



## Kids Find New Stomping Ground As Some Private Schools Reopen

### Attendance Thin, But It's Altogether A New Experience For The Younger Lot

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**New Delhi:** Three-year-old Eklavya Thakur went to school for the first time on Monday. The delighted nursery student romped around, played on the slide and swing, and told his mother, "Let us stay here always," when the time allotted for his batch ended at 11.30am. While first timers like Thakur were excited when many private schools resumed classes on Monday, the attendance otherwise was very thin at around 25% of the regular student strength.

Thakur's mother said her tot had got up at 5am and was elated all the way to Oxford Angel Public School at Chhatarpur. Despite the risks of Covid infection, which had closed the city's schools for almost 20 months, the parents, like Thakur's mother, expressed relief that their children could return to school. As the mother of Mohammad Husain, a nursery entrant in the same school, said, "We have to make a start somewhere. How long can we keep the children at home?"



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The institutions did their best to comply with the Covid precautions, careful to ensure that the returning junior students were under the robust supervision of the teachers and the helps. They were constantly reminded to wear their mask and not to share a desk with any other

student. With fewer students attending, the schools were able to leave the alternative desks empty too. Entry was staggered with some classes beginning at 8.30am and others, especially the lowest ones from nursery to Class I, at 9.30am.

Sanjana Vashist of Class

VI said with much feeling, "I really hope the school doesn't close now. Online classes are not good. We don't get to meet friends too."

Most students preferred to stay home on Monday and continue with online lessons. Manash Joshi of Class V was one of them. "I am in my ho-

metown in Uttarakhand," he explained over phone to TOI. At SR Capital Public School, less than a third of the students returned. The school had placed hand sanitisers in each classroom and cautioned students not to touch each other and not to share their food.

Many schools have decided to reopen only after November 11, with students attending school just once or twice a week. Jyoti Arora, principal, Mount Abu Public School, Rohini, said, "As Diwali is a festival where people interact a lot, we thought we should allow a three-day break before restarting school." MM Public School, Pitampura, is also biding its time, though its principal, Rooma Pathak, revealed, "We have received the consent of 60% of the parents for the return of nursery-VIII students."

Some schools, such as Amity International, have opted to continue with online classes till November 22. Principal Divya Bhatia said, "We are waiting to see if Covid cases increase after the festival. Pollution is also a problem."

Sanjeev Rastogi