

I am Kavitha Govindarajan, a volunteer of Asha Chennai. I had made a visit to three schools that are in Thiruvallur District , TamilNadu (which is about 2 hours from Chennai) along with the project steward, Mr. Rajaraman Krishnan. Mr.Srinivasan joined us at Thandalam and he took us to all the 3 Schools. The visit was done on 25th October 2016.

Rajaraman and I accompanied by Mr.Srinivasan, visited the government schools at Thandalam, Kannagipar and Anna Nagar in Thiruvallur.

Here are the observations from the schools.

In all three schools Mr.Rajaraman in a child friendly, with a few smart simple methods that he had come up with in local language and importantly, in a way they could understand asked them questions with respect to subjects English and Math. He checked their communications skills and played games to make them enjoy in one of the three schools too.

Also, he constantly kept giving feedbacks and suggestions on how to improve to the teachers. He made them understand that their efforts were appreciated and where needed got them to think about actively participate in coming training sessions.

One noticeable thing about all schools was the walls next to the students had been painted in black, like blackboard and chalks and such kept so they could practice, use them productively. On enquiring about the novel, smart use of this space, I was informed that this area is called the SCRIBBLE AREA. ASHA paints these areas once or twice in a year and ASHA had recently painted the scribble areas and the blackboards in all the 3 schools. This is being put to good use by the students and the teachers.

All schools classes were neat and tidy and things were kept arranged in a easy accessible way.

1. School : PUPS (Panchayat Union Primary School) Thandalam

Place: Thandalam

Taluk Name : Ellapuram

District : Thiruvallur

State : Tamil Nadu

Pincode : [601102](#)

Postal head office is Periyapalayam

About : The school is located in a place Close to the Water tank of the Village and has entrance on the front and back.

School Strength: Currently the strength is 114, down from 134.

Teachers: there are 4 Government T incl HM. The HM is the CRC coordinator - That is a Cluster Resource Centre (CRC) Coordinators. For details on CRC look up <http://www.educationforallinindia.com/SSA1.htm>

HM was in a meeting and another teacher was also absent on the day we went.

Asha Support: Started only in September of this year.

Our teacher: Asha teacher, Ms. Jaba Malar looks after class 3. Yesterday she was also looking after class 5 because of the teacher absentees.

About Visit : We spent quite a bit of time in this school, with Mr.Rajaram actively interacting with the students and making me also contribute, understand and try join where possible.

Interaction :

Both Class 3 and Class 5 students were in the in two different parts of the same classroom, When Class 3 Students were interacting with us, the Class 5 students had a bit of free time and a few of them chose to answer ahead and on requesting let the Class 3 Students try. :-)

Class 3 were tested on their English, Math and communication skills too. The slates and chalks provided by Asha and also later the pencils came to be of a great help for this. Surely the teachers and staff must be finding their task on that easier, THANKS to ASHA.

Maths : Broadly, asked the children to come up with their own word problems (for a given subtraction or division sum) after giving a example as suggestion. Like, Giving Examples of any purchase or having a particular number of items to distribute, giving no of people present and how many more needed (addition) or left (Subtraction) and asking them to come up with make more or less similar type lines about themselves, their activities.

English : Getting the spelling of place names phonetically was done for 3rd std. Spelling, Phonetics and alphabet recognition abilities were checked by giving a few words starting with SIMILAR SOUNDING Alphabets like D/T K/C AND ending with similar phonetics like I/E. The Students were asked to write on their slates first, the answers checked and then some random Student asked what the start or end letter was. Beginning words with K/C, a few made mistakes Similarly ending in I/E words, got answers as I if E or vice versa.

These were done at PUPS Kannigaiper also.

Simple English Line Translations, Giving Examples of ones own name, parents or relatives name and place of stay, and asking them to make more or less similar type lines about themselves, their activities. Based on their responses, gave feedback to Ms.Jaba Malar and pointed out a few students who we could see were a bit slower.

After that we had lunch in one of the classrooms and Ms. Jaba Malar, acted the host and without any fuss or anything served food for all of us including the driver. She herself had not had her lunch.

Toilets :

We saw only open to air but with closed walls and door toilets near the side entrance to the school. There was cemented closed type ones nearby too. Could not check about water or maintenance as they were closed.

Also, There are bushes near the side entrance and garbage too is being dumped by many on one side of this entrance. As the Panchayat Office was near this side, suggested that the school staff and authorities request them to clear and/or provide bins for the same.

About the bushes, requested them to clear it since chances of snakes or some insect bites are possible.

2. School: PUPS Kannigaiper

About : The school is located in a much more spacious well lit and open space, with a bit of greenery and has new trees planted with guard(?) around them, thanks to initiatives by the HM and the staff.

The same open space around the school buildings, is being used as a place for tethering cattle and such during the time after school. It is a common place where all activities related to the Village, temple and other such.

School Strength: 94 up from 84 last year partly thanks to Asha support.

Teachers: Four govt teachers incl HM - This HM is also a CRC coordinator. He was also out for a meeting on that day and just came to meet us when we were about to leave.

Asha Support: We have been supporting them since 2014-15.

Our teacher: Ms. Janova looks after class 3. Yesterday she was looking after class 4 also.

About Visit :

It was during the post lunch break free time that we could reach the school. Class 4 students were in the back playing games on the laptop provided by ASHA, were immersed in learning skills and adapting easily to handling the computer.

Class and Students

Classes were neatly arranged, long and hence, different class Students could occupy different parts of the room, and one teacher could still keep a watch over the students.

Here also the brightly edged (neon Green and orange) slates and pencils provided by Asha team were used well by all.

Two of the Class 5 students (One boy Vs One girl) were playing Chess and others were around them, watching and whispering about the possible moves and/or teaching each other about the various Chess pieces and moves.

Mr. Rajaram immediately paid attention to the players, asked questions to see if they really knew about way the various pieces move and they indeed did and were at a far more advanced level! The girl was playing quite strategically and thinking a few moves ahead.

After that small break, Mr.Rajaram got the students around and questioning on the basic English, Math and communication skills related to that particular standard (Class 3).

English students asked to translate a few lines that he said in English , asked Name questions :- what is your father's/mohter's brother's name and when one or two did not know, told suggested answers about what they should reply and a few who randomly picked answered correctly, enocouraged the others to applaud/clap for their classmate. Also, since one of the girl students always did answer ahead, we had to ask to let only others to answer. :-)

Phonetics and alphabet recognition abilities were checked by giving a few words starting with SIMILAR SOUNDING Alphabets like D/K/C/A AND ending with similar phonetics like I/E. The Students were asked to write on their slates first, the answers checked and then some random Student asked what the start or end letter was. Beginning words with K/C, a few made mistakes Similarly ending in I/E words, got answers as I IF E or vice versa.

He also played a game of Simon says with them and made them laugh and have a good break and they, I am sure will be playing the same whenever they get their breaks . All students were asked to write their names in English and tamil. Those who werent able or do so or see school ids and write were recognised and pointed to the teacher so she could pay attention later.

Maths : Skip Counting (in 2s or 3s) and reverse count skills were questioned orally. Students were asked to stand in a Circle and asked to count/given numbers starting with one child. Students were made to count in 2s or 3s. Students who made a mistake was asked to move out and again same exercise repeated.

Addition with two digit numbers with carry over and without carry over were tested. Some found carry over difficult.

We then tried word problems with the children and asked the children also to tell stories for a given problem. We did this for Addition and Subtraction.

That is, subtraction and Addition and look and tell, learn skills were tested.

Next, They were also asked to write BEFORE AND AFTER NUMBERS (upto 2 digit numbers) after a number was said out aloud by Mr.Rajaram. Most could do when a number not ending with 9 or 0 was said but not with the latter. That is, if 49 said, asked to tell what came before and after in Tamil (Munni and Thodari - I learnt thanks to the visit), tell and write the before number 48 and the next 50. But most children are not yet ready with that and blinked.

The same were noted and teacher wrote down extra areas to pay attention to, novel ways of teaching the children, thanks to Mr.Rajaram.

The HM came from the meeting as we were leaving and proudly showed the sprucing up and trees planted, the guards specially fixed around the trees too.

KUDOS : Though Ms. Janova was handling two higher class students (of nearly 30 or 40 ?), she was extremely patient and some of the students had slept off , she was caring about them too and keeping an eye on them.

Toilets : Right now there are no toilets easily accessible to the students. The area adjoining them on one side had a lot of bushes and since chances of snakes or some insect bites are possible, are not being used. The higher classes' students are using the one toilet with a door (does not close properly, I think) that is attached to the school.

We are hoping to get to repair the toilets also here.

3. PUPS Annanagar (last one visited that day)

This is a Irular hamlet.

School : Thirukandalam

Place : Anna Nagar Village

Taluk : Ellapuram

District: Thiruvallur

State : Tamil Nadu

Village : Thirukandalam

Pin code is 601103

Postal head office is Ikkadu .

About The School : The School is located in a remote place. No busses or even share autos come to this place.

School Strength: About 100 Students

Teachers: Three govt teachers incl HM (all men) - HM was in a meeting and another teacher was also absent.

Asha Support: Asha Support for this school started only in September of this year. Our teacher: Ms. Geetha looks after class 1. Yesterday she was also looking after class 2 also.

About the Visit :

Class and Students

Classes were neatly arranged and the brightly edged slates provided by Asha team were used well by all.

Class 1 and 2 Assessment :

Math : Pencils provided by Asha were asked for and keeping a few (5 to 10 or so) they were asked to count how many were in hand, using their fingers and their answer was checked.

Some of the Children did not know as they had just then been admitted by parents but were willing to see their friends and try to write. After that one pencil was removed and without counting physically, they were asked to either write or say out aloud as to how many were left.

Real life examples of going and buying asking for balance money from shopkeeper or having a particular number of items and one or two removed how many left were given and children asked to come up with their own examples.

English : All kids were asked to write their names in English and Tamil. Most of them did try though a few got their tamil spellings wrong. Some of the Children did not know at all. They were encouraged to look at their School id cards and write the same. Suggestion was given to them to practice at home and school a few times and learn. Students who did not know at all were pointed out to teacher who made a update for improvement in her notebook about the same.

The feedback with respect to writing names was emphasized on and as a suggestion phonetic recognition exercises suggested to the Teachers to do more such.

While we were interacting with a batch of students, in the background, Mr.Srinivasan went around engaged in friendly chatter with the other children, made them laugh and smile, checked the rooms and facilities too. Dedicated and sincere efforts by him.

Toilets and Area surrounding school :

There are two/one (?) open to sky bare minimum facility for privacy and to use as toilet. The toilets are situated separately from the school building but in a close proximity and area and path leading surrounded by bushes (some thorny) and actually difficult to access even with footwear.

Water facility seems to be the bare minimum, has to be taken and door as and such not sure if they can close or for higher class students to have privacy, if at all. Most Children in such remote areas come barefoot and do not seem to be making any fuss about it at all. That makes ones heart ache (?) and also gives the additional drive and fillip to make an effort to give more efforts and make such projects succeed.

Additional Info and KUDOS : To Ms.Geetha who travels by a two wheeler on kaccha uneven roads in all weathers.

When we visited, As it had rained earlier, the road close to the school was inaccessible due to a huge pit that had formed on the road by car (only a small rickety bit left by which with difficulty, a two wheeler can go) and we had to park ahead and walk to the school.

She still manages to travel through distances on this bumpy road, pits and drag her two wheeler to a place near school.

It was suggested that the with a help of a few, if possible to get the road access better so easier for the children and the Teachers, Parents.