Implementation of RTE Act

What is the issue?

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The sad state of affairs in the education system speaks for the lackadaisical implementation of provisions of the RTE Act.

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What did the RTE Act provide for?

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- Article 21-A was inserted through the 86th Amendment to the Constitution brought in 2002.
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- This made free and compulsory education of children in the 6 to 14 age group in India a fundamental right.
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- This right was to be governed by law, as the state may determine.
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- Accordingly, the enforcing legislation for this came as the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act in 2010.
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- It establishes that the onus to ensure free and compulsory education lies on the state.
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- Even years after its enforcement there are concerns in implementation of its provisions and the overall school education system.
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What are the concerns?

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- **Liability** - The State governments and Panchayats are tasked to ensure that each child is brought into the schooling system and “retained” for eight years.
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- However, the ‘compulsory’ and ‘state liability’ commitments of the Act fall short of being imbibed by the educational bureaucracy.
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- **Dropouts** - The problem now is more about dropouts than children who were never enrolled.
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- Sadly, tracking dropouts and mainstreaming them into age-appropriate classes have been subsumed into existing scheme activities and lacks special attention.
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- Out-of-school children, especially girls, disabled, orphans and those from single parent families are hard to reach.
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- It necessitates that the solutions are more localised and contextualised.
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- **Pupil-teacher ratio** -33% of the schools in the country do not have the requisite number of teachers, as prescribed in the RTE norms.
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- The percentage of schools that are pupil-teacher ratio (PTR)-compliant varies from 100% in Lakshadweep to 16.67% in Bihar.
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- States shy away from recruiting or posting more teachers keeping in mind higher salaries and finances.
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- Low Pupil-teacher ratio impacts other provisions including continuous assessment, child learning at her own pace and ‘no detention’ policy.
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- **Decentralisation** - As per the RTE provisions, the academic calendar will be decided by the local authority, which in most cases is the Panchayat.
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- This provision recognises the vast cultural and regional diversities within the country.
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- It facilitates scheduling the school working days considering the local festivals, sowing and harvesting seasons, and even natural calamities.
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- This would be conducive for exponentially increasing attendance and teaching-learning.
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- This would also strengthen local panchayats to take the responsibility of

ensuring that their schools function on the prescribed instruction days.
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- But for inexplicable reasons, the educational bureaucracy has not allowed the decentralisation of academic schedules even in districts.
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What is the way forward?

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- Strategies should focus more on ensuring retention of children than just enrolling the un-enrolled in schools.
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- Teacher provisioning is crucial for a sound schooling foundation and thus it needs the first priority in funding.
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- In States with an adequate overall number of teachers, their positioning or posting requires rationalisation according to the number of students.
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- More decentralisation of powers to the local bodies can adapt the education system to regional needs and support its enhancement.
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Source: The Hindu

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