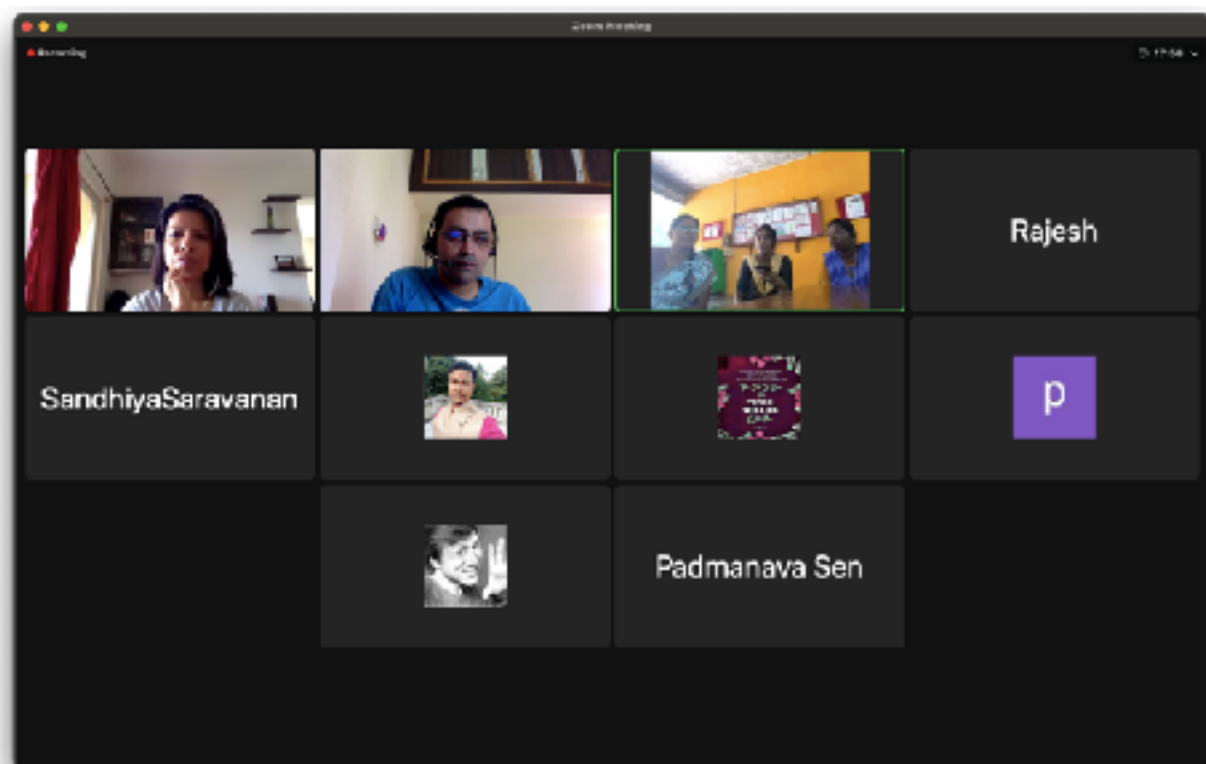


ISAI AMBALAM VIRTUAL SITE VISIT REPORT

Asha Bangalore: Atrei (project steward), Balaji, Padmanava (for a short time)

Isai Ambalam: Sanjeev (project partner), various teachers and volunteers, few Grade-6 students.



The virtual site visit of Isaiambalam school located in Auroville, Tamil Nadu, was conducted on Sep 19, 2023 over video conference. The school caters to students living in the villages around Auroville and aims to impart education through the values of **responsibility**, **realising full potential**, and **integrity**. All the lessons, whether academic or extra-curricular, imbibe these values. Every class has a designated class teacher who spends their entire day with the class. They are supported by teachers for specific subjects. Besides their regular academics, the children learn judo, yoga, swimming, gardening, music (mridangam), and other sports and games.

The **teaching philosophy** involves making the students think critically about their activities and engage in them. For instance, festivals are celebrated knowing the reasons behind the celebration rather than following them blindly. The school provides nutritious lunch and snacks daily to the students. There are 158 students in the school out of which 128 are fully supported through SAC. The Auroville Community supports 4 teachers who are permanent residents of Auroville, apart from providing Rs. 70,000 per month for running the school. In

addition, they are supported by C3STREAM <http://www.auraauero.com/> for general maintenance and unforeseen expenses.

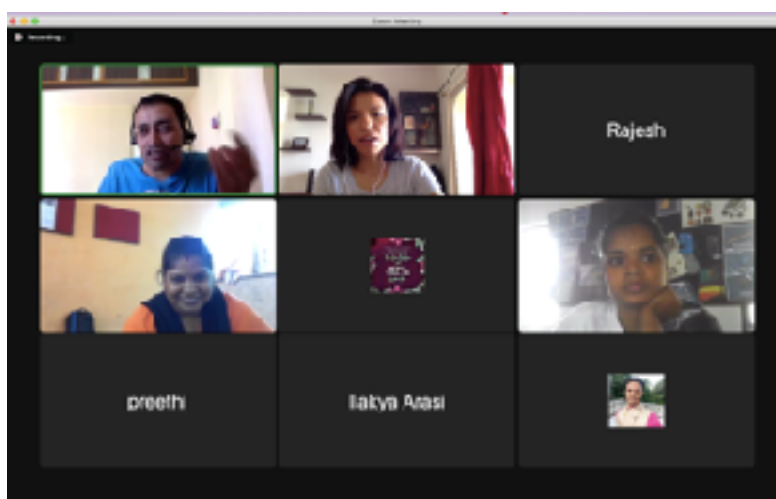
The meeting started with an introduction by Sanjeev about the school and the first four teachers - Kavitha, Thamizharasi, Suvashankari and Vasantarani - describing their roles in the school. We had meeting with the teachers in batches to ensure that the classes are not disrupted. **Kavitha** has been with the school for over 27 years and handles the children from Grade-6. She is also a facilitator for English and Tamil classes for other Grades. She finds that children, in recent years, are interested in learning more about their culture. Kavitha also takes care of administrative work related to the school.

Thamizharasi is the class teacher for Grade-4 and also teaches English and Tamil for middle classes. She has been with them for the past one-and-half years and is also responsible for the Newsletter. She hails from the neighbouring village of Edayanchavadi and studied at Udavi School, another school of Auroville Foundation. She is interested in this system of education which encourages experiential learning.

Suvashankari is the class teacher for Grade-7 and has been with the school for 4 months. Hailing from Cuddalore, she currently resides in the neighbouring village of Mathur. She finds that the students are enthusiastic to learn new things, be it swimming or Mridangam.

Vasantharani is a veteran teacher who has been with the school for 22 years. She supports classes in all subjects upto Grade-2 students . She is also responsible for EVS, gardening, and organising festivals.

Some programs in Isai Ambalam are handled by Volunteers who work with C3STREAM and also part of the newly launched [Shifu program](#). Recently, there was a 3-day drama workshop in the school and was facilitated by some of the volunteers. **Rajesh**, who teaches at Udhavi and also helps with the SAC program, spoke about the benefits of the workshop, which addressed some of the social issues, such as alcoholism. **Santhosh** and **Sandhiya**, both graduates of the Shifu program, also helped with the workshop and talked about how the children became more aware of various social issues through the workshop. **Preethi** is part of the ongoing Shifu program and spoke about the students gaining greater environmental awareness through this workshop. She also added that most ideas for the drama came from the children. Finally, **Illakya**, who helps in teaching Maths and programming to students of Isai Ambalam, Udhavi and few government schools, spoke about her participation in the



workshop. She attended the workshop more for her self-development, and found it enriching to learn with younger students.

The next batch of teachers introduced us on the call were Nirmala, Thenmozhi and Jagadambal. **Nirmala** has been with the school for 25 years and a permanent resident of Auroville. She is presently teaching Tamil and English to Grade-5 students, and is also their class teacher. She spoke about designing their own curriculum based on the recommendation of the New Education Policy 2020. This allows them to include courses on gardening and cultivation of millets.

Thenmozi joined the school recently and is the class teacher for Grade-8. She teaches Tamil and social skills. She is humble to admit that she also has lots to learn from the children and improving herself in the process. She also helps in weekly STEM activity, craft sessions, mridangam classes. **Jagathambal** hails from nearby village, Rayapettai, and has spent 7.5 years with the school. She is the class teacher for Grade-1 and teaches Tamil. She also helps with English, Maths and EVS.

Before we got introduced to the next batch of teachers, Sanjeev outlined the **admission process adopted by the school**. There is an interview with the parents of children to find if they understand about Auroville, the school, the philosophy adopted, and their expectations. In case of any doubts, they are provided with reading materials and come for discussion again. The admission of children happen over bilateral talks and common understanding between parents and the school. In the recent years, many children are getting admitted from the nearby villages. Few years ago, transportation to the school was a challenge as many children were admitted from far-away villages.

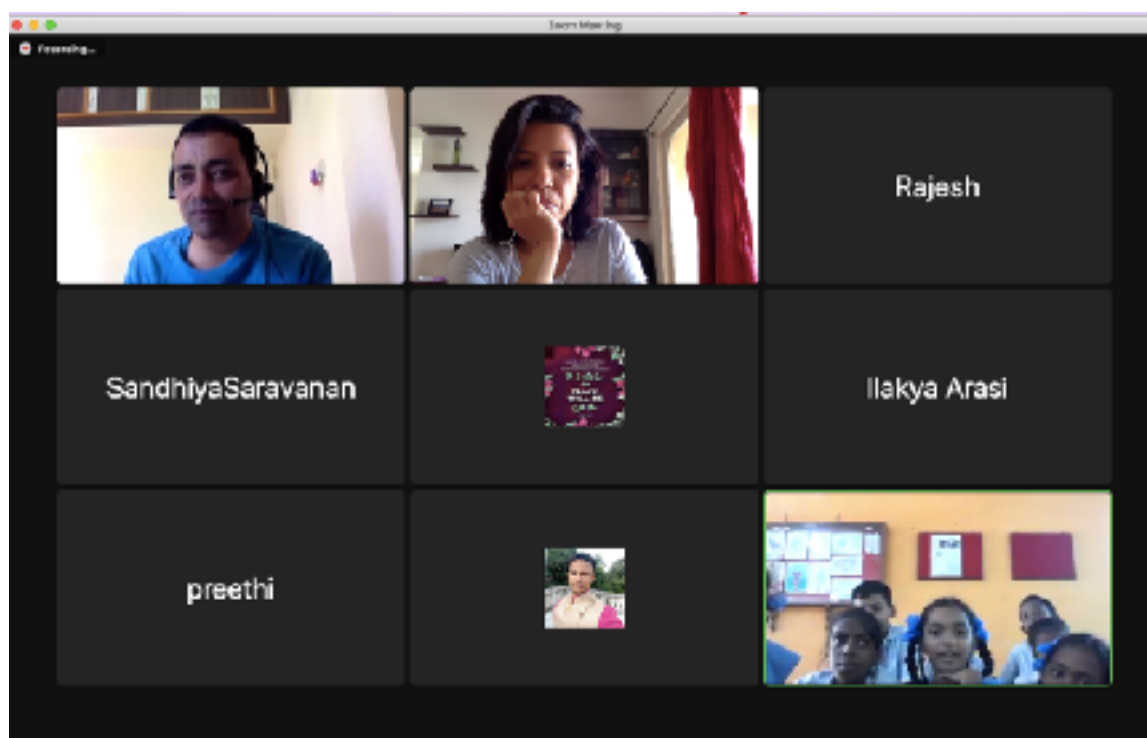
Sanjeev has also taken steps to **integrate activities of Auroville** with the school. This includes attending Yoga sessions at Matri Mandir Gardens once-a-week along with children from other Auroville schools, and performing in Bharat Nivas. Through the volunteering program in Auroville, a German volunteer spent about a year in Isai Ambalam teaching spoken English to the students, which was extremely helpful.

The final batch of teachers whom we met were Nandini, Stella, Parimala, and Sathya. **Nandini** has been with the school for over 2 years and handles the kindergarten classes. **Parimala** hails from Alankuppam, village adjacent to the school, and has been with the school for 4 years, and teaches kindergarten classes. Together, they focus on the development of the child in eight areas which includes language, self-development, social development, creativity, emotional, and sensory aspects. The teaching is imparted through material as well as experiential ways. Their current project is around vegetables.

Stella has been with the school for over 30 years, and resides within the campus. She teaches the Grade-3 in Tamil, drawing, and EVS. Over the years, she has seen the school develop and transform according to the needs of the society. **Sathya**, who spoke mostly in Tamil, is a language teacher teaching Tamil to Grade-7 and Grade-8. Sathya is supported by Anita and Sandhya in Tamil classes. They are working on a curriculum to make Tamil interesting for students across all classes. Currently, the focus area of learning is through the Chola dynasty and the 5 types of Land outlined in Tamil literature (hills, forests, coast, farms, and desert).

We also had a chance to interact with Alexander and Pratap, who were also on the call, mainly spoke about teaching gardening skills to children. **Alexander**, who mostly spoke in Tamil, has been with the school for 5 years and is engaged in gardening with an emphasis on organic farming. He is keen to introduce organic farming to people of all age groups. For the children in primary classes, the focus is on explaining about seeds and crops. He is keen to introduce organic farming to people of all age groups. For the children in primary classes, the focus is on explaining to them about seeds, and crops like greens. The children in Grade-6 and Grade-7 learn about planting vegetable crops like turmeric, carrot, beetroot, brinjal and ladies finger, which are also used in their kitchen. Gardening is used as a method to teach children in Grade-8 about maths, science, social studies and agriculture. He tries to dispel the myths around organic farming by explaining them about why the yields are low in initial years before normalising after a certain time period. Many of the children were excited when they realised a yield of 12 Kg of Sweet potato in a crop-bed sizing 12 feet by 10 feet. They also take these methodologies back home and try them in the space available to them.

Pratap, who has been in Isai Ambalam for 5 years, is part of STEMLand and teaches Maths and EVS to Grade-4. He is also keen in gardening and spoke about the recent millet workshop that the school held where the benefits of various millets were described. Millets had been a traditional local food for centuries before it was largely replaced by white rice, which requires a lot more water to grow and is less nutritious.

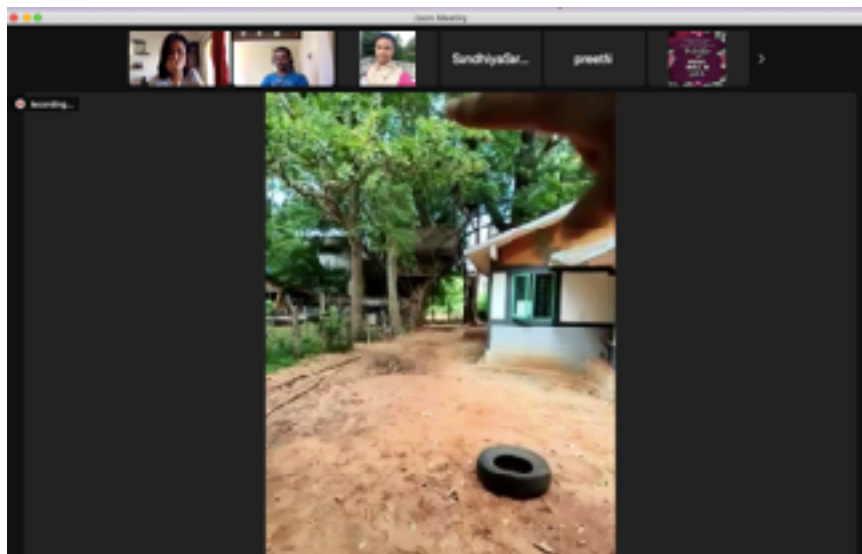


Finally, we met a few students, who are in Grade-6. They were enthusiastic and lively and talked about their recently concluded story-telling class where they were encouraged to create their own stories. They also sang a song in Tamil.

Sanjeev then gave a virtual tour of the campus and talked about the recent renovations to the main school building. It is an old building and needed structural reinforcements. The repair works were funded by C3STREAM. He also showed us the new sports ground that

they had leased for sports and games. The ground also has a garden where plants were growing happily in the vegetable patches.

The meeting concluded after two hours.



School premises