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## **Little Stars School Site Visit Report**

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#### **Virtual Visit to Little Stars School, Varanasi**

We had the opportunity to virtually visit Little Stars School (LSS) in Varanasi, a place that's making a huge difference for underprivileged children in the area. The school has come a long way since its beginning in 1996 when it started on Madam Asha's parents' rooftop with just 14 students. Now, it's home to around 900 students and continues to focus on its mission of providing quality education to those who need it the most.

#### **The Mission**

The school started with a simple goal: just literacy. Today, it's about so much more—quality education, skill development, and creating opportunities for children who otherwise wouldn't have them. What stood out was how LSS has grown despite challenges. Back in the day, parents were hesitant to send their kids to school. Now, families see the value of what LSS offers, and the community trusts the school to deliver real results.

#### **The Students and Their Stories**

The student body is as diverse as it is determined. Kids range from 3 years old to 20, and many come from families struggling to make ends meet. Most of these families don't have health insurance, so their limited income often goes toward medical expenses, not education. LSS ensures that only families in genuine need benefit from their free education program by carefully reviewing applications. We also learned that LSS doesn't stick to strict age-based grade assignments. Some students, like a 13-year-old starting in class 1, are catching up after missing out on earlier schooling. It's all about meeting kids where they are and helping them move forward.

#### **Curriculum and Activities**

LSS's curriculum has shifted over the years. It started with separate Hindi and English medium classes, but now it's all English medium—because the kids wanted to push themselves to do more. Subjects include the usual like English, Hindi, Sanskrit, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies, but they've also incorporated Arts, Music, and Physical Education.

Some recent highlights:

- The kids won a kabaddi competition, which was a big confidence booster.
- They actively participate in Sanskrit shloka recitations and qawwali competitions, celebrating a mix of cultures and traditions.

#### **Teachers and Their Impact**

With around 46-48 teachers, the teacher-to-student ratio at LSS is about 1:20. That's not bad, but the focus remains on hiring and retaining high-quality educators. The school organizes 2-3 teacher training sessions a year, and last year, teachers from Holland came in to help with skill-building workshops.

## Facilities and the Need for More

The school has come a long way in terms of infrastructure. There's now a computer lab (though they're still looking for a teacher and struggling with maintenance costs), a playground, and well-maintained classrooms. They even have a small clinic for basic first aid and a shelter where some of the girls and staff live, including Madam Asha herself.

## What's Next for LSS?

Despite all its achievements, LSS is clear about where it needs help:

- **Better teacher salaries** to keep their workforce motivated and skilled.
- **More sponsorships** to expand vocational training opportunities.
- **Resources to secure licenses for higher classes**, especially 9-12, so kids don't have to leave after class 8.

## How Asha Can Help

When asked how we could support, LSS had one simple request: "Help us keep this going." They're committed to running as long as there are children in need of quality education in society, but they can't do it alone. Supporting teacher salaries and raising awareness about their mission could make a big difference. It was inspiring to see how much they've accomplished with so little, and it's clear that with the right support, the sky's the limit for this school and its students.

Please find attached a screenshot of the virtual site visit:



