Asha for Education 10/15/2019

Site Visit Report

Organization Rishi Pragatisheel Shikshan Sansthan

visited:

Place Little Stars School located in Nagwa, Varanasi

visited:

Dates of September 12, 2018 and September 11, 2019

visit:

Our names: Amrish Garg (from Princeton chapter of AfE in NJ)

Samir Biswas (ex-management consultant residing in N. Delhi and friend of Amrish from IITD, where both studied)

Background: The relationship of the Princeton Chapter of AfE with Little Stars School (LSS) was established in 2014 when the two of us visited the School in August of that year. The visit resulted from the contact made with our Chapter by William Hinthorn who had done volunteer work for 8 months at LSS as a participant in the Princeton University’s Bridge Year program.

Our next visit was in 2017.

Reports of the aforementioned two visits are available on the ashanet.org website of AfE.

We have subsequently visited LSS in September 2018 and September 2019.

This report captures the highlights of the latter two visits.

Highlights of the The main purpose of this visit was to assess learning outcomes

visit in 2018: in arithmetic and language. The motivation was the recurring appearance of news items in the Indian press that the learning outcomes in Indian schools left a lot to be desired. An effort was made in the assessment to focus on problem solving and cognition in the spirit of PISA testing.

Two tests were prepared with directions and questions in Hindi. The first test was designed to assess arithmetical reasoning skills. It consisted of 7 questions selected from AMC 8 math exams and ranged in their level of difficulty from easy (the price of a banana was given and the price of one and a half dozen bananas was to be determined) to moderately hard (the volume of a box was given and the volume of a box was to be determined in which the length of each side was increased by a factor of 2). For ease in grading, the questions were in multiple-choice format with the correct answer to be picked from 5 answers provided for each question.

The second test was designed to assess expository writing skills in Hindi and the assigned task was to write an essay consisting of 10 to 15 sentences on one of 4 topics: (a) Cleanliness (b) India (c) Ganges and (d) Varanasi.

Both the tests were required to be completed in 1 hour.

We had taken the photocopies of the tests with us. LSS did not know the structure of the tests in advance except that the language used was Hindi. About 50 students from grades 8 to 10 took the tests.

The tests were graded immediately after. For the arithmetic test, each question carried one point. The highest score could have been a 7. A qualitative grade was given for the essay. The possible grades were “very good,” “good,” “satisfactory,” and “unsatisfactory.”

Overall, the performance on the arithmetic section was about average. There were a few students with a score of 5, which was a good score considering the fact that the students had, in all likelihood, never been exposed to the questions that were asked. On the flip side, several students scored a 0. We did not keep a record but the average was probably around 3.

On the essay section, the performance was better. At least a quarter of the essays were imaginatively written and had no spelling mistakes and were scored as “very good.” No essay was found to be “unsatisfactory.”

Our feedback to LSS was that the students were being educated well in Hindi but needed to receive more practice in arithmetic

questions that required critical thinking rather than just mindless application of rules. We gave several sets of AMC 8 questions to the school administration for their use.

The tests were returned to the students a few days later. (See photos.)

After the testing phase, we attended a music class and a PE class.

(See photos.)

In a meeting that we had with Ms. Asha Pandey (founder of the school) in the afternoon, she expressed her concern about the termination of the arrangement with “Where There Be Dragons” that let LSS benefit from the extended stay on site of a Princeton University rising freshman every year.

Highlights of the In September of this year, we traveled to Varanasi by the new Vande

visit in 2019: Bharat Express train that left Delhi at 6 AM. The train was scheduled to reach at 2 PM but got delayed by 2 hours due to a breakdown.

Our overnight stay was in a hotel near the main pilgrimage area. The next morning, after breakfast we took an auto to LSS and reached before 10 AM.

We met with Ms. Pandey and Ms. Malti Singh (Principal) for over 2 hours.

1. LSS has not been able to find an office support person who would be reliable and shoulder multiple responsibilities at a salary that LSS can offer. The support that LSS enjoyed for many years from Princeton University volunteers is being acutely felt. While Ms. Pandey is adept in communicating with WhatsApp, she does not have enough hands-on practice with using MS Office software on a desktop/laptop. Consequently, she has not been able to follow up on the funding proposals that were submitted to the Berkeley and Princeton Chapters of AfE.
2. The number of students, teachers and staff has not changed much in recent years and currently stands as follows:

* Pre N to Class 3: 300 students, 13 teachers in orphanage building
* 4th to 8th: 600 students, 29 teachers in main bldg.
* 9th to 12th: 113 students
* Orphanage: about 40 girls
* Staff total: 56

Full time teachers are paid at least Rs.5500/- per month.

1. While Samir focused on providing guidance on organizational and financial issues, Amrish went to several classrooms to visit the teachers and students. (See photos).
2. The school premises were spotlessly clean, the students were in uniforms and the class sizes were small (not more than 30).
3. Amrish noted down the following action items that he needed to pursue:
   1. Contact the Teach for India office in Delhi to explore the possibility of a TOI volunteer working with LSS.
   2. Expedite funding to LSS from the Princeton Chapter of AfE.
   3. Contact the Berkeley Chapter of AfE to find out the status of their support to LSS.
4. We left LSS at about 1:15 PM and reached the Varnasi Cantonment station by auto in time to catch the 3 PM Vande Bharat Express to New Delhi. The train reached in time at 11 PM.

Amrish Garg

Samir Biswas





 

 

 

 