

Little Star School Visit (Asha for Education) – November 6th, 2017

(Dr Padmanava Sen, AfE Bangalore volunteer and AfE fellowship coordinator – padmanava.sen@gmail.com – November 2017)

Summary of visit:

- Reached Little Star school around 7-50 am on November 6th, 2017 and visited the main school first (Class 3 to Class 11). Interacted with the students in each class (approximately 15-20 minutes). Some classes have divisions in two rooms. I was there for around 5 hrs (till 12-50 pm)
- I went to the other building (office and nursery to Class 2). Spent around 30 minutes in total. After that the kids went home.
- I had lunch with Peter (Intern from USA) and a lady from Denmark who conducts the dental health checks for the children regularly (many years now).
- Went upstairs to the hostel and interacted with the girls (mostly photo sessions). I also checked the facilities in the building (like Solar panels, music room, library). Asha Pandey's daughter gave me details about the background of the kids.
- Pierre (Dutch) and Asha Pandey arrived around 5-30 pm and I spent around 2 hrs talking and discussing several things.

Useful links

Their home page - <http://littlestarsschool.org/index.html>

Asha for Education page - <http://ashanet.org/project/?pid=98>

[The last visit](#)

Detailed Visit Report:

The school is located near Hindi International School round the corner of Lanka police station. This area is near Banaras Hindu University. When I reached the Little Stars school students just finished their morning prayers and they were going to classes. There was a Biometric machine for teachers and other workers (to record attendance and time). I went from class to class. On that day, there were a shortage of teachers (Monday following the Deb Deepawali festival, famous in Banaras). So, sometimes there was a teacher present when I was in the class, sometimes not. I kept the visit a bit informal and most teachers did not know which place or organization I came from. Asha Pandey went back to office. Given I am proficient in Hindi, there was no communication

gaps between me and students. Also, given it is an English medium school, the level of English is better compared to regular Government schools.

I followed these regular routines in each class (3 to 10) –

- Asked them to introduce themselves. Sometimes to write their names on the board in Hindi, English or Sanskrit depending on the class.
- Asked about their subjects and what subject they love or hate.
- Hindi/English – checked vocabulary/sentence skills/ speaking skills/reading ability depending on the class
- Math – tables, simple operations and quick questions of operations (to test practical arithmetical skills)
- General knowledge and other subjects, asking about their ambitions

In some classes, I did not have time to interact if there was shortage of time or their exams were near. So I did not want to disturb the flow of teaching. For example, I just said Hi to Class 11 students. In between there was a Tiffin period as well. There was a temple nearby and the mantras during class hours were too loud. I noticed a broken window pan and later recommended Asha-ji to make sure the soundproofing is better in all the classes. Later from students, I learned the loud celebration is not a daily affair.

Snapshot of my observations –

- Class 3
 - Math – good multiplication skills, they know tables (some could say the tables of 2-10 in reverse). Division in learning phase (nobody could divide 81081 by 9)
 - English – good vocabulary and some can write sentences
 - Sanskrit – some can write names
- Class 4A/B
 - Skills better than Class 3.
 - Class 4B consists of mostly new students, 4A of old students (who were studying in schools since nursery)
 - There was a difference between these two sections. For example, no one in Class 4B could divide 81081 by 9 whereas most in 4A could do
- Class 5A/B
 - The English speaking skills have improved compared to lower classes
 - In Math, they could do HCF, LCM etc
 - I checked some practical questions related to math and the answers were satisfactory
- Class 6 /7/8 - The English speaking and knowledge got better in each class.

- Class 9/10 – I mostly asked students what they wanted to become in future and the ways to reach there. Most of them did not know the details of their path to ambition. However, all of them have access to internet in some form (thanks to cheap Reliance Jio internet and smart-phones reaching most households in India now). I told them to search for it in google and to give a clear answer when they are asked the same question in future.
- I saw only 3 students in Class 11. Mostly art.
- *I noticed some teachers using rulers and other sticks to hit the students. The teachers were not changing their ways of controlling class in my presence.* I later mentioned this to Asha Pandey and Pierre about our stance on such behavior. They usually give teacher training and will make it clearer next time.
- I have also checked the sewing machines downstairs and the computer lab after going through the classes.







Pictures of Students from different Classes (Class 3 – 11)



Pictures of Students with me (Padmanava Sen)



The sewing machine on the center and the picture of building

Then I returned to the office building with Peter. I spent some time with the nursery to Class 2 kids till they were sent home (around 1-30). Before I visited, the teachers called Asha-ji to check if I had permission to visit the kids and take pictures. The interaction was mostly about simple AtoZ or reciting a poem. Some higher class students also told tables in math or simple words of English. One thing I noticed that some of the kids were older than the recommended age (like Class 1 having 9 yrs old or some nursery classes had 8 yr olds). Later Asha-ji mentioned that they enrolled them to specific classes based on their academic level and later they could get double promotions too. That explained why one Class 4 student mentioned she went straight from Class 2 to 4.





Pictures of students in office building (Nursery to Class 2)

During the lunch with Peter, we discussed about the questions raised by Berkeley volunteers. We also discussed about my first hand observations. Then we went upstairs with Asha Pandey's daughter. I spent some time with the girls in the hostel. We also checked the library book collection, music room and the solar panels on the roof.



The library book collection and the beautiful painting of a hostel girl in the office



The solar panels on the office roof and the school roof (from distance)

I spent some time with the hostel girls of different ages and talked about many things. I asked about their school experiences. Most of the girls from the hostel go to Little Stars School and the rest (six of them, academically stronger) go to a nearby school.



Photo session with the girls in the hostel

Once Asha Pandey and Pierre came back, we discussed about the observations and other topics. She gave me a history and Pierre explained how they trained the teachers. Also, they explained how the child help line work requires them to keep some girls for short time periods (after Police drops these girls). Eventually most of them are sent to Government homes or their own homes after tracking. During those periods, they have to take care of the health, food and other needs of these girls apart from the hostel girls. Some answers to the questions raised by Asha Berkeley given below:

- How many teachers are currently working at Little Stars?
 - 47 Teachers
- What is the average salary paid to the teachers? How much is this discounted from the salaries they would make teaching otherwise in private/ public sector?
 - Monthly 4000 to 7000 Rs. Compared to that the neighboring Little Flower School gives 10000 to 20000 Rs per Month.

- Are there any current plans for expansion?
 - Sewing classes in the home science stream and vocational training aimed at future employability (one girl in Hostel is a trained beautician).
- Are the teachers supported by Asha Berkley still working at Little Stars? How successful have their classes been?
 - Yes. Also, the support went to a common pool.
- As Little Stars has expanded, how many more teachers have they had to employ?
 - They need to employ Computer teacher and one sewing/beauty teacher



Me posing with Asha pandey and Pierre

Overall I had a positive experience in the school and the hostel. The children are happy in the hostel and they are quite smart too.



Me posing in the Hostel

- Padmanava Sen (padmanava.sen@gmail.com)