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Alumni seek heritage tag - plea to preserve school 'character'

OUR CORRESPONDENT



Kalimpong, Oct. 28: Ex-students of Dow Hill and Victoria Schools will organise a two-day event to seek heritage status for the institutions and ensure that the schools are not brought under the purview of the Right to Education Act.

More than 200 ex-students of the two hill schools from across the country will gather in Kurseong on November 5 and 6 to take part in the programme.

"We will hold a seminar on the rich heritage of the institutions at Victoria School on November 5 and follow it up with a book release and a musical evening in Dow Hill the next day. The book *Dow Hill to thee* that is written by an ex-Dowhillian Jaya Roy Choudhary," said Manoj Chandra Rana, the secretary of the north Bengal chapter of the Victoria and Dow Hill Alumni Association.



"We are seeking a heritage status for the schools at the state, national and, if possible, even at the international level to acknowledge their contribution in spreading the light of education in the region," Rana said.

Dow Hill School; and (above) Victoria School. File pictures

The 132-year-old institutions are managed by the directorate of schools (Anglo-Indian schools) of the state school education department and they are among the oldest institutions in the hills.

Both the schools feature the list of the 225 sites compiled by the North Bengal University that would be placed before the state heritage commission in November to grant them heritage status.

"However, we do not want only the physical infrastructure of the schools as heritage sites. We are also campaigning to ensure that the present character of the schools is not changed. We have already moved the state education department in this regard. If the need arises, we will also approach the chief minister with our demands," said Rana.

According to the ex-students, two clauses in the RTE Act do not blend with the values of the schools. First is the provision to do away with the merit-based selection system and introduction of a lottery system for admitting students to standard I.

"Students should be admitted after interviews on a merit basis and not by lotteries," said Rana.

The second clause of the Act that the ex-students have opposed is the admission of children from the economically backward families in the vicinity of the schools.

"As things are now, students from Bihar, Calcutta and many other places study in these two hill schools and they get a chance to interact with the local children. If the schools admit students only from the locality, the children would not get that exposure and they will not be able to interact with different kinds of people," Rana added.

Victoria School has Classes from IV to X and 30 per cent of the seats are reserved for students from the three hill subdivisions.

Hill students are allocated 50 per cent seats in Dow Hill School that teaches students from kindergarten to Class X.

Although the RTE Act came into force in all government schools on April 1, 2010, the two hill schools were exempted.

"However, the directorate has recently issued an order stating that the two schools will be brought under the purview of RTE Act from the next academic session," said a source.

The academic session for both the schools is from March to November.

Jaya Roy Choudhary, of the 1974 batch, said: "The Darjeeling hills that is acknowledged as the centre of education will lose two branded schools (if the Act is implemented)."

