

## Young Children Age 3 to 8: Schooling and learning trends

Engaging in developmentally appropriate activities from a young age and growing up in a supportive environment helps children to develop a solid foundation for learning. All major policy documents in India now recognize this fact. Recent ASER data for the “foundational stage” (age 3 to age 8) can be helpful in understanding the current status of schooling and learning so that appropriate steps can be taken to ensure that children enter Std I at the right age and are ready for formal school.

**Table 1: % Children enrolled in different types of pre-schools and schools. By age. 2018**

Age	Pre-school			School			Not in pre-school or school	Total
	Anganwadi	Govt pre-primary	Pvt LKG/UKG	Govt	Pvt	Other		
Age 3	22.7	9.6	5.9	1.4	0.6	0.0	59.9	100
Age 4	8.8	35.4	33.6	1.7	1.7	0.2	18.7	100
Age 5	4.4	40.7	40.5	6.5	4.0	0.0	3.9	100
Age 6	11.7	20.0	24.2	22.6	19.6	0.0	1.9	100
Age 7	10.9	9.0	9.2	34.7	35.2	0.0	1.0	100
Age 8	3.2	6.7	6.0	41.3	41.2	0.0	1.6	100

**Table 2: % Children enrolled in different types of pre-schools and schools. By age. 2022**

Age	Pre-school			School			Not in pre-school or school	Total
	Anganwadi	Govt pre-primary	Pvt LKG/UKG	Govt	Pvt	Other		
Age 3	23.1	19.4	10.6	0.4	0.0	0.0	46.5	100
Age 4	3.9	48.6	37.5	0.9	2.1	0.0	7.1	100
Age 5	0.9	47.9	41.8	4.3	3.9	0.0	1.2	100
Age 6	0.5	30.2	27.5	22.5	19.2	0.0	0.1	100
Age 7	0.0	10.7	6.2	38.1	44.8	0.0	0.1	100
Age 8	0.1	2.4	1.6	47.5	48.1	0.0	0.4	100

**Table 3: Distribution of children in each grade by age (%). 2022**

Std	<=5	6	7	8	9	>=10	Total
I	6.6	34.0	40.0	11.4	3.9	4.1	100
II	1.5	5.3	29.2	37.7	15.5	10.9	100
III	0.5	1.0	4.7	30.7	38.0	25.2	100

How to read the table: This table shows the age distribution for each grade. For example, in Nagaland, of all children in Std I, 34% children are 6 years old, but there are also 6.6% who are 5 or younger, 40% who are 7, 11.4% who are 8, 3.9% who are 9, and 4.1% who are 10 or older.

### Key takeaways:

- Increase in enrollment in government pre-primary classes:** Across 3 to 5-year-olds, in 2022, a higher proportion of children are enrolled in government pre-primary classes than in 2018. For example, in Nagaland, the percentage of children aged 5 enrolled in government pre-primary classes increased from 40.7% in 2018 to 47.9% in 2022 (Table 1 and Table 2).
- Different curricular expectations in different pre-school institutions:** At age 5, most children are already enrolled in some kind of educational institution (98.8%). They could be going to an anganwadi (0.9%), or to a government pre-primary class (47.9%), or to a private pre-school (41.8%), or to a school (8.2%) (Table 2). This means that what is offered to, and expected from these young children varies enormously across the state depending on whether they are enrolled in their pre-school years and for how long. These differences need to be understood and addressed once children are in Std I.
- Variation in age composition in each grade:** In any given grade, there are considerable age variations. The Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2010 and National Education Policy (NEP), 2020 deem age 6 as the appropriate age of entry to Std I. Table 3 shows that while 34% children enrolled in Std I are 6-years-old, 6.6% are age 5 or below and 59.4% children are age 7 or above.
- Age makes a difference:** By the time a child enters formal schooling in Std I, she should have a strong foundation for learning. While school readiness rests on a breadth of skills, ASER can provide data on a few foundational literacy and numeracy skills such as letter and number recognition. Although there is no clear difference by age visible in the reading and numeracy levels of children enrolled in Std I in Nagaland (Table 4), at the all-India level, 57.7% of 6 and 7-year-olds in Std I can read at least letters, as compared to 73.4% children aged 8 and above.

**Table 4: Reading and arithmetic levels for Std I children. By age. 2022**

Age group	% Children who	
	Can read at least letters	Can recognize at least numbers (1-9)
Age 5	Data insufficient	
Age 6 and 7	89.4	90.7
Age 8 and above	89.8	92.8
All	89.3	90.9

This table shows the proportion of children in Std I who can read at least letters and recognize at least numbers up to 9.