
Site visit Review

Door Step School

April 11, 2018



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What, When, Where

This document contains the report for our visit to an 'Education Activity Center (EAC)' run by the 'Door Step School' organization at Pune. Myself, Aamod Gokhale, a Software Engineer by profession and my mother Mrs. Swati Gokhale, a retired pre-primary principal, visited the DSS's center at Range Hills Primary School, on April 11, 2018.

What do the Educational Activity Centers cater to:

DSS primarily works for the kids staying at construction sites and poor communities that are deprived of education. The problem with construction workers is that they migrate from one site to another in 2-3 years. Secondly, they usually have more than one kids, due to which they don't want to send their elderly kids to school and keep them at home to look after their younger siblings.

Before the visit, we had an email interaction with Sunila Page and Bhavana Kulkarni from DSS where they helped me choose the location nearest to my residence. DSS conducts such EACs at 70 locations across Pune. The center chosen by us was hosted in a two-room setup behind the 'Range Hills Primary school'. The timings of this center are from 9:30 am to 12:30pm. After 12:30pm, the kids attend regular government school.

We reached the center at 9:30 am. As soon as we entered the classroom, the children got up promptly and greeted us good morning. This gesture was indicative of them being taught all the manners at the EAC. We then let the students and teachers continue their activities, while the area coordinator Hasina Mulani briefed us about the way DSS operates. She, along with other teacher, showed us an array of study material prepared by the teachers.

Here's what we learnt from our conversation with the teachers & coordinator:

1. All the teachers undergo a special training designed by DSS, which helps them understand the background these students come from and teach them in a manner that is easy to understand and not burdensome to the students.
2. A refresher training session is held each month for all the teachers. This helps them stay focused on their teaching methodologies and goals.
3. A training is given to supervisors about cleanliness, talking with parents etc.

4. Since the centers are not a well-established permanent school premise, they do not have science lab setups. Hence, a mobile lab comes for science experiments each week. This facility helps students gain scientific outlook towards daily life and think rationally about many superstitions rooted deeply in communities around.
5. The teaching aids are prepared by the teachers and other coordinators at the EACs or at their central office operated from Aundh, Pune. I'll give examples of the teaching aids (with pictures) in a latter section.
6. Each month, a parent visit is conducted where the parents are educated, enlightened about the importance of education in their child's life, how parents can support the kids get closer to education, a quality life.
7. DSS has started Vocational guidance at 3 CLCs (Community Learning Centers). Under this, they do not give an actual training for any profession, but they guide students about what all opportunities are available to the students when they complete the schooling. They have conducted visits to banks, police stations etc. to give students an exposure of how these establishments operate, what kind of work the employees do. This way, students start thinking about their careers seriously, and know the multiple options available around.
DSS needs more funds for such activities as well.
8. DSS needs more funds to convert more education activity centers into CLCs.

Here's what we observed ourselves:

1. There were two classrooms at the EAC, one had kids from kindergarten (called Balwadi in native language) to 2nd grade. The other classroom had kids from 3rd to 7th grade.
 2. In the first classroom, there were about 20 students (12 girls, 8 boys) and 3-4 teachers. The second classroom had 14 students (4 girls, 10 boys) and 2 teachers.
 3. The teachers and students were gelled very well. Teachers sat at the floor along with the students. It seemed like there was no status barrier between teachers and students, which is a very positive environment for education.
 4. DSS has a very well planned custom curriculum for the lower classes, for the students that do not know even alphabets yet. For each week they have a specific goal, progressing students throughout the 120 days plan containing learning alphabets, their specific forms in Marathi language, small words to sentences.
 5. The teachers maintain a progress record book where each student has an entry for each week, recoding the expectations for the week number that he/she has
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completed and what the student is capable of doing at the end of the week. This record is then assessed by the supervisors and a rating is assigned to each student at specific milestones. The ratings are NOT to compare them with other students. Instead, the rating helps DSS know where does a student stand at the end of a milestone and what needs to be done to bring him at par for the next milestone. We really liked such meticulous attention given to each student, indicating that they are not doing the job just like any other schools / commercial classes.

6. We saw the teaching aids that were prepared by the teachers and supervisors. The material covered subjects like languages (Marathi, English), Mathematics, Geography, general knowledge. Other basic topics such as identifying shapes, colors, sounds, tastes were taught using physical objects. Students were also taught about non-study related day-to-day tasks such as sewing buttons and button-holes on a shirt.
 7. The students from the first classroom (KG to 2nd) happily sung poems for us, told 3 stories, played musical games. The students were very sharp and had everything by-heart.
 8. One theme is planned for project each month. This project is a multi-faceted activity. For example, if the theme for a month is Sea and its biology, the stories, poems taught will be related to fishes, craft will include modelling sea-bed and ecology, different types of sea creatures will be introduced through photos and textual information. The students from higher grades prepare mini models of real world objects, using the material easily available at/around their house.
 9. I found that although the classroom was very raw in terms of the construction/painting, it was well decorated with educational items (wall charts, hanging alphabets, images etc.).
 10. We found that the students were very happy at EAC (didn't seem like they are brought here against their will)! All the kids knew multiple poems, stories and games. They proactively sang few songs and narrated few stories for us.
 11. All the images attached in this document are taken without any prior preparation.
 12. Few things that I found could be improved with funds:
 - a. The classroom didn't have a single fan! In summer, the temperatures at Pune go up to 37 deg. Celsius (98.6 deg. Fahrenheit). I really appreciate students and teachers adjusting at such temperature without a fan. Maybe more funds will give them such basic facilities to stay cool.
 - b. The toilets could have been in better condition (DSS does not own this facility, so it is up to the school premise to improve it).
 - c. More funds can give computer/other equipments to the EACs as well.
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Overall, it was a wonderful experience and we really appreciate the DSS team and students as well, to work hand in hand for betterment of the educational condition. Keep up the good work and I thank Asha for extending a helping hand to such organizations.

Please find below the images I clicked at the center.



Image 1: Study aid for languages and science subjects



Image 2: Study session (KG to 2nd grade)



Image 3: Flash cards



Image 4: Teaching Session (KG to 2nd grade)



Image 5: Wall charts for language studies



Image 6: Project kits for different subjects



Image 7: Study session (3rd to 7th grade)



Image 8: Teaching session (3rd to 7th grade)

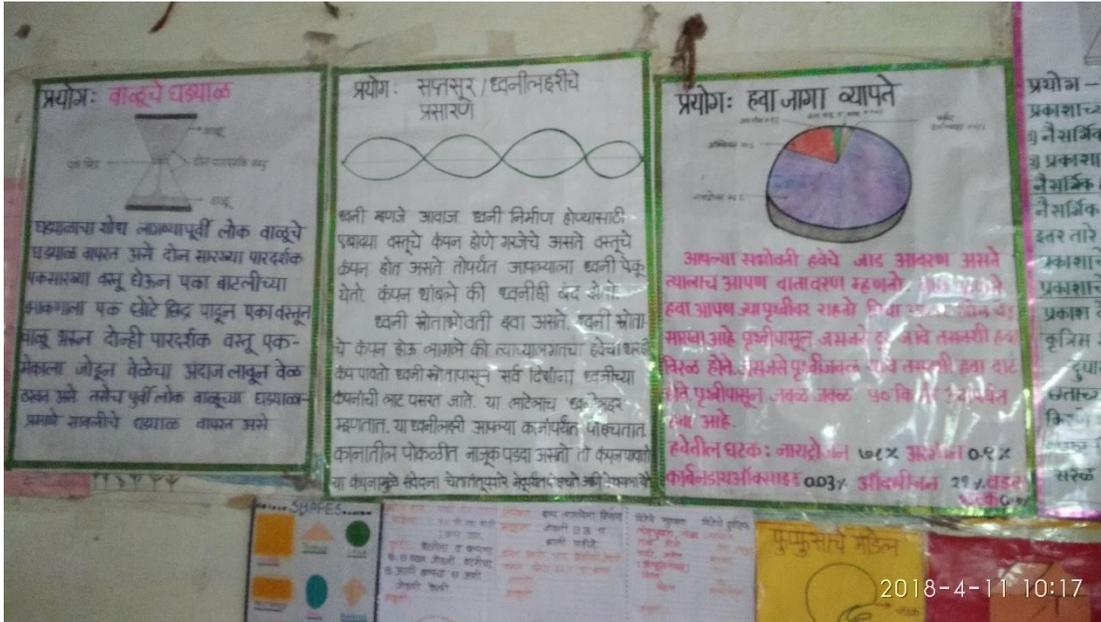


Image 9: Wall charts explaining Science principles



Image 10: Science setup prepared by students.

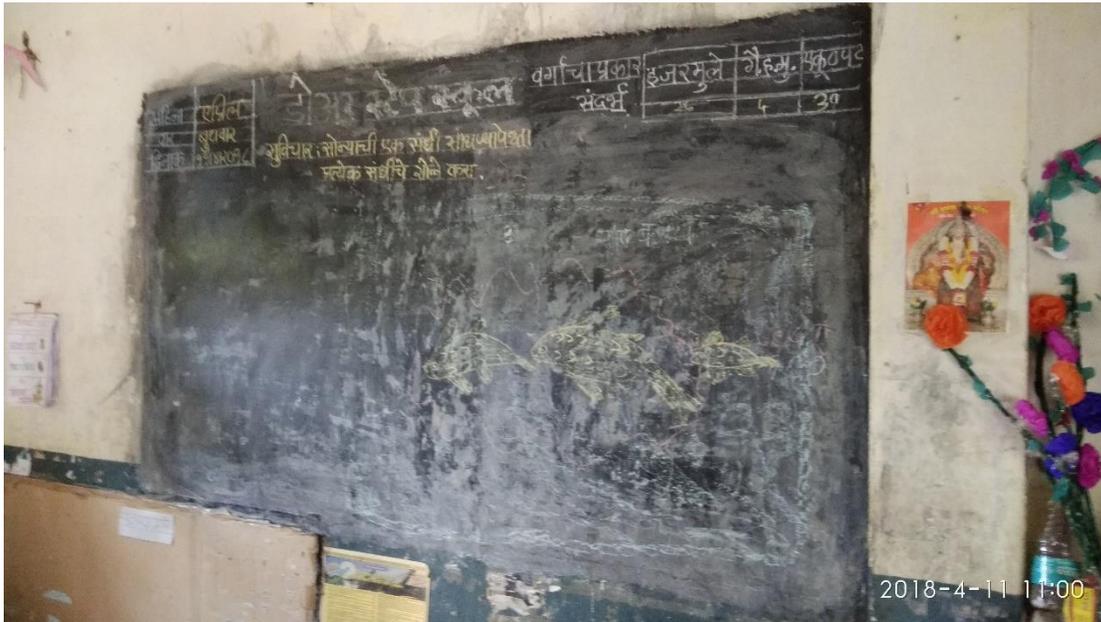


Image 11: The blackboard at the EAC room (I think more funds can improve the quality here)



Image 12: Open lavatory outside (can be improved if DSS agrees)



Image 11: Kids singing poems



Image 12: Students after the class is over, bidding us goodbye 😊