

Site Visit Report



Balaji

Sbalaji1 (at) gmail (dot) com

I visited Isaiambalam School on February 10th, 2021. The school was not functional for students as per the prevailing Government regulations. The teachers visit the school everyday and spend their time creating learning materials, skilling themselves, and preparing for online classes. I met with the teachers - Dr. Sanjeev Ranganathan and Ms. Kavitha - and interacted with them on how they coped with the COVID crisis.

Online classes

Classes were conducted online for children through video calling, WhatsApp and other mediums. Only about 110 out of 160 students could afford smart phones/ devices. For students who could not attend online classes, worksheets were provided. They were placed in specific shelves in the school campus from where the parents will collect/drop the worksheets. Most assignments to students were related to their local surroundings - identify the insects around the house, paint the scenery outside your house etc. There were instances of few students who weren't accessible. In such cases, teachers went to the villages to support them. Teachers from STEMLand helped in assessment in online classes.

Challenges

While online classes ensured that they continued their engagement with students, the teachers weren't convinced about its effectiveness in imparting education. They still feel that the critical factor in education is in retaining contact with students. There were plenty of instances where disruptions were due to external factors like the prepaid mobile connections were not adequately paid for, power outages, mobile connectivity, and malfunctioning of the devices. In most cases parents shared their phones with the children and had to take it away as they were off to work.

Teachers are also worried about promoting children to higher grades in the next academic year with limited classes during the year.

Teacher Training

The teachers started visiting the school from July onwards. They maintained good health throughout and followed all COVID-related protocols. Apart from the online classes, they spent most of their time in training each other and skilling

themselves. They underwent training in TPRS (Total Physical Response Story) and 'Higher order skills'. The teachers organised a discussion on the New Education Policy and was moderated by Mr. Lourdes, one of the members of the Isaiambalam management team. The teachers looked at the facets of the NEP and identified some of the commonalities between the education system followed by Isaiambalam and the one proposed by the NEP.

All teachers attend the Radical Transformational Leadership workshop organised by Ms. Monica Sharma, a renowned leadership coach and mentor for the school. The Central Board for Secondary Education (CBSE) organised many online workshops for teachers. Some of the workshops attended by the teachers are joyful learning of mathematics, classroom management, connecting and communicating with parents of students, including art in social studies, Stress and response, online planning and assessment, learning python, strategies for happy class room, among others.

Doubt clearing sessions

After pongal, students were invited to come to school once every week on a given day (planned to keep the number of students at minimum levels) and allowed to interact with teachers about various worksheets and assessments. It was also organised to help them ease into schools with the hope that schools will be re-opened anytime sooner.

Parent - Teacher meeting

Parent-teacher meeting were held on two occasions. Parents shared their challenges with online classes and were keen on getting the school reopened.