

Olcott School Chennai Site Visit Report

Date: July 26th 9pm CST

Medium: Zoom meeting with the Olcott Management, Teachers and Students

Attendess: Chidu Subbiah, Sundari Gopalan, Raghu Raman (Asha St.Louis Volunteers), Mohan Chellaswamy, Sasikala (Director, Olcott), J.Lalitha (Asst HM). Sridevi (teacher), Shanti (Middle school and high school teacher). Padma (Asst HM), Srimathi (teacher), Arvind (12th student, just graduated), Hemavathi (going to 12th this year), Satish (student)

This was a difficult year with Covid and the school is adapted to working in the covid world and this can be a model for a lot of Asha Projects.

Some initiatives that the school is done in the past year

1. Samsung Tablets for every kid from ninth grade to 12th grade. The tablets have made a huge difference.
2. Upgrading teacher skills in teaching online using google classroom. Teachers have formed a community on sharing tips and tricks on how to teach online. The entire school is been setup on a google classroom platform and they have adapted well to teaching online. Teachers mentioned they had a lot of self doubt going into the pandemic but they have adapted and now they have reached a stage where they completed all the syllabus. They met with Ms.Sasikala over the weekend and after work hours and came up with a clear protocol on how to handle and take classes online. Now it has reached a good sweet spot where both teachers and students are interacting seamlessly.

3. They have incentivized kids by giving them food rations in exchange for completed homework.
4. Teachers have been trained on how to handle stress in the covid world to help kids. They have bought books for reading and they have distributed it to kids. Kids are reading better now. The teachers have attended workshops and also learnt a lot from online resources. All teachers spoke to how they have become tech savvy.
5. They have topped up phones for kids so that they can attend class.
6. They have given math games to kids in coordination with the Math Teacher, Parents, Reading teacher and it has worked well. Games like Ludo and Snakes and ladder have been given to elementary kids.
7. Alumni Parents have helped as well in working with teachers and their kids to work at home.
8. Nutrition like Healthy Flour Mix, Peanut balls, Dates, Rice and Dal have been given in three installments to collect the food and worksheets. The food is contingent on returning the reading book and worksheets. This system is worked out really well.
9. Teachers are recording classes and being sent to students via WhatsApp. Then the teachers talk to the students to follow-up. They also follow-up with the parents. Students have looked forward to these sessions.
10. It has been a little difficult with middle school. Students with smart phones have done well.

11. High School is done really well with the digital initiative. They have also introduced spoken English classes partnering with corporate companies. It was a rough start to start with. The challenges were great but the teacher have learnt and adapted through the year. They had 160 samsung tablets and they got back 155 tablets. Two were lost and three were damaged. They have come up with a mechanism to get back all the tablets and serviced them for the upcoming year. They are starting to hand out tablets for the upcoming academic year. They have given notebooks and supplies to start the new year.
12. They have an increase of 50 students this year mainly due to the success of the digital initiative. They are trying to mobilize funds for 20 new tablets this year. All teachers spoke to the effectiveness of the tablet. They have also had spoken English classes for teachers. A volunteer from the US is taking this class every weekend. The school got a 100 percent pass percentage this year.
13. Almost all teachers have completed B.Ed except for 2-3 teachers who are currently pursuing. This again was a good initiative supported by Asha.
14. The students spoke in English on the effectiveness of how they have used the tablets and how the digital initiative has helped them increase their confidence.

Overall, we could see the progress that is been achieved in the Covid world and Olcott is done really well in adapting. They have been tech savvy and they teachers have formed a group among themselves in installing Apps and getting everything setup in the tablets. Olcott can be a model for a lot of other projects in how a digital initiative can be rolled out successfully and

they have showed that education need not take a break and kids and families can be incentivized to make things work online. This is something that can continue to empower teachers and students in the post-covid world as well.