

Asha Silicon Valley

Swami Vivekananda Vidyalaya Site Visit

School Location: Lodhar, District Kanpur, U.P.

Date of Visit: February 14, 2024

Visit conducted by: Annapurna Dixit, (Principal, Swami Vivekananda Vidyalaya) and school staff, Raju Gaur (Jagriti Bal Vikas Samiti)

Reported by: Vijay Poduri (vpoduri@yahoo.com)

My visit began at 9:30 AM. The day was a school holiday due to Basant Panchami, but the teachers and about 50 children (out of a total school strength of 300) had come for a programme of performances organized by the school. Children who are in the after-school music and Taekwondo programs gave demonstrations of their skills. At the beginning students displayed their musical skills in bongo drumming and in singing. This was followed by a Kathak performance.

I was then taken on a tour of the school building by the principal Annapurna ji. We were accompanied by Raju ji. I saw several classrooms, the library, the computer room, and the science lab. There are new benches in several classrooms, though not in all. The older furniture had been obtained from IIT Kanpur surplus furniture years ago. The newer student desks have been bought from Asha SV funding provided for this purpose. The principal mentioned that the kids in classrooms with older furniture (the higher classes) asked why their classroom furniture had not been upgraded. The main reason is budgetary constraints. Each new desk costs ₹5000.

The library is well-equipped, with several thousand books. These include books in Hindi and English at various reading levels for children of different ages as well as some reference books.

In the science lab, the children who had displayed their projects at the science fair a couple of months ago, brought them out again for my visit. There were about a dozen projects and each project had involved two to three children. The children gave me explanations (in Hindi) and I posed questions to them, which they were able to answer, for the most part. I encouraged them to learn more by using the reference books in the library and internet resources. They are getting a good foundation in basic science and I hope this will nurture their curiosity.

The school has been conducting computer training classes for older girls in the village. I was asked to hand out certificates to the girls who had completed the training course. Most of these girls had graduated from the school a few years ago. Several of them had gone on to complete bachelor's degrees. The classes aim to provide basic office skills in word processing and spreadsheet usage. I talked to the computer teacher, Uday, who is very enthusiastic about the classes and feels that these skills equip the students for getting good jobs.

The school is also considering starting classes to teach conversational English to children. The medium of instruction is Hindi, and while the children are familiar with English to some extent, they are not able to converse in English.

Currently, the big concern is a shortfall in the operating budget. This was mentioned in a discussion with Raju Gaur and in later conversations with Dr. Mahendra Verma and Dr. Aditya Medury. The annual budget for running the school is approximately ₹36 lakh, with ₹25 lakh going to teachers' salaries (figures from 2023-2024 proposal). Jagriti Bal Vikas Samiti would like to receive funding from Asha SV for operational purposes, and a proposal for this will be presented soon. The current funding was provided under Edu Impact 2021 and is targeted at extracurricular activities designed to encourage girls to stay in school.

Some photographs from the visit:



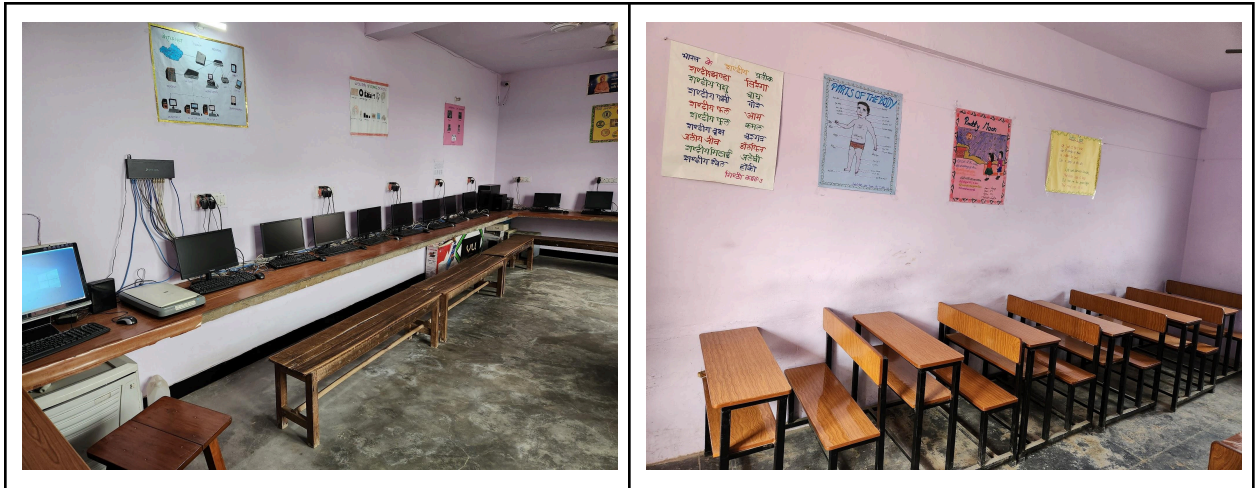
View from school terrace



Song and tabla performance by kids, some of whom are also learning Taekwondo



Kathak performance



Computer lab and classroom with new benches



Old chairs and benches in some classrooms that need replacement