

Kamalakar Trust site visit report - January 2017

By Priya Mocherla

I had the opportunity to visit Sri Vikasa Bharathi school a few times during the last year. During my visits I had a chance to interact with the principal, teachers, students and few parents. This report is a compilation of the highlights from all my visits combined during the last year.

Academic performance:

Academically the students did decently well during the last year. During the last academic year out of the 8 students who took the 10th board examinations, all of them cleared the exams. The highest GPA was 8.0/10 and the lowest score was 5.0/10. The class had 6 boys and 2 girls. The girls scored (7.5 and 7.2). After passing out of school everyone joined Junior college. They mostly took Math and commerce streams.

It is encouraging to see that even the students who have been performing poorly in academics are continuing the schooling till they finish the 10th standard. Earlier, most of these students would have dropped out. Apparently the value in the job market for a 10th class certificate seems to be driving them to hang on.

The performance of the students (1st to 9th grade) in examinations is fair. The school encourages all its students to actively participate in various competitions like elocution, essay writing, painting, singing, drama etc. The students are doing pretty well in those competitions not only at the school level but also at various city level competitions as well competing with kids from costly private schools.

New Recruits & Teacher Quality:

This year 5 new teachers were hired. All the new recruits this year are better qualified and most of them are graduates and post graduates. But it has come at a cost of higher salaries with teachers working only for half a day. The hire of full time teachers with the same qualifications the salaries will have to be much higher and the school currently cannot afford that.

On one of my visits, I spoke to the new english teacher. He is a retired defence employee who out of passion for teaching joined the school to teach english. I was impressed by the new ideas of improving the oral and written english skills he is bringing into the classroom. There is a perceivable change in the quality of written english in the students. However their spoken english needs to be worked out rigorously.

Students:

While interacting with the students I felt that the overall skills of most kids have improved. During the visit I found that most students in the middle to higher grades interacted actively with me and asked questions. I also saw a lot of enthusiasm in them to learn computers as they think it's the passport to land in a job.

Review of Financials and audit reports:

During one of my latest visits I took the time out to review the financial records and audit reports of the school. Everything seemed ok. During the review I had a few questions like why the student fee payment receipts showed different numbers than what has been reported as the fee paid by the students etc. As it turned out the parents pay the fee only when they can and sometimes they pay the fee once in every few months. Some pay only a partial fee. Most students don't pay anything at all. From what I gathered from the records only about 20 to 30 students have been paying any fee at all. Rest of the students haven't been able to pay the fee.

Interaction with the Parents:

I had a chance to interact with few parents. They all like the school very much especially because the Principal Ms.Bharathi devi doesn't demand Tuition fee and gives waivers to families according to their financial situation. The parents seemed to be happy that their kids get quality education than compared to government schools in respect of

- Low cost tuition
- English language curriculum &
- success rate on the standardized tests

Challenges and potential future additions to improve the quality for the school:

Improve quality of learning

- Introduce rigorous teacher training
- Provide learning material (hands-on kits, labs etc)
- Shift towards activity based / alternate learning methodologies
- **Library:** Currently the school has a very small library. I felt it's not being used adequately.

Provide Employability skills to students

- Computer Education
- Communication training
- Personality Development
- Access to career mentors / access vocational training resources

Overall, I believe the school is doing a good job of helping the kids from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds. There can certainly be improvements made in the quality of education when looked at it from a holistic perspective. The teachers were receptive to suggestions made and it would certainly be helpful to provide the teachers with some teaching aids and / or teacher training.