

# Bengali Speaking Children in Hampshire schools (West Bengal, India)

## Overview

### Population

India is the seventh largest country by area, and second most populated country with over 1.2 billion people. West Bengal is located in the eastern part of India. The state capital is Kolkata. Bengal was divided in 1947, and the East part became Bangladesh.

### Language spoken

India has 22 official languages. Bengali is spoken by 8.10% of people.

### Climate

Generally, there are 4 marked seasons: winter, summer, monsoon and autumn. Summers are hot and humid with temperatures in the low 30s, and often exceeding 45 degrees during May – June.

### Education System

There are a few boards (such as ICSE and CBSE, Madrasa) in West Bengal. Every board has a different curriculum and different system. In West Bengal Board of Secondary Education the Bengali language is now compulsory.

- Preschool can be Montessori or Kindergarten, and children aged between 2.5 years and 4/6 years can attend. Montessori is mainly private. Kindergarten is divided into two parts; KG-1 and KG-2. Some primary schools have their own KG section.
- 6-11 years of age – Primary school
- 11-16 years of age – Secondary school
- 16-18 years of age – Higher Secondary school. Higher secondary is available in schools and a few colleges. Schools take students who achieved the highest marks in their exams.

**SEN:** Children with special needs of any kind are not usually educated in a main stream school but attend a special school.

**EAL:** Only the board controlled by Government uses Bengali language as the medium of study. Private schools use Hindi and English as a second language.

## Education System – main differences and implications for schools

### School starting age

In Montessori or Kindergarten there is an emphasis on both learning and play. They both prepare children for formal study, and they mainly focus on English.

- Education is compulsory from age 6, year 1 to year 8. In government schools two exams are held every year; half yearly and end of year. Results are very important. The first public exam is the secondary exam, held at the end of year 10. For this pupils have to take two English and two Bengali exams (literature and language) and 8 other compulsory subjects each scored out of 100. In higher secondary pupils can choose either a science/commerce or humanities stream. At the end of year 12 more public exams are held, called higher secondary. Pupils take 4 main subjects each scored out of 200 with compulsory English and Bengali. Achieving good marks in higher secondary is crucial as colleges and Universities give places in particular subjects based on these.
- There are also national level and state level tests for entry onto a bachelor degree (such as joint for both Medical and Engineering), leading to Masters and PhD.

### School day

- Government schools mainly focus on theoretical studying. Blackboards are used in most schools and some have IT facilities. In higher secondary science there is much practical work using equipment. Equipment is also used for PE.
- Rural schools have a free mid day lunch system.
- A few schools believe in open-air education, where classes are held outdoors (example- Viswabharati Shannntiniketan).
- Every school has a different uniform. In higher secondary girls wear the same coloured and patterned Sari.
- There is no teacher assistant system. Children get given homework every day and sports are encouraged.
- Everyday school starts with prayers. Primary schools mainly start in the morning and secondary schools start around 11 am. There are daily maths and language classes. Schools have only one break of 40 minutes.

### Curriculum

The West Bengal government made Bengali compulsory from 2017. Follow the hyperlinks below to get up-to-date information on different syllabus and curriculum.  
For Primary education <http://www.wbbpe.org/curriculum.aspx>  
For year 9 and 10 [http://wbbse.org/Files/Syllabus\\_Book\\_IX\\_X.pdf](http://wbbse.org/Files/Syllabus_Book_IX_X.pdf)  
For higher secondary [http://wbchse.nic.in/html/question\\_pattern.html](http://wbchse.nic.in/html/question_pattern.html)

## Literacy

- Phonics is not a method used in West Bengal. Bengali and English are taught differently. In English the teacher focuses more on writing, a few schools emphasise speaking too. Language work involves answering questions from a passage, dictation, spelling and grammar.
- Students often use independent writing, such as essays, news etc.
- Line guides are used for younger children.
- Hand writing is very important. Pencil is used until around year 3, when pupils move onto pen.

## Maths

- The same methods are used in every school. Children do not use number lines, they are encouraged to add and subtract using a column method. Arithmetic is taught in primary, geometry (problem and theorem) is taught in year 6 and algebra is taught in year 7.
- It is known that few sign and symbol concepts (zero, sine, cosine, decimal etc.) are made and developed in India. Children are encouraged to use more mental maths. In counting children are encouraged to count using the finger joints, so that up to 20 can be counted on one hand.
- Pupils regularly take part in very difficult maths tests (at national and international level).
- In public exams results in maths are very important for any further studies.

## Cultural sensitivities

- Mainly Hindu students are in state schools, but people are not sensitive to the religious element. There is a difference between City and rural education systems.
- Teachers are well respected in schools. There tends to be a good relationship between teachers, students and parents. Respect for the teacher is important, and they are addressed as Sir or Madam in class.
- After the first public exam pupils generally grow in confidence. In class pupils are not encouraged to present their own project work however they are encouraged to ask questions.
- Girls and boys have PE lessons at different times.
- Nodding your head to the right side means yes; both sides means no.

## Parental involvement and attendance in West Bengal

- Parents are not involved directly in school (like PTA or parent helper), but their role is to encourage children to work harder and achieve good results. Generally, parents use private tuition to ensure their child achieves the expected grades.
- Nowadays there is debate about the pass and fail system in West Bengal. Pupils have to repeat a year if they achieve below 34% overall. There is also a pass mark for individual subjects.
- In cities, parent teacher meetings happen on a regular basis, however teachers are available to talk to the parents anytime.
- In rural areas some schools provide text books, but generally pupils have to buy text books for each subject and take them home at the end of day for study and homework
- Schools are not very strict regarding attendance levels. However, if attendance is very low parents are contacted by the school. Before exams some schools give study leave.

## Language differences that may cause problems with Literacy

### Alphabet/Script

Bengali script is a consonant and vowel sequence written as a unit, where vowel notation is secondary. There are 11 vowels with seven main vowel sounds. There are 35 consonants, in voicing order there are vocal, palatal, alveolar, nasal, dental labial consonants. Bengali has consonant conjunction. Bengali script has a horizontal head stroke. Head stroke (matra) is important, without matra the meaning can be changed. Bengali text is written and read horizontally from left to right. Bengali script has ten numerical digits. Numbers larger than 9 are written in a positional way as in English.

### Punctuation:

The Bengali Full stop is different (I). Sometimes in poem full stop can be seen as (II). Other than that there is no special or different punctuation uses, commas, exclamation marks are the same as in English. There are no capital letters in Bengali.

## Auxiliaries/negatives/questions/tenses

Bengali has four simple tenses: present, past, conditional past and future.

Pronouns are very similar to English. The end of the verb changes with the first, second and third person. However, there are second and third person pronouns which have a different form (polite form to show respect).

There are 12 rules for the transformation of sentences to a negative. There are no negative pronouns and adverbs but there are negative verbs.

There are two main ways of asking a question.

The pronoun can come before the verb; the pronoun can go at the end, Often, the pronoun is not used, as with the form of the verb question which is understandable to whom (polite or informal) it is addressed.

### Modal verbs

Modal verbs exist in Bengali, the modal meaning follows from the texts as there are numerous and varied ways to present modality. Modality can be made by adding the infinitive then a modal verb. Infinitive and auxiliary verbs can make modality. There is also an imperative mood in Bengali.

### Word order

The Bengali basic sentence pattern is subject then object and then verb (like I rice eat). The auxiliary verb is not always present in Bengali.

### Gender/Articles

Bengali actually has 3 genders, but nowadays we use two or only one gender. Pronouns and adjectives do not change, regardless of the gender being addressed.

### Articles

In Bengali there is no use of articles (eg "chnad dekhte pachho?" Moon can you see?). But, it is grammatically correct to use Indefinite articles. Articles are placed before references, (eg "aami akti boi kinechhi" -I a book have bought). Definite articles are used after references (eg "tomar boi ta amay daao" - Your book the me give).

### Vocabulary

Bengali is enriched by other languages such as Prakrit, Pali, Sanskrit, Arabic, Persian etc. Also, there is an influence of English and French.

## Useful classroom words

### Greetings

Welcome	Swagatam
Hello	Hello
Thank you	Dhonyabhad/Thank you

Please	Daya kore/ Please
Goodbye (formal)	Abar dekha hobe
Bye (casual)	Bye

Morning	Sakal
Afternoon	Dupur

Are you OK?	Tumi thik aachho?
School Routine:	School routine

Playground	School khelar math
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School office	School office
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Hall	Hall
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School	School/bidyalay
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Assembly	Assembly
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Toilets	Toilets
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School field	Mathh
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Classroom	Class
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Registration	Registration
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Computer suite	Computer kokhsho
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Tutor group (class)	Class/shreni
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Break time	Birati/Break time
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Outside	Baire
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Inside	Bhetore
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Fire drill	Fire drill
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Packed lunch	Tiffin
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School dinner	School Dinner
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School nurse	School nurse
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First aid room	First aid room
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Staff room	Staff room
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Lunchtime	Dupurer khowa
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School uniform	School uniform
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Library	Library/Granthgar
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Reading book	Parar boi
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Library book	Library boi
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Copy	Nakol/Copy
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Label	Lable
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Colour	Rang/Colour
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Pen	Pen
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Pencil	Pencil
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Yes	Hnya
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No	Na
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## Days of the week Saptaher dinguli

Monday	Sombaar
Tuesday	Mangalbaar
Wednesday	Budhbaar
Thursday	Brihaspatibar
Friday	Sukrabaar
Weekend	Saptahanto

### Numbers:

Zero	Shunyo	
One	Ak	
Two	Dui	20 Kuri
Three	Tin	30 Tirish
Four	Char	40 Challish
Five	Pnach	50 Panchash
Six	Choy	60 Shaat
Seven	Saat	70 Sattar
Eight	Aat	80 Ashi
Nine	Noy	90 Nobboi
Ten	Dash	100 Aksho

### How many: Katoguli

Instructions/Questions: Proshno

Work with your partner: Tomar shongeer shonge kaaj karo

Use your dictionary: Tomar abhidhan/ dictionary byabhar karo

Talk about this at home: Eta niye barite katha balo

Translate these words at home: Shabdoguli barite Anubad/translate karo

Fill in the blanks: sunyasthan puron karo

Annotate: Annotate/Teeka/mantybo

Highlight: Highlight/lakhyoniyo kora

Draft: Draft/khashra

Please be quiet: Sahnto hoye thako

(please = daya kore, however 'please' is generally not used in Bengali)

Come here please: Ekhane esho

Sit on the carpet: Carpet e baso

Where does it hurt? Kothay byatha korchhe?

Well done!: weldone/ khub bhalo