Sankalp Daycare works with children with different forms and levels of mental disabilities ranging from autism, cerebral palsy, hyperactivity and so on. As typical in special education schools, each child here needs individual attention as they’ve individualized development programs depending on the type/level of disability they have and the progress they have made. This requires teacher-student ratio of 1 teacher per 5-6 children. Sankalp currently has 36 kids and 7 teachers. Since large fraction of kids need help with even basic bodily activities, they also have 1 sweeper and 1 aya plus 1 helper for the class of hyperactive kids (kids are grouped by age/level e.g. preprimary, primary, secondary, prevocational etc and type of disability as that dictates kind of activities they have to do in turn allowing use of same teaching/learning material). 70% of kids here have some level of speech problems (mental disability often affects motor skills leading to low control over tongue movement) so Sankalp has a part-time speech therapist (comes few hrs per week; Sankalp would like to have someone full-time but there are not enough funds) who guides a speech assistant who works on full-time basis. They also have 1 physiotherapist to work on kids motor skills – also part-time but he spends sufficient enough time at Sankalp and works himself with each child that needs physiotherapy.

School is located in a rented facility at central location (civil lines area) in Kanpur on McRobert Hospital “campus”. Facility is rented from McRoberts hospital but Sankalp has a separate entrance. Building is fairly decent but small – 2 rooms and a larger room that has been partitioned into 4 smaller areas used for smaller classrooms, physiotherapy/speech therapy area, a verandah (gated) also used as reception/office area, and a good-sized play area with a swing and a slide. Facility is good and in good condition but was clearly not large enough for 36 kids. On my last 2 visits there were still 20-25 kids and things seemed manageable but not so much now. Deepti Misra (project coordinator) and Deepak Gupta (IITK Professor who looks after Sankalp from Asha-Kanpur and whom I met separately) both have been looking for a larger facility for last few months. However, since Sankalp aims to cater to most of Kanpur, it needs to be in a central location (transportation costs are already high) and Deepti insists that children need to have some open area to play outdoors since they don’t get to do that at their home (not enough sufficient support structure plus social stigma), nothing suitable has been found as yet.

Pictures from the site visit are attached in following pages. As the pictures also show, a large fraction of kids appeared to be at basic shape and number recognition learning level. Most of them seemed to need individual attention to do work requiring low children-to-teacher ratio to make some progress in kids’ abilities. Aside from improvement in their physical and vocational abilities, I feel that programs such as Sankalp are needed to provide much needed avenue for emotional/psychological support system for children with these types of disabilities. Otherwise they do not get to interact with any other kids other than their siblings if they have any. Special needs children also often need psychological help (e.g. they may carry “I cannot do this...” idea as a reaction to having seen others doing things they could not, or, e.g some children at Sankalp are hyperactive). Autistic kids also need behavioral help. To address kids behavioral/psychological issues, till last month, Sankalp used to have a part-time psychologist but she left for higher-pay full-time position at a newly opened center at Kanpur’s top-notch hospital, Regency. With better funding such needs can be fulfilled better. Currently Deepti said Sankalp has to compromise on level and quality of intervention (as I had also mentioned earlier regarding speech therapy).
List of photos:

1. Sankalp Entrance
2. Sankalp building
3. Playarea
4. Playarea swing and slide
5. Facility entrance
6. A volunteer talking to a parent; kids bags stacked in background
7. Physiotherapist working with a kid
8. Speech Assistant working with a kid
9. Teacher having kids do shape recognition (above)
10. Another group of kids (in foreground is an older kid who won prizes at state-level special Olympics; also used to take care of younger kids on the van; undergoing chemo right now)
11. Group of kids with lesser level of disability
12. Another group of students
13. Another group – kids in this group seem to need direct attention to do work
14. Teacher having a kids work on shape recognition
15. Group of students getting craft lessons
16. A kid stringing beads as part of vocational training; other kid showing her artwork