

Isai Ambalam (Auroville) Site visit Report

I visited Auroville on the weekend of 19-21 June, 2026. The main purpose of the trip was to visit the Isai Ambalam school. Asha Bangalore has been supporting the teachers' salaries of Isai Ambalam school through the Support a Child (SAC) program. The project partner, Dr. Sanjeev Ranganathan was away, so Anita Komanduri coordinated my visit.

Isai Ambalam is an Auroville outreach school from Creche (3 yrs and above) till the 9th grade. The addition of 9th grade is quite recent. From 1st to 8th grade, the school follows the CBSE syllabus. For 9th, they follow the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) syllabus, which is equivalent to CBSE and state boards but is highly flexible, letting students study at their own pace. The school emphasizes on teaching through Education by Design (EBD) and a lot of extra-curricular activities are included as part of teaching.



Turmeric planting

I was met by Anita on arrival who took me to the school to meet Kavitha, who has been associated with the school for 25+ years and who looks after the overall day-to-day running of the school. Anita had prepared a tentative schedule for me, which I more or less stuck to. When I arrived around 10 am, it was the gardening period. The children were planting turmeric that day,

which would be used in the school's meals as well as for preparing *kumkum*, to be used during Pongal festival. Uththam, who has been with the school for about 3 years, coordinated the planting activity and I also joined in. The children seemed happy and without inhibition and asked me a lot of questions regarding where I was from, my language, my favourite color, and so on. Though I did not understand their language (Tamil), they spoke English well enough for us to have a conversation.

It was around mid-morning by this time and the sun was hot and so we were treated to locally grown ice apples to cool us down. The next item on the agenda was talking to some 9th standard students. They explained to me about what they had learnt in their last science class, which was about measurements. The next visit was to the school kitchen which runs on firewood. The school provides breakfast, tiffin, lunch and evening snacks to the children and the school staff. The children and staff have recently built an improvised version of the usual stove, made of earth, that involves much less smoke and doesn't let the heat out, making the cooking experience a lot more pleasant for the *ammās* (cooks).

Post lunch, I gave some 8th and 9th graders a lesson on the Earth's magnetic field, how it originated and how it is one of the primary factors responsible for life on Earth and how Mars,

a close planetary companion to Earth, lost its magnetic field and hence its ability to sustain life. The lecture was also attended by a few engineers/teachers from STEMLand. I tried to make it an interactive lesson and it was heartening to see some of the children asking a lot of questions. Next a demonstration of judo was held by the students. The judo teacher, Master Ramamurthy, is a carpenter by profession and has been teaching judo classes at the school for 15+ years. The demonstration was very impressive with the children displaying tremendous skills and agility.



Left: Class on Earth's magnetic field and Right: judo demonstration.

Anita and some of the school teachers then took me to see the 2 acre land that potentially could be allotted to the school by the Auroville administrative group for gardening. It was situated about 200m from the school and would give them a lot more space to grow vegetables and other plants for the school meals. The day ended with some delicious hibiscus tea served from the school kitchen, which was prepared with flowers and medicinal plants grown in the kitchen garden.

The following day, Vaishnavi took me to visit STEMLand, which is located at Udhavi school. There I met a few other employees of STEMLand, most of whom had graduated from the

[Shifu program](#). They all volunteer at Udhavi and Isai Ambalam schools as teachers during the mornings and work on engineering projects in the afternoons. They showed me the materials and various electronics that are used in STEMLand for the children to tinker with and learn from them. Atchudhan gave me a demo of the AI inspired program that they are building for identification and recognition purposes, which can be used even if one is offline. I also met Rajesh there, who is currently responsible for the Support a Child program.



Palm leaf crafts

We came back to Isai Ambalam where the children were just getting started with their craft class. Since it was a Saturday there were no formal classes. That day's lesson was how to

make various objects using palm leaves. The leaves were already cut and immersed in water to make them soft and easier to work with. One of the seventh grade kids, Anirudh, taught me how to make a heart and a star with palm leaves. I struggled with the star :-). The next project was making earrings and one of the girls taught me how to do that. It was a fun lesson overall!



Music lesson

After lunch, it was time for music class. I was supposed to teach the kids a Bengali song written and composed by Rabindranath Tagore. Their music teacher had written down the words of the song in Tamil and the children had a copy of it. The task proved to be much more difficult than I had anticipated. Teaching *Rabindrasangeet* to Tamil kids

ain't easy :-). Following the music lesson there was a short presentation on a trip that some of the senior students had taken to visit a farm in Kodaikanal where they had learnt various skills.

The final item of the day was a *Silambam* display by some of the children. *Silambam* is an ancient weapon based martial art from Tamil Nadu. The demonstration involved hand-to-hand combat, fighting with bamboo staff as well as acrobatic skills with various paraphernalia. The students excelled at the activities. We again wound up the day with a cup of hibiscus tea and sweets made by the children using jaggery, peanuts and sesame seeds.



Silambam display



Overall, I had a wonderful two days visiting Isai Ambalam school. The kids were learning, not only from text books, but also from the nature that surrounded them. They looked happy and curious and I am glad Asha Bangalore could be a part of such a meaningful initiative.



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