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**School choice for the poor?
The limits of marketisation of primary education
in rural India**

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Summary

In recent years India has seen an explosion in low-fee private (LFP) schooling aimed at the poorer strata of society. This marketisation of primary education, around which there is much contentious debate, is a reflexive reaction to the well-documented failings of the government system. LFP schooling, initially an urban phenomenon, has over the past decade experienced considerable growth in rural areas, and it is the rural setting, home to the majority of Indians, which is the least researched. It is argued by some that an effective policy response would be to rely increasingly on market-based competition involving LFPs, as these schools are purported to be affordable and accessible to the poor. Based primarily on a thirteen-village survey of 250 households and visits to 26 private and government schools in one rural district of Uttar Pradesh, India, this paper explores whether LFPs are in fact affordable to the rural poor and marginalised by examining the key factors in parental decision making and ultimately discovering whether equity considerations are served. Based on a detailed conceptual analysis of different poverty indicators, the paper adopts multivariate analysis to determine whether poverty is a major deciding factor in school choice, once other possible determinants associated with child and family characteristics are taken into account. The interpretation of the quantitative evidence was supported and triangulated by the qualitative evidence from focus group discussions.

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