Digantar Site Visit Report 21 Oct 2019

I visited Digantar Vidyalaya on 21 Oct for half day. The school is split in 3 parts as follows:

* Primary – 4 groups under 4 teachers: Titli – Vijeta, Roshni – Rekha, Sawan – Ramjilal, Aangan – Ghanshyam
* Upper primary – 3 groups: Aman = Class 6, Mehendi = Class 7, Chandni = Class 8
* Secondary – 2 groups: Sangeet = Class 9, Sankalp = Class 10

Upper primary and secondary shares a common pool of 4 subject teachers. They have another school – primary only with 2 groups of children under 2 teachers.

The school starts at 9:00 and continues till 3:30 with breaks in between Mon-Fri. Teachers stay till 5:00 for planning etc. Primary teachers stay with their group throughout the day while the upper primary and secondary teachers follow the time table. Some of the latter teachers may have few free periods in between when children go for library, computer, carpentry etc. Plans of individual teachers are available.

On Sat, the school runs till lunch and the teachers usually have their sharing meeting in the afternoon. 5 primary teachers form one group while the upper primary-secondary teachers and the remaining primary teacher form the second group. The 2 teachers from the other schools join different groups.

How the day went:

Children started playing as they came in. Then they cleaned the premises with the help of teachers. This was followed by group-wise assembly, where children got an opportunity to express concerns and raise issues. Some issues were taken up for Saturday assembly e.g. repeated offence by a child. Offender was asked what should be done. Girls turned out to be more vocal than the boys. I observed an upper primary groups assembly led by Gunmala till 10:00

Then I observed the primary group Tilti 10:00-10:40 this group had a teacher I hadn’t met earlier. I have known the other primary teachers for few years now – having observed their classes, discussing individually with them regarding the school and having facilitated various workshops for them.

Then I talked to Ved Prakash who teaches math in upper primary and secondary till 11:20.

Then I went around the school and observed the various workshops/vocational facilities they have with Naurat ji. Had lunch at noon and left after that.

Titli observations:

A group of 23 very small children: initially they worked in small groups – some working on workbooks, some working independently while some were with the teacher. The grouping changed after a while.

Main thrust was on 1st sound: teacher used the children’s names and they had to tell the 1st sound e.g. Nisha → Ni. The teacher asked children individually and left no one out

Then teacher said the parts and children put them together as a word e.g. mo-ti → moti (bead) followed by the reverse where children had to split in parts. Children responded as a group in this part.

Some older children came to do a survey on favourite colours during this time.

Discussion with Ved Prakesh:

Since he is the only math teacher for high classes, the math workshops usually involve primary level content and issues. So, this was an opportunity to ask him about his needs regarding the higher classes. He need help mainly with integers and indices. Shared a branching model of indices with him. Yet to share other resources through email.

Going around the school:

* New premises are used for library, computer lab, science lab, handicrafts (including tailoring and plumbing) room, health care room
* Science lab and its materials are used by all classes
* Mar-Apr 2019 – 4 girls appeared for the secondary exam
* Health – Santokhva Durlabhji Hospital – through the president of Digantar’s executive committee
* Handicrafts – Swikriti through the director, Reena di, of Digantar
* There is some discussion on getting a sports teacher (hockey). They need teachers for tailoring and plumbing. Main bottleneck is funding.
* The borewell had to be extended for 40ft deeper this summer
* There was a half-day workshop with children on road-safety conducted by Sarita (an organization)
* Children have some outdoor trips and write trip reports:
  + Secondary – Bangarh fort and bauri
  + Chandni and Mehendi – Amer fort
  + Aman/one more group – Birla planetarium and museum
  + Aangan and the other school – zoo
  + Future trips can include visits to Akshay Patra and dairy – both are work in progress

Comment:

The school was running as a good school should run. The issue of getting good teachers for the higher classes remain. Getting teachers for various vocational/craft exposure is handicapped by fund crunch.

It is difficult to raise funds in India post RTE since (i) most of the funding is directed to ensuring access i.e. efforts to get children in schools and not so much on the quality of schooling, (ii) some are opening their own schools and are no longer interested in supporting the existing ones and (iii) funders want to dictate certain terms.

For Digantar, which has not only been running a good school for decades but have also played significant role in shaping the education through working with the government (state and center), it is not possible to compromise their ways to suit the fancy of funders. So, the fund situation remains a challenge and impacts many things as expected.

Luckily, most of the primary teachers stayed with the organization through its most difficult times and are very good. The questions they raise and the depth of engagement they have had during workshops is not common. They are definitely way better than average government teachers with all the qualifications.