

Isha Vidhya School, Coimbatore - A Site Visit Report

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Isha Vidhya, Sandeyakoundam palayam School is located about 30 Km from Coimbatore City. On the morning of July 11th we took a taxi and reached the school around 11:00 AM. The school is near a tiny village named Aalandurai, the school campus is large and the buildings are well maintained with large play areas. We were there for about 4 hrs; we met the Principal, Vice-Principal, teachers, supervisors and parents.



Isha Vidhya Coimbatore School Profile:

Total Students: 615

Number of Teachers: 32

Current Enrollment: up to 8th Standard

Students Background: Rural children

Parents Background: Mostly daily laborers, up to 20% Single parents

Meals: Only Lunch is provided, this is optional. Around 280 children take lunch. The fee is Rs 250 for regular students; Scholarship students pay only Rs 125

Transport Fees: Rs 300 – 475/month, around 19 children were not able to pay.

Other Fees: There is a onetime admission fee of Rs 1500 and uniform fee of Rs 600 per student. This fee has been waived for some students due to their inability to pay.

Fee Structure for non scholarship students:

LKG & UKG: Rs 1800/term

1 – 3: Rs 2150/term

4 – 8: Rs 2350/term

Intake Process:

76 new students were enrolled in LKG for this year, 49 of them were scholarship students. The scholarship process is rigorous. Isha Vidhya team visits the student homes individually to check for living conditions and the parents' background. Some of the criteria used to check are to see if the student homes have reinforced concrete ceilings or if the parents own two wheelers etc. Even though 54 students were awarded scholarships only 49 turned up. Last year the scholarship was cancelled for 2 students after learning about their parental incomes. For non scholarship students there are no preliminary tests for up to 2nd standard. 3rd standard and above have interviews.

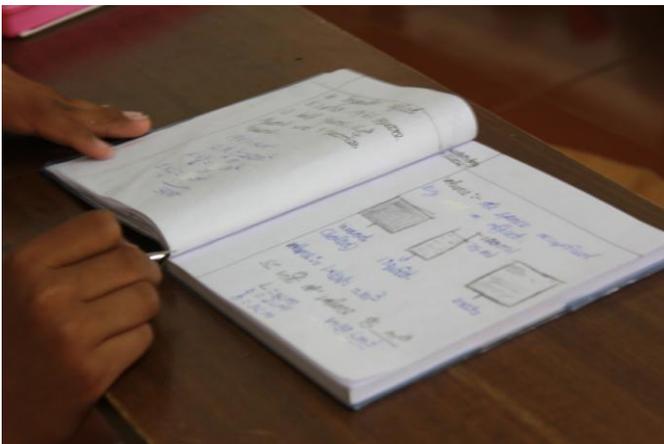
Meeting with Teachers, Students and Parents:



We first met the school principal Mr. NavaneethaKrishnan. He is a physics teacher and we sat down in his physics class at 12:00 PM. First thing we noticed was that all instructions were in English. The class board had the word of the day written down along with its meaning. The bottom right corner of the board also contained a math puzzle. 31 out of 38 students were present and 6 students had gone to a neighboring school to participate in an interschool athletic meet, per principal. All students were well-dressed and had their notebooks and textbooks neatly wrapped. The Principal started the class by asking how many students had not completed their homework. We were surprised to see no hands going up. The Principal was highly interactive and knew every student by his/her name. Instead of focusing on textual content as is, he was constantly throwing questions to students leading them to the topic under discussion (area of an irregular object).



The students, we observed, were receptive and for every question, one could spot at least half a dozen hands going up. Students answered fluently in English and we noted that their English skills were really good for a rural school although not on par with an urban school. Students made quick notes in black (keywords) and blue pens. From their answers to basic problems on area and volume, their mathematical skills appeared sound. The class ended with the Principal randomly picking students to call out their answers to the homework. We did not find any defaulters.



The Principal then showed us around a Digital class where power English classes are conducted (photo uploaded). Then we met Ms. Chitra, a Maths teacher for 4th, 5th and 8th standard who has been working since the initiation of school 8 years ago. She was very clear in her communication as she explained her teaching methodology and her emphasis on puzzles, story problems and quiz she conducts in the maths extension class.



We then walked over to the lunch area; students were sitting in a hall along with some teachers and having lunch. Some of the students had bought lunch from home while others were eating the food provided by the school. The food appeared to be nutritious and prepared in a hygienic manner. We talked to a few students to check on their background, our conversations were in English and we noticed that most of the students were able to respond well: *<Picture Masked on Request>*



Student #1: *<Name>* – Section: 5B, he mentioned that his father was accounts professional and mom was a house wife.

Student #2: *<Name>* – 6th Standard. Father works in a furniture shop and mother is a housewife.

<Picture

Masked on Request>



Student #3: <Name> – 4th Standard, does not know his father’s whereabouts and mother is a house wife.

Student #4: <Name> – UKG, we particularly noticed that at UKG she was able to follow what we were saying in English. She was not able to provide much information about her background.

Student#5: <Name> – 2nd Standard. Father works in a hotel and mother is a housewife. Speaks good English and he mentioned that he likes Isha Vidya school and eats lunch meals provided. *<Picture Masked on Request>*



We came down to the cleaning area where all the students are required to clean their lunch plates. We also met 3 school workers (Aayamma), whose children study at the same school. Their husbands worked as daily laborer (at a tribal community), Temple Priest and a help in photo studio. All their children were studying under full scholarship. They were really grateful to Isha Vidhya and the opportunities the school has provided their children with. We also were able to confirm the fees they were paying the school.



Then we visited the following class rooms:



Class #1: CAL – Computer Assisted Learning, Teacher: Malleswari (MSc IT)

This class starts as early as LKG and goes on till 4th standard and happens twice a week. All the children were hooked to the animated vocabulary games. We observed that the teacher's communication was perfect; she also mentioned that she designed the school magazine.

Class #2: Library – Teacher: Priya (Library and Social teacher)

4th and 5th standard students were in the library at the time of our visit. She mentioned that library classes are conducted once a week. *<Picture Masked on Request>*



Class #3: DVD Class

DVD classes till 8th standard once a week. Nature shows, National Geographic documentaries and cartoons are screened to promote English and Communication.

Other Schools in Vicinity:

The nearest government high school is about 2km away with 1000+ students. It is a Tamil medium school in the same village (Alandurai). We visited this school on our way back. Although we could not spend much time at the Government School, we took a few photographs which we have uploaded to this site. We saw a



few empty and with no fans and conducted under seated on the classrooms were storage spaces. It is the infrastructure is There is another in the same village students and two



unclean classrooms classes being trees with children ground. Some even used as our impression that not very adequate. elementary school with total of 17 teachers.

Conclusion:

The Isha Vidhya School definitely provides high quality English education to children in rural areas who would otherwise not be able to afford it or even have access to it. After conversations with teachers, students and parents, it is our impression that the scholarship donations go a long way in providing this opportunity for rural children. Communication skills of the children were very impressive considering their background. A common issue we heard from all the teachers was that these children have hardly any help for studies at home. Most of the parents are daily laborers who have no education themselves. All the teachers we talked to were very accommodative of this situation. All the teachers we talked to were competent and passionate about their work. It was also mentioned that there was no kind of physical punishment, imposition, eye contact or body language shown towards any children to correct their mistakes. Another issue observed was the teacher turnover rate which is close to 35 %. Isha Vidhya puts high emphasis on teacher training. While salaries have been increasing year over year, it is still not on par with urban schools and staffs sometimes opt out for better pay and closer to home urban schools. Isha Vidhya team is working hard to improve the teacher retention rate. A private study is currently being conducted to assess the performance of all the schools in the region; the report is due October 2012.

Pictures:

<https://picasaweb.google.com/111543072216443253746/IshaVidhyaSiteVisit?authuser=0&authkey=Gv1sRgCMmj8bKbiNHmKQ&feat=directlink>