

Report from visits to Glovis Sangamam School in Late Aug and early Sept 2018

I am Rajaraman Krishnan, a volunteer of Asha Chennai. I am also the steward for Project Sangamam. On Aug 23rd Mrs. Meena and Mrs. Kalyani from Ramanujan Museum and Centre for Math Resources, our Maths trainers, visited four of our schools to review how our teachers are teaching Maths and also to understand how they have to fine tune their training.

With Hyundai Glovis support we have added support for several new schools. We have also appointed several new teachers. I visited these schools. These visits are covered in this report.

The photos from these visits can be found [here](#).

23rd Aug - Old Thirupatchur

I was staying overnight at Thiruvallur after a computer training session with teachers on 22nd August. Since Mrs. Meena and Mrs. Kalyani were delayed a bit, I decided to a short visit to Old Thirupatchur which is one of the closest schools to Thiruvallur. Our teacher Tamilselvi who has been with us for a long time was the teacher there. When I went into the class Tamilselvi was conducting some activities for classes 1 and 2. She is the teacher for class 1 but was also looking after class 2 as the HM was absent that day.

One of the kids came to the front and was telling things like touch your toes, touch your head ... All the other kids had to do that. After telling 5 or 6 times, another kid will come to the front. All the children were doing things correctly which is quite good at 1st and 2nd std. I introduced some variations like touch something white, touch the ground etc. The children were able to follow along. I also asked the children to count my claps and claps as many times as the number I am showing. The 1st std kids did that very well. Tamilselvi said that she has also been doing the same exercises.

I was very happy to note the level of the children in this school. I had visited the school a couple of times last year and remember noting that the children are average. With Tamilselvi coming in there has been an impressive improvement in the 1st std children. I hope the whole school improves over time. The school in which Tamilselvi used to be - Nemiliagaram - always used to be a good school. She may be able to bring about such a change here too.

23rd Aug Pondhavakkam

Then I joined Mrs. Meena and Mrs. Kalyani and we went to Pondhavakkam, a primary school with about 110 children close to Uthukottai. Our teacher Parameswari, who has shifted here recently, was looking after class 2. Our Maths lead teacher Nathiya also joined us there. They tested the childrens knowledge of place value by asking the children to make the numbers with two cards (for the 2 digits). Then they broke the children into groups and had them count down from 100 to 1.

After that the HM of the school also wanted us to interact with the class 5 students. Mrs Meena asked the children to form different numbers with three cards. The children were able to form the largest and the smallest number with ease.

23rd Aug Pondhavakkam

We then went to Ammambakkam. Lunch was arranged for us at that school. We had lunch and then as the school teachers were having lunch I went outside. The 4th and 5th std children were reading sentences with the sentence builder books we had given them. I explained the meaning of some sentences. The children were able to get the hang of it. However I was not so sure about the whole method of one child reading the sentence and all others in the group of 3 or 4 repeating it.

After lunch we went to interact with the class 1 children. Asha teacher Nishanthi is looking after class 1. Mrs. Meena and Mrs. Kalyani tested the children with Jodo blocks about their counting skills, ability to sort by colour, size etc. The HM also was quietly observing what we were doing and said she will also use some of the techniques.

23rd Aug Katchur

Then we went to Katchur. Till a couple of years back, the school used to be quite bad and we used to be concerned that the children have some serious deficiencies. There were 4 or 5 CP/MR children and many other children also did not make eye contact when talking etc. We have been noticing a great improvement over the last couple of years. The government teachers, especially the teacher looking after class 1 has made a major impact. Our teacher Selvi and the computer teachers have also helped. Now Selvi has become a computer teacher and a new Asha teacher, also named Nadhiya is the teacher there.

The government teacher managing class 1 was also looking after 5 children from class 2 who are very weak (3 of them new admission in class 2). The remaining 15 children in class 2 were bright. They did well in the various things Mrs. Meena and Mrs. Kalyani asked them. Here too all the government teachers were also observing what we were doing. Mrs. Meena who has been here earlier was also impressed by the transformation!

23rd Aug Othappai

We have appointed a teacher for this school only this year. Sumithra is our teacher here and she was managing class 4. Mrs. Meena and Mrs. Kalyani once again tested the children's place value concepts using cards in boxes representing 3 digit numbers esp. with zero in the middle.

While this was going on I went to the computer room to see how our computer teacher Kumari was doing. She was teaching class 6. I have noticed that the children struggle with notion of left and right when the person (or object) is facing a direction different from their own. So we tried a simple game with a 4 * 4 grid drawn on the ground. They have to write the steps to navigate a person to pick up an object from another square and drop it at yet another square. This would help with Blockly-Maze puzzles and Logo kind of programming. They have to learn to think relative to an object in a different orientation. I felt the exercise was useful and Kumari also agreed to use it in her classes.

With this we had reached the ending time of the schools and returned to Thiruvallur and then to Chennai. Mrs. Meena and Mrs. Kalyani felt on the whole the children seem to be doing better now. They got a few ideas on what to focus on for their next training.

29th Aug - Kannigaiper

In the morning of the 29th August I visited Ariyapakkam to distribute the materials to the children there. Distribution of materials to schools is covered in a different report. Then I briefly stopped at Kannigaiper. We temporarily had 2 teachers there. We needed to pull back one of the teachers to move her back to Annanagar. While there, I saw the class of Bharathi, the teacher that we were going to move to Annanagar. She was managing the first standard and was also looking after kinder-garden which had recently started there. The children were still struggling to do counting. Even when I showed them numbers with my fingers, they had to count with their own fingers. They couldn't count in sync with their steps or claps.

I also went to the 3rd std class of Janova. She had just rejoined the school after a month long wedding leave. She was just starting to teach them 3 and 4 digit numbers. So I thought I will talk to them about shapes (which had been taught to them by a different teacher). The children's knowledge of shapes was very poor. They couldn't remember the properties of square or rectangle. They tried to repeat the English definition (opposite sides are equal) but the English words were also difficult for them. They also couldn't recognise a square in a different orientation. So I asked Janova to refresh this topic before moving on to numbers, addition and subtraction.

29th Aug - Annanagar

I anyway needed to go to Annanagar to check on the progress of the construction of the library at Annanagar. That is covered elsewhere. While there I also interacted with our computer teacher Anusuya's class. She was teaching class 4 at that time. While they could tell the parts of the computer, they knowledge of Openoffice was very poor. The children in this school are in general weak in education. Anusuya was saying that they were having difficulty remembering anything they were told. I was not so sure. Even the fifth standard children weren't able to answer most of my questions. Anyway they didn't know

basic things like Bold, font colour, underline, bigger font etc. I told them a few things. I hope with our sustained involvement we are able to improve the school. The regular Asha teacher at this school Geetha was absent that day.

We met the Annanagar school HM at a restaurant. He treated us to lunch. Unfortunately being a local block level teacher union leader, he has official duties almost all days and is rarely at the school. We discussed the progress of the library construction with him.

Then we briefly dropped in at Palavakkam to give a computer to the school. This is a old desktop computer from Glovis which used to be at Annanagar. It now didn't need that as we had given them 2 new laptops. We didn't spend any time there. Our computer teacher who would have been at Palavakkam, Poonkodi was also absent that day.

29th Aug - Perittuvakkam

We drove over to the Poondi block. We drove past Pondhavakkam and went to Perittuvakkam. This is a small school with 29 children. Our teacher Ramya had just started going there that week. But they were familiar with Asha and welcomed our support. The assistant teacher seemed like a very motivated person. She had organised the children outside the school and was getting them to perform various exercises. I explained to them about Asha and left.

29th Aug - Mambakkam Ambedkar Nagar Periya Colony

Like at many places in the last few years a new school was started here to serve the needs of the Dalit community at this colony. There is another school at Mambakkam which serves the OBC community in the main village. That was closed today because of the death of a student nearby. This school at the Ambedkar Nagar colony had a huge playground. It was nice to see a school with so much space. It had 46 children. The HM had left by the time we came. It was close to the closing time. Then assistant teacher welcomed Asha's support. Asha teacher Ramya has been going there for the last month. I talked to a few children whether they like the computer classes. The answer was a very positive yes!

We had crossed the school closing time and decided to see the other schools in that vicinity at Velagapuram another day.

30th Aug - Mambakkam

I had some meetings with Asha teachers in the morning. Three of our senior computer teachers Kumari, Seetha and Rajkumari had come to the office to work on the computer science curriculum. I worked with them a bit on that. There were also a few teachers there to interview with us as a teacher. Two of the old Asha teachers had also come back to work for us after a break of 5 and 2 years. I also reinducted them and worked with Srinivasan to figure out how we can use the teachers to cover all the schools.

In the afternoon we went to one school at Mambakkam. Our computer teacher Ramya was at that school. We talked to the children at her class. Even in the short period of one month, she had taught the children the basics of computers and OpenOffice quite well. The HM was also very eager to get Asha support. Since she wanted me to teach the children something, I tried my usual $400 + 3000 = 7000$ problem with them. Their sense of place value was not good. No one could understand the mistake I had committed. It took a while to make them see it. Muthu our computer service engineer was also there servicing the computers at that school.

6th Sept - Athivakkam

I had to once again visit Annanagar to check on the library construction. However I did not spend much time at the school. I went from there to Athivakkam. This school has 90 children and just 3 teachers. There was a crying need for an additional teacher. We had suggested this school to Hyundai Glovis as a replacement for a school at Nambakkam which we were finding very difficult to cover. Glovis had also approved this change. I had interviewed one candidate from this village on the 30th. I once again talked to her and she agreed to start working there from Monday, 10th September. However later she dropped out as she couldn't manage the work and a small child at home. So she is finally not joining us. We have to find another teacher.

Anyway we talked to the HM at that school who happens to be related to our teacher Poonkodi. She was also desperate to get Asha support as managing 90 children with 3 teachers was extremely difficult.

6th Sept - Palavakkam

After an early lunch we went to Palavakkam. Today Poonkodi was there teaching class 4. Since she was starting there newly, she was first teaching them to paint with Tuxpaint. This is usually done for class 3. I asked the children to draw some shapes and paint them. They had good control of the mouse and managed to do this reasonably well. The computer we had given the school was still in the HM's room. Only that day Dharmi Chand had come and configured it. So they hadn't got the HM's permission to put it in the classroom where Poonkodi was teaching.

6th Sept - Velagapuram

We then went to Velagapuram. Like Mambakkam, Velagapuram also used to have just one school in the village. Three years back another school was started in the colony where most of the Dalits reside. So this main Velagapuram school had just 20 children. Ramya had not yet started coming to the school. The Headmistress was happy to get Asha's support and was hoping that will convince more people to send their children to this school instead of private schools.

6th Sept - Velagapuram Mettu Colony

Velagapuram Mettu Colony is some one kilometre from the main road. It was located in a very spacious area with almost no houses nearby. The school has 45 children. This HM knew Asha well from Whatsapp posts of other schools and was really keen for our support. The school being a new building was in good shape. Both the Velagapuram schools understood the difficulty in coming to the area and offered to help our teacher on the days when she comes to their school.

7th Sept - Kunjaram

On the 7th morning I had some more work in the office with our teachers, coordinator and service engineer. I finished that, had lunch at Thiruvallur and then started for Kunjaram. We have newly started supporting three schools in one small road that cuts from Othappai to TM Puram. The three schools in the area are the ones at Kunjaram, Nelvoy and Vellathukottai. These were difficult schools to reach because there are no share autos or busses on this road. One new teacher Nirmala had come forward to travel to these schools. I had visited the schools at Nelvoy and Vellathukottai earlier (before we started our support). This was the first time I was visiting Kunjaram. Our teacher Nirmala was also coming to the school for the first time. Last week she had been to schools with other teachers. This was her first week on her own. When we went there the teachers were still having their lunch. So I sat with the children and made them play something like "Simon says". The school has 26 children. The children enjoyed the game.

Then Nirmala came and started teaching the 3rd std children. She started by teaching parts of computer. She first told them "Computer is an electronic device" and then got them to memorise the names of things like monitor, keyboard, trackpad etc. I stopped her and told her to avoid rote learning and that they will on their own learn these words when they hear that being used when they play with the computer and see it repeatedly. Tell them things like "see what is on the monitor", "type A on the keyboard", "click on the trackpad" etc. Nirmala has taught in a private school for a few years. Many of the teachers come from a culture of such rote learning. It is a challenge for us and them to change this. While this was going on the government teacher was teaching class 2 and he was employing very similar rote learning methods!

7th Sept - TB Puram

We have been sending computer teachers to TB Puram for 2 years. It is one of the schools that was complaining most vociferously that they weren't getting any other support from Asha. Through Whatsapp all the schools can see what we are doing at other schools. Till last year we could give materials and other support only to schools where we send regular teachers which was supported by Glovis. This year since Glovis was supporting even the computer teacher schools, we could give materials and other support even to computer teacher schools like TB Puram. I was expecting them to be quite happy about that. But they had moved on to request more things from Asha! 😊 They wanted shoes for the children and smart class setup. I told them categorically that we absolutely will not provide shoes as I believe it is a cruel thing in a hot humid place and also that beyond a projector we do not provide smart class. I also told my opinion that passive

content that you can project on a TV or remote lessons offered through a smart class arrangement will not really do much to improve education at a middle school level!

Our computer teacher Selvi was teaching class 4. Even though she is new to this school, we have had different teachers teaching at this school over the last year or two. The children were learning OpenOffice. I asked them to do various things like Bold, Italics, Underline, Font colour, background colour, center align, left align etc. The children knew very well what needed to be done and most of them were able to do it. I was very impressed. They were even able to save the file, close the application and reopen it! Selvi had done a good job.

Though the school is a middle school, our teacher was only teaching classes 1 to 5 as there is another govt. teacher teaching classes 6 to 8. The school had 3 computers but all the three were not working. Out service engineer Dharmi Chand was also there attending to this when we were there.

6th Sept - Sriramakuppam

Every now and then you get to see a school where education is happening the way it should and all the children are at their grade level or beyond. It is such a joyful experience. After such an experience at Greenvel Natham back in April, I had a similar experience at Sriramakuppam. That is a remote school situated beyond Katchur. Some years back the children use to travel to Katchur. But then the upper caste people of Sriramakuppam got a school for themselves. But being a well-off village a majority of the people in the village go to private schools. In spite of that the children were clearly well off compared to most other government schools. The school also receives support from local donors. Each student had received a nice sports uniform from that donor. I also noticed that every student had a nice ever-silver water bottle.

When we went to the school the children were having their PT period and they were putting all the sports materials we had recently donated to good use. Children were playing skipping, something with the football, with the ring, carroms, business man etc. We talked a bit to the teacher. She was happy for the Asha support. When I remarked that the children's handwriting on the board was very good, she had the fifth standard children show me their notebooks. Indeed their handwriting was very good! I asked a couple of the girls to read what they had written. They could read it comfortably. I even asked the meaning of difficult words like abode, sob, weeping etc. The girls could explain the meaning of all the words!!!

I was quite impressed. I thought I will do my usual Maths exercise for 5th std children. I asked the children to write $2076 + 3103$ which I said verbally. Most of the children got the place value correct and even those who got it wrong could correct it when I told they got it wrong and repeated the number. Then I wrote my usual $300 + 4000 = 7000$. All the children jumped on me and said I got the place value wrong!!! I was very impressed and decided to try an exercise that I usually try on teachers I interview with limited success.

I wrote $3 \times \underline{\quad} = \underline{\quad} \times 7$. They had to come up with numbers for the two blanks. It took them a bit to understand the problem. Then one person came up with $3x$

$7 = 3 \times 7$. Then I asked them to think of higher numbers and see if there are other solutions. They couldn't find this on their own. As we were running short of time, I asked them to think of twice 7. They then got the answer $3 \times 14 = 6 \times 7$. Now they got the pattern immediately and got the next answers $3 \times 21 = 9 \times 7$ and $3 \times 28 = 12 \times 7$. I then asked them if there is an answer if I needed the same number in both the blanks. I once again had to lead them a bit. They eventually got zero.

I congratulated the HM for having taught the children very well. The other remarkable thing about the school was that all the children got the answers to these questions and not just a couple of bright children. Then the children sang the national anthem and left. I had delayed them by a good 15 minutes. But it makes my day to see a good school doing things correctly.