/blog/edu/what-are-dummy-schools-in-india/> accessed 18 October 2025.

⁹ Neha Gupta, "“Dummy Schooling” and Its Impact on Students’ Personality" (LinkedIn, 13 September 2024) <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/dummy-schooling-its-impact-students-personality-neha-gupta-odsuc> accessed 18 October 2025.

¹⁰ Hindustan Times, 'The Rise of Dummy Schools in India: A Double-Edged Sword' (14 July 2024)

<https://www.hindustantimes.com/brandstories/exam-content/the-rise-of-dummy-schools-in-india.php> accessed 18 October 2025.

Most importantly, dummy schools are not officially recognised, which can lead to problems with certification and higher education.

THE LEGALITY OF DUMMY SCHOOLS IN INDIA

Dummy schools operate in a legal grey area in India.¹¹ While some are affiliated with recognised boards, they often violate attendance and academic engagement norms. There isn't a specific law that directly addresses them, but schools are required to follow the rules of educational boards. In recent years, multiple court cases and government interventions have drawn strict attention to their legality.

In September 2023, a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) was filed before the Delhi High Court. The Petitioner Rajeev Aggarwal challenged the eligibility requirements used by Delhi University and Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University to award MBBS or Bachelor's of Dental Surgery (BDS) seats under the Delhi State Quota. He alleged that the concept of a "dummy school" is essentially a strategy that offers students a virtual platform to portray themselves as having moved to Delhi after completing their 10th-grade exams. This is done with the sole intention of gaining access to the state quota seats in Delhi, which should rightfully be reserved for genuine residents of the National Capital Territory (NCT) of Delhi.

The divisional bench, consisting of Chief Justice Satish Chandra Sharma and Justice Sanjeev Narula, took note of the unchecked growth of dummy schools and sent out notices to various parties, including the Delhi government's Department of Health and Family Welfare, the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE), and the Council for Indian School Certification Examination, to curb this phenomenon.

In an official letter, the district inspector of schools (DIOS) explained that dummy schools are institutions that enrol students under the name of a recognised school but conduct classes in unrecognised or unauthorised setups.

On January 27, 2025, the Delhi High Court bench of Chief Justice D.K. Upadhyaya and Justice Tushar Rao Gedela called the practice a "fraud" and said that schools allowing students engaged in coaching and not attending classes to appear in board exams based on "absolutely

¹¹ CareerAnchor, 'CBSE Cracks Down On Dummy Schools' (1 April 2025)

<https://www.careeranchor.in/uncategorized/cbse-cracks-down-on-dummy-schools/> accessed 18 October 2025.

“false information” could not be permitted.¹²¹³ The court demanded affidavits from the Delhi government and CBSE on actions taken against such schools. Subsequently, it led to the intense crackdown on dummy schools by CBSE board officials in March 2025. They conducted surprise inspections at 27 schools in Rajasthan and New Delhi to investigate the “menace” of dummy schooling. The board de-affiliated 20 schools across 12 states, including Delhi, Punjab, Assam, and Rajasthan, for enrolling dummy students.¹⁴¹⁵ Following the inspections, CBSE issued show-cause notices to the implicated schools, allowing them 30 days to respond with explanations or corrective measures.

News agency PTI quoted a senior board official as saying, “In case candidates are found missing from school or are found to be non-attending during surprise inspections undertaken by the board, such candidates may not be allowed to appear for the board examination. The onus of not attending regular school also falls on the concerned student and his or her parents.”

In Addition, the Central Board of Secondary Education is contemplating amending examination bye-laws to disallow dummy school students from appearing in class 12 board exams, directing them to the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) instead, effective from 2025–26.¹⁶¹⁷

The Ministry of Education constituted an 11-member high-level committee to address the mushrooming of dummy schools and the unchecked influence of coaching centres.¹⁸ Chaired by Higher Education Secretary Vineet Joshi, the committee includes representatives from CBSE, NCERT, and faculty from IITs in Madras, Kanpur, and Trichy.

¹² ‘CBSE confirms action against dummy schools as High Court seeks stricter checks’ (27 January 2025) <https://www.indiatoday.in/education-today/news/story/cbse-confirms-action-against-dummy-schools-as-high-court-seeks-stricter-checks-2671199-2025-01-28> accessed 18 October 2025.

¹³ ‘Delhi High Court directs CBSE, government to take action against dummy schools’ (27 January 2025) <https://www.ndtv.com/education/delhi-high-court-directs-cbse-government-to-take-action-against-dummy-schools-7577372> accessed 18 October 2025.

¹⁴ Hindustan Times Online, ‘CBSE conducts inspection at 15 schools to check for dummy student enrolments’ (1 August 2025) <https://www.hindustantimes.com/education/board-exams/...> accessed 18 October 2025.

¹⁵ The Times of India Online, ‘CBSE carries out surprise inspections in 15 schools across seven regions’ (1 August 2025) <https://timesofindia.com/articleshow/123055575.cms> accessed 18 October 2025.

¹⁶ Hindustan Times Online, ‘CBSE set to bar “dummy school” students from Class 12 board exams’ (27 March 2025).

¹⁷ NDTV Online, ‘CBSE to not allow students from dummy schools to appear in board exams’ (27 March 2025) <https://www.ndtv.com/education/cbse-to-not-allow-students-from-dummy-schools-to-appear-in-board-exams-8030592> accessed 18 October 2025.

¹⁸ India Today Online, ‘Centre forms panel to probe coaching reliance and entrance-exam issues’ (21 June 2025) <https://www.indiatoday.in/education-today/news/story/centre-forms-panel-to-probe-coaching-reliance-and-entrance-exam-issues-2744066-2025-06-21> accessed 18 October 2025.

Meanwhile, the Rajasthan Cabinet approved a bill in April 2025 to regulate coaching centres operating in Kota and other education hubs. The legislation aims to curb exploitative practices, mandate mental health counsellors, and prevent coaching centres from operating without a minimum infrastructure standard.

ETHICAL PERSPECTIVES

While this trend of dummy schools is still gaining momentum, it begs a deeper ethical question: Is this shift logical and sustainable, or just another academic rat race where only a few succeed, and the rest fall through the cracks?

A closer look at the collaboration of dummy schools and the coaching industry reveals an unsettling trend. These institutes, operating on a business model, have grown into multi-crore empires. Advertisements highlighting ‘toppers’ often omit the number of students who either dropped out due to stress or failed to clear either the board exams or entrances. They use unethical tactics to manipulate the students into believing that they can succeed in their future career only by joining their coaching centres, which are partnered with dummy schools. Many students who believe this lie opt for dummy schools and have had success with that, but that doesn't overshadow the fact that quite a few students choosing dummy schools for JEE preparations end up scoring the right score for getting admission to IIT, but fail to score 75% marks on their boards. On the other hand, there are vast numbers of students who do not opt for such dummy schools and yet end up scoring the right score in their boards and also in the competitive exams to reserve a seat in the prestigious institutes.

Every year, around 12 lakh students appear in the JEE mains for the 10,000 seats of IIT. The competition is cutthroat, and the psychological impact of such competition can be deep. Keeping the mind that in the Indian society failing in an exam is equal to dishonouring the entire family. Because of this parental pressure, dummy students feel seclusion leading to loneliness, and that can be a strong contributor to anxiety and depression; many end up developing suicidal tendencies, and some end up committing suicide. Kota, the hub of coaching centres, has been called a “factory” that produces thousands of engineering and medical aspirants every year. They have the largest student suicide rate in India, with reports

consistently highlighting the immense academic pressure and stressful environment faced by students preparing for competitive exams in the city.¹⁹²⁰

Ultimately, the ethical dimension of dummy schools lies in balancing the pursuit of academic success with fairness, transparency, and the responsibility to ensure students' overall well-being and integrity within the education system.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, dummy schools have become a notable feature of India's education landscape, emerging alongside the growing demand for specialised preparation for competitive entrance examinations. They function by allowing students to meet board exam eligibility requirements while focusing their time on coaching and self-study, a model that some find efficient and purpose-driven. However, they also raise concerns about the dilution of traditional schooling, the neglect of overall student development, and compliance with educational regulations. The issue lies in balancing academic focus with holistic growth, ensuring that students are not deprived of essential social and emotional learning experiences. Recent policy discussions and legal actions point toward an evolving approach to address this practice through better regulation and alignment between school curricula and entrance examinations. How dummy schools evolve will depend on coordinated efforts from policymakers, educators, and families to create an education system that values both academic excellence and personal development.

¹⁹ India Today Online, 'CBSE warns Class 12 students in dummy schools...' (26 March 2025).

²⁰ Hindustan Times Online, 'CBSE set to bar "dummy school" students...' (27 March 2025).