

Sri Sarada Niketan Site Visit Report

Date of Visit: June 13th 2022

Site visit by: Lakshmi Prasanna Ummadisetty

Other people present during the site visit: Lahari Ummadisetty and Rajeshwar Jaladi (Volunteers)

My family and I have been fortunate to visit Sri Sarada Niketan Public School located in Martur (Andhra Pradesh) during this summer. The site visit was planned for June 13, 2022 and we were scheduled to meet Mr Nagaraju, principal and Mrs. Vani, one of the teachers.

The school sits on an expansive site in a rural setting. Upon arrival at the main entrance, the security personnel guided us through the entrance. As we entered the main campus, we saw a group of students playing in the playground in front of the school building.

We met the school personnel who explained the school's mission. The school personnel told us that the school was meant for orphaned and underprivileged children of all ages. Most of the students were orphans, some had lost both parents, some were missing one parent, and some had parents that were unable to work.

Some of the students that enroll do not have any prior education despite being older. The teachers mentioned that these students were placed in a specialized program where the curriculum is more intense for the students to catch up on all the years of missed education.

We started our visit with a tour of the school buildings. The tour started with a trip through the primary section and later the secondary sections of the school. Although Kindergarten to 10th grade school was on summer break, Students who are orphans and have no extended family stay back at the school. Additionally there have been catch up summer classes for some students. The 11th and 12th grade classes were running as usual and they were giving their final CBSE board exams during our visit. They were also in the process of preparing for career entrance exams, IIT/JEE, EAMCET and NEET. Hence the majority of the staff and teachers were present.

As we walked through the classes, students were reciting multiplication tables (in lower grades). Students in the classrooms were sitting on the floors, and the windows and doors were left open because of the heat. As we walked through the secondary classes, students (in 11th and 12th Grades) were finishing up their exams. We also saw the dormitory rooms for girls and boys.

All the lower grade students were gathered together in a classroom and my daughter Lahari Ummadisetty volunteered to teach them critical thinking skills by quizzing the students on IQ test questions. The 11th and 12th grade students also gathered in a classroom after their exams. Rajeshwar Jaladi volunteered to quiz them on probability, algebra, geometry and number theory questions from contests. Both volunteers taught the students for about 90 minutes. Both the volunteers were pleasantly surprised to see the students' enthusiasm, working together in a team, and answering some of the hardest questions. The students repeatedly informed us that coming to Sri Sarada Niketan was the best thing that could happen to any orphan kid. Teachers supported and helped students during the course of the activities – providing translation to the questions, helping students understand the volunteers etc.

After the volunteers completed the teaching sessions, we met with the teachers who reflected that several students are able to improve their education despite what level they started at the school and eventually able to merge with their grade level peers. They also quoted several success stories of students who have won competitions, gained admissions into medical, engineering colleges, veterinary science, polytechnic, etc.

When we went past the cafeteria, we learnt that all students are provided with breakfast, lunch, and dinner. The kitchen was clean and the food preparation area appeared to be well maintained. The staff detailed how most of the items used to prepare the food (that is being served to students), including vegetables, are grown in the surrounding farm that belong to the Sri Sarada Niketan. The dairy farm provides all the required supply of milk for the consumption of students and to prepare yogurt for meals. The dairy adds to the self-sustaining model of the school, providing milk to the students and biogas for cooking in the kitchen.

We saw the library and the labs. On completion of the tour all the classes were brought together into one large room to meet with us. Each student was asked to introduce themselves, how long they have been in the school, how was their experience and what are their future aspirations.

Each member elaborated on how education helped them to explore career opportunities. The students seemed very excited about the teaching staff and confided that the quality of the teachers was very good. All the students unequivocally reverberated the caring nature of the teaching staff and how they go beyond to ensure all the students understand the subject. The teachers also take extra measures for students who are falling behind and to catch up with the rest of the class. Students indicated that additional resources in the form of teaching specialists, in science and math subjects, will help them prepare for college admission tests like EAMCET, IITJEE, BITS, AIIMS, and other higher levels of competition. All the students spoke of their own future aspirations including becoming a policeman, a lawyer, a doctor, a computer specialist, an engineer, a car maker, a chartered accountant, a videogame creator, a veterinarian, a nurse, a banker and many more.

During our visit, we witnessed students - boys and girls, across all ages groups with a passion to learn, helping each other, and sharing a sense of bonding. Given their economic background, it was disheartening to learn about the personal childhood misgivings and their personal stories of hardships. It was very comforting to learn, from each of the students we talked to, on how getting into Sri Sarada Niketan changed their outlook towards life. Some of the students also admitted that they can now dream big - of being successful professionals, and becoming an inclusive member of the 'educated' echelon of the society.

Witnessing the efforts and direct impact of Sri Sarada Niketan on uplifting orphan kids, underprivileged students and children from tribal communities, Dr. Polineni and his team are truly committed to this cause. In this regard, any financial assistance and donation of school supplies will come a long way in supporting Sri Sarada Niketan's vision of giving orphans a chance to come to a learning institution they can call a 'home'.

Attached below are a few photos from the visit. Please feel free to contact me for any further details about the site visit.

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Regards,

Lakshmi Prasanna Ummadisetty



With the students in front of the school building



With the teachers