I visited Sai Seva Sangh for a couple of hours today between 11:30 PM to and 2:00 PM on Nov 27, 2017.

When I arrived the school, I was given a tour of the school class rooms, the administrative office, library and digital center, and their pantry, kitchen and community dining areas. All the kids were busy with their teachers in the class rooms. What struck me was the children’s enthusiasm and cheerfulness despite being from less fortunate backgrounds. The classrooms did seem quite crowded. The 1st graders were sitting on the floor in their class while there were desks and chairs in most other classes. The older kids in the 10th grade were preparing for their exams in common areas because they felt it was less noisy outside.

My main intention though was to observe how the mid-day meal program works. The pantry is well stocked rice and lentils. They had 10-15 bottle gourds, perhaps a couple of kilos of carrots, 2-3 kilos of potatoes and 2-3 kilos of onions. I was told that they shop for perishable vegetable once every 2-3 days due to lack of refrigeration facilities. To me, even all those vegetables seemed quite insufficient to be able to feed 300 kids for a day. The school seems to be doing the best it can to stretch its resources. The school spends about ₹7000 / day on mid-day meals. That is about ₹23 per kid. Considering this could be their most nutritious meal of the day, the dedicated staff and volunteers would be much happier to receive more funding for healthier, more nutritious meals.

On this particular day they had rice, radish sambar, and yogurt. A banana was the fruit of the day. I was told that the kids get a fruit every day. The choice of fruit depends on whatever would be economical during the season of the year.

I felt the meal hour was very well organized - it was quick and efficient. The kids were led by their teachers to the community dining area. The kids were disciplined and lined up for the food with disposable paper plates and spoons in hand. There were two separate serving areas with a total of 7-8 volunteers serving food. The 1st graders were the first to arrive. To solve the over-crowding, the arrival of kids of different classrooms was staggered by 5 minutes which I thought worked really well. Each kid got a helping of rice and sambar. There were 4-5 pieces of vegetable in their serving of sambar. All the kids joined together in a prayer before they started eating.

Some kids returned for a second helping of sambar. And most kids retuned for a helping of rice and homemade yogurt. The kids seemed to particularly appreciate the sambar. The kids had about an hour to finish their lunches and return to their class rooms. Finally, the volunteers cleaned up the dining area.

Overall, I am grateful to have been allowed to visit the school and witness our funds to support the mid-day meal funding program being put to good use. I strongly recommend that Asha do all it can to continue funding this program and if possible further allocate a higher budget for this year to support this wonderful program which benefits these really poor, but very bright and enthusiastic kids.

Regards,

Rajeev Bhat