

For the Attention of the Education Committee, Tavdi Village, Gujarat

We spent 3 months in India from January - April 2010. Of this time, we spent 6 weeks in Tavdi village, teaching English and Computers in the school on a daily basis. We were welcomed into the school as teachers, and integrated with the children and teachers fully. We attended school prayers in the morning, taking lessons in English and computing without any assistance, despite not speaking Gujarati.

We thoroughly enjoyed our experience in Tavdi School and felt our presence made a positive difference to English and Computing lessons. We were greatly appreciated by the teachers, students and the headmaster. As our teaching at the school was a great success, we believe it would benefit the school if other overseas volunteers were to continue teaching English and Computing. As such, on our return we would like to put together a structured programme for other volunteers to teach at Tavdi School.

As we spent significant time at the school, we were able to observe the daily routines and workings of the teachers and the progress of the students. Below is a short summary of observations and suggestions. We are happy to answer any questions via email, and we are more than happy to attend future committee meetings to become more involved with the education committee where we can present a full account of our experience.

- **Daily Chores** The school is very clean and well maintained, with students rotating daily responsibilities of cleaning the garden, toilets, classrooms and bins. We felt this taught good discipline; however chores should perhaps be limited to a specified time as we often observed children missing classes as they were watering plants in the garden or sweeping the floors. This meant some children often missed out on teaching time.
- **Structure** The school didn't seem to follow a structured timetable. Morning lessons would often be shortened due to long assembly or prayers. Sometimes assembly would run for over an hour, meaning one or two morning lessons were completely missed. Although morning assembly and prayers are an essential part of the school day, we felt they should be limited to a set length of time, perhaps a maximum of 20 minutes. They overrun due to extended lectures from the headmaster or teachers on how to clean and discipline. This doesn't need to take an hour, especially for children of primary school age. We felt that given the limited number of teachers (6 teachers for 7 standards/classes) teaching time is valuable, and should follow a structured timetable.
- A simple need we identified was a lack of working clocks in each classroom. This would help teachers follow a timetable and students to learn the importance of timekeeping and punctuality.
- **Punctuality and teacher attendance** In our 6 weeks as teachers, we experienced 4 occasions where only 2 out of the 6 teachers were present at school. This meant two teachers were expected to teach 150 students. We were told the reason for this was that the other 4 teachers were at a meeting. It seems counterproductive that 4 teachers needed to attend one meeting and be absent from school at the same time. It would make more sense for one teacher to attend on behalf of the school and disseminate any information to the other teachers on their return. It was also a regular occurrence for one or two teachers to be absent for all, or part of the day, either leaving school early or arriving late.
- **English** Although the English teacher has only been in post for a short period, we could see progress in the children's written and spoken English. Having an English

teacher is clearly benefitting the children and we think funding an English teacher is a very good investment for the UK Education Committee. English is currently only taught to Classes 4, 5, 6 and 7 (ages 10-13). The younger children should also be given basic English lessons (as in private schools and other states in India) otherwise the children in Tavdi will always be behind other children of their age in English. Phasing in English lessons for the younger students now, would mean once they leave school their English will be of a higher standard, compared to the children leaving school now - bringing their English to the standard of others entering secondary school.

- **English Teacher**

- **Salary** The English teacher is grateful for her recent salary increase to 3000 rupees per month and extended contract of an extra year. However, we were given the impression that this is still significantly less than other government teachers. Although the English teacher is a new teacher and has less experience than the other teachers at the school, her ability to teach English should be reflected in her salary, otherwise we fear retention of any English teacher maybe difficult. We feel the UK Education Committee should discuss and address long term funding and establish a competitive salary (comparable to other English teachers in Navsari) – this is something that would need to be researched further.
- **Recruitment** Should it be necessary to recruit an English teacher in future, we recommend an English speaking person is present on the interview panel. To ensure the new teachers level of English, both spoken and written is of an acceptable level.

- **Computers** The 6 computers donated to the school are used by students on a daily basis. The students who are excelling in standard 7 (ages 12-13) are allowed to use the computers for an hour daily. However, due to the lack of teacher's time the children are rarely given structured computer lessons. During this time, those children who are unable to read and write, or who are falling behind are given extra lessons. Older children know how to turn computers on and off, open programmes and draw pictures using the Paint programme. Some older students also know how to use some educational programmes, however when unsupervised, they understandably prefer to draw pictures than use these.

We recognise giving reading and writing lessons should take precedence over computer lessons, and do not recommend teachers divert their time to computer lessons, however the use of computers by the school could be improved in the following ways to ensure the computers are being used to their full potential, so that the children are benefitting educationally from them, not only drawing pictures and playing games!

- We recommend investing in step-by-step textbooks in Gujarati for Microsoft Word and Excel that can be followed by the older students during computer time. This would require minimal supervision by teachers, allowing them to continue to focus on the less able students. We already bought a computer textbook for the school from Navsari for 250 rupees – 6 more of these books, one for each computer and one for the teacher would help. It was hard for us to communicate to the headmaster how we envisaged the textbook to be used. It would be helpful if someone from the Education committee could

emphasise the importance using the textbook as a tool and step-by-step guide to learning.

- We often found children playing un-educational games on the computers – these should be restricted and limited to lunch breaks.
- This is an area in which an overseas volunteer could really help and add value and we would like to recommend this for future volunteers.

We understand that the UK education committee is limited in its influence as the school is a government school, however we thought our observations would give the committee first-hand insight of the daily running of the school. We also understand that not all the issues can be addressed from the UK.

We hope these comments are useful for the Committee when planning further needs of the school. We would very much like to be involved with future decisions, as we really enjoyed our time in Tavdi and look forward to visiting very soon.

Vanita and Mike

May 2010