

Site Visit – Khajurdaha Numbankar Unite Club – Learn Together Teach Other, Khajurdaha, West Bengal

Date of Visit: August 17th 2010

Visited by: Sohil Tiwari & Vijaya Tiwari

Asha Volunteer: Sohil Tiwari, Princeton Chapter

KNUC Point of Contact: Mr. Satyajit Mondal

Accessibility:

The school managed by KNUC is accessible by road and is about an hour away from Kolkata. We flew in to Kolkata from Mumbai on Aug 16th and stayed at a friend's place for the night. Mr. Mondal picked us up from Kolkata on Tue Aug 17th & drove us to Khajurdaha.

Details of the visit:

1. Mr. Mondal drove us from Kolkata to Khajurdaha which was an hour drive. On the way we discussed the improvement in infrastructure with better roads resulting in easy accessibility to Kolkata. One concern Mr. Mondal raised due to the improvement in infrastructure is increase in fatal accidents due to villagers trying to cross the major highway. He also mentioned that general traffic awareness is being introduced in the school to avoid such incidents.
2. The school complex is gated and includes a small ground, a two level school building and a hospital / nursing home.
3. We reached the school before the school opened for students. We were introduced to the teachers and saw the students come in. School timings were strictly adhered to.
4. Morning mass / prayers took place by singing of National anthem. Thereafter there were general hygiene checks (clipped nails, etc.) by senior students.
5. We then returned to the office where we resumed discussions with Mr. Mondal and some teachers.
6. Mr. Mondal wanted to ensure certain paperwork related to FCRA is complete.
7. Based on my previous request, Mr. Mondal had arranged for certain ex-students to come back and discuss how the LTTO program has helped them in main-stream. Key points were:
 - a. All the ex-students felt that this program has helped them prepare for mainstream and had a certain attachment to the institution
 - b. All the ex-students wanted to continue to study further and graduate. They wanted to be teachers or nurses.
 - c. The ex-students continued to maintain their relationship with the school and came back for helping the school for sports days, etc.
 - d. The students showed keen interest in knowing the differences in lifestyle in the US vs. India
8. Then we went around the school and visited the classrooms and met the students without disrupting the class schedule. We were gifted with drawings and painting made by the students.

9. The school runs from Pre-K to class VIII. Lower grade classrooms and VII & VIII grade class rooms are on the lower level (ground floor) while middle grade classrooms are on the first floor.
10. Children were provided with mid-day meals which was basically *khichuri* (rice & lentils) for lunch. The meals were prepared in the school complex (in a separate building). Vijaya helped in serving the students.
11. We were also provided lunch which was prepared by the teachers which was delicious, both veg & non-veg options were provided. We also tasted the *khichuri* which was provided to the students.
12. We then met with the teachers for discussions. Key points of discussion were as below:
 - a. Teachers would like to have a higher salary as the average salary is around Rs.2400 per month.
 - b. Teachers want build a new Child Resource Center for laboratories / computers.
 - c. Teachers also would like to have a separate staff room for female & male teachers
 - d. Higher emphasis on exposure visits, etc.
13. In the afternoon, the students of all grades performed various cultural activities which included:
 - a. Traditional dances
 - b. Music & songs
 - c. Nursery Rhymes by younger students
14. We then visited the classrooms and distributed pencils and candies that we carried from the US. We also bid our goodbyes to the school children and teachers.
15. Mr. Mondal then took us to visit the eye hospital which is also managed by KNUC. The eye hospital is less than a 5 minute drive from the school. The eye hospital supports the local population by resolving cataract and other eye related ailments.
16. We then drove back to the school to pick up our stuff and then Mr. Mondal dropped drove us back to Kolkata for our flight back to Mumbai. Thanks to Mr. Mondal for making it a successful site visit.

Observations / Conclusions:

1. The school is managed by dedicated staffs that are very focused on teaching and developing children.
2. The salaries for the teachers are extremely low considering the current inflation in India
3. Most of the drawings / paintings were of fields, farms, etc. When asked the students on what profession they would like to take, it was primarily nurse for girl students and teachers for guys. This is because the girls are exposed to the nurses in the nursing home while the guys are exposed to the teacher. As a result, I think, the exposure visit to museums, aquariums, planetariums, zoos & botanical gardens is essential.
4. Children below IV grade do not have a chair / table and sit on the floor to study.
5. Lower grade classrooms are larger as it reduces as the grades increase. The attrition is due to children going back to working in the fields or going to the city to work.

Please see some pictures from the school below:



Morning Prayers & Hygiene check



Sohil Tiwari (Asha volunteer) right, meeting with ex-students



Lower grade students classroom



Higher Grade students classroom



Computer Room



Cultural activities performed by students



Nursing home



Vijaya Tiwari serving mid-day meals



Teachers pictures

