

Site Visit to KLC, a Unit of V-Excel Academy

K.
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Chapter

I have been volunteering with Asha since 2022. I have previously undertaken site visits to two projects, **Safe Schools** and **Kalanjiyam Trust**, supported by Asha Austin, in addition to several site visits to projects supported by the Asha Chennai Chapter.

Visit to Kaleidoscope Learning Centre

On **Friday, 11 September**, at around **10:40 a.m.**, I reached **V-Excel Academy** for a site visit to the **Kaleidoscope Learning Centre (KLC)**, a specialised school run from its premises and partly supported by Asha Seattle.

The Academy is housed in a spacious two-storeyed building with several rooms used for different activities. When I arrived, all the children had assembled on the ground floor, where festivities connected with **Vinayaka Chaturthi** were taking place.

I went to the first floor to meet **Ajita Panshikar**, the coordinator of the overall programme. She gave me an introduction to the origins of the organisation.

Geetha Bhalla, who is in charge of the **Erode Project Special School**, joined us and briefed me about the project. The project has requested Asha funding beginning this year.

Later, **Shashikala Subramanian**, the Chennai school coordinator, joined us and gave me an overview of the **Kaleidoscope Learning Centre (KLC)** and its various activities. She explained the **Waldorf curriculum** followed by the Centre and the different interventions and approaches used in working with children of different ages and with different disabilities. The aim is to help the children become independent, lead a dignified life and integrate seamlessly into society.

Following this, one of the staff members took me around the various activity rooms in the building, including the **weaving, carpentry, tailoring and art rooms**. Since all the children were assembled on the ground floor for the celebrations, I was unfortunately unable to observe them participating in any of these activities.

In the tailoring room, I met **Maya**, a parent and volunteer assistant from Nepal. Her son, **Himal**, aged eight, has been attending the school for the past three years. Maya was very happy with the progress her son had made since joining KLC. I also learnt that many parents become volunteers in due course.

The entire premises were very clean, well ventilated and well maintained. After a brief meeting with **Ms Vasudha**, the founder of the Academy, and **Mr Anand Jagadeesan**, one of the Trustees of V-Excel Academy, I headed downstairs.

The children were having lunch independently. The ground floor houses the **kitchen, administrative office and a small play/rest room for the younger children**. Luckily, three children were playing there, and I was able to sit with them and play for a while.

As I was a stranger to them, I was initially a little apprehensive that my presence might upset or disturb them. Fortunately, they were comfortable interacting and playing with me. I felt that this reflected the value of the interventions and therapies provided by the organisation in helping the children interact with and integrate into society at large.

The children then moved to a **large sand area** behind the room. This facility too was very well maintained and had several sensory play equipment and materials to support the children's development.

By this time, the other children had finished their lunch and were ready to leave for the day. They all sat together in a circle and sang a **goodbye song**. I also had an opportunity to speak to a few parents. Overall, they gave very positive feedback about their children's progress and the facilities at the Centre. They appeared grateful and happy with the services being provided.

As I was getting ready to leave, a few students who were waiting for their guardians to pick them up started setting up a skating area. They soon began skating with great confidence and happiness. It was a beautiful sight and a wonderful way to end my visit.

Observations from the Visit

A Typical School Day

The school functions from **9:30 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.**

- **9:30–10:30 a.m.:** Morning circle, prayers, movements and main lessons
- **10:30–11:00 a.m.:** Break, including ragi kanji prepared at school
- **11:00 a.m.–12:00 noon:**
 - Junior school: Academic activities related to the main lesson
 - Senior school: Vocational activities
- **12:15–1:15 p.m.:** Lunch, including setting up, eating, clearing up and cleaning the room
- **1:15–1:30 p.m.:** Massage
- **1:30–2:30 p.m.:**

- Junior school: Hand work and practical work
- Senior school: Vocational activities
- **2:30–2:45 p.m.:** End-of-the-day story
- **2:45–3:00 p.m.:** Snacks and closing circle
- **3:00 p.m.:** Children leave for home

General Well-being of the Children

The children appeared happy and comfortable at the school. My own interaction with the children in the play area and the confidence with which some of them later went skating were particularly encouraging.

Food and Nutrition

I had lunch and prasadam at the Centre. The food was of good quality.

Learning and Progress

The feedback received from parents indicated that the children are making good progress and that they are happy with the development they are seeing in their children.

Individualised Support

The students are grouped into classes according to their capacities. Each child may have difficulty in particular areas such as **fine motor skills, gross motor skills or reading**.

Within the regular curriculum planned for each class, teachers work on these individual difficulties during the sessions. For example, while some children may be able to read and identify bigger words, others may still be at a basic level. Teachers therefore use different sets of words from the same lesson and work with the children at their respective levels.

A common focus across the programme is helping children become more independent—doing things on their own, helping with classroom activities and keeping things in their proper places. Activities such as painting also form part of the therapeutic approach.

Children After Graduation

Some students become **self-employed**, while a handful find employment in workplaces such as **Writers' Cafe**.

Staff and Teachers

The staff appeared to be positive about working at V-Excel. The average tenure of staff members is around **seven years**. Staff may leave occasionally for personal reasons, but financial difficulties do not appear to be a major reason for attrition.

Teachers and support staff are recruited through interviews of eligible candidates. Parents who become involved with the Centre and gain experience may also subsequently take up support roles.

Attendance and Retention

Attendance is maintained for both students and teachers/support staff.

The reported student **dropout rate is zero**.

Student and Staff Records

The student list was found to be accurate based on the information available during the visit.

It was difficult to verify the teacher and support staff list because the budget proposal did not contain sufficient details on these positions.

Other Organisations

There is another organisation, **Ekadaksha**, working in a similar area. Its founders are from V-Excel itself.

Financial and Administrative Practices

The project partner maintains records of its transactions and uses **Tally accounting software**.

Salary payments are made on time. However, I was unable to verify whether the salaries are in line with the proposed budget because the budget proposal did not contain the relevant budget line items.

There are plans for **new programmes at Erode**, and there are also **new hiring requirements**.

The reported sources of funding include **Asha For Education and other sources**.

Fees for Asha-Sponsored Students

The Centre currently charges **₹500 per month**, including to Asha-sponsored students. The stated reasoning is that parents may not take their children's education seriously if no fee is charged.

In my view, **Asha-sponsored students should not be charged fees**. Since Asha's objective is to support the education of underprivileged children, charging fees to students sponsored by Asha does not seem aligned with the purpose of Asha's support.

There are currently **no reported dropouts due to inability to afford the tuition fee**.

Recommendations

Based on my visit and observations, **I would recommend granting funds to both the Chennai and Erode projects.**

The work being done at the Centre is meaningful, and I found the environment caring, well maintained and supportive of the children's development. The feedback from parents was positive, and the confidence and independence I observed among the children were encouraging.

I would, however, recommend that the **budget proposal be strengthened**. Instead of presenting primarily the amount of funding required per student, the proposal should provide a clear **break-up of the funds requested and explain how each component will be used for the students**. This would make it easier to understand the direct benefit of the proposed expenditure to the children and to assess the funding requirement.

I would also recommend that **no fees be collected from Asha-sponsored students**, as this would be more consistent with Asha's objective of supporting the education of underprivileged children.

Overall Reflection

Overall, my visit to V-Excel Academy and the Kaleidoscope Learning Centre was a very enriching and heartwarming experience. Moving through the Centre, meeting the staff, interacting with the children and speaking with the parents gave me a better understanding of the work being done there.

What stood out to me most was the emphasis on helping each child develop **independence, confidence and the ability to participate meaningfully in everyday life**. Although I was unable to observe the children participating in the various vocational and creative activities, my interactions with the children and parents, together with the confidence and happiness I observed among the students, gave me a glimpse into the positive impact of the Centre's work.

The positive feedback from parents, particularly their appreciation of the progress their children had made, was especially encouraging. The sight of the children confidently skating while waiting for their guardians was perhaps the most memorable part of my visit.

The visit reinforced my belief in the importance of providing children with disabilities not only with education and therapy, but also with opportunities for meaningful engagement, independence and inclusion. It was inspiring to see how a well-planned, caring and supportive environment can help children develop confidence and lead more independent and dignified lives.

PHOTOS:











