

## **Maharashtra Government Embarks on the International Schools Project**

The idea of education, and its facets, evolves every day. In this sense, though one can define basic minimum age-appropriate achievement standards, it is practically not possible to set an upper limit of learning achievements, and that one can always aspire for advanced educational standards with reference to other academic systems at the national and international levels.

The International School Project by Maharashtra's Education Department, launched in 2017, is in essence an initiative to raise the bar for quality learning.

International School Project, is a logical next step, after effective implementation of *Pragat Shaikshaniik Maharashtra* (Educationally Progressive Maharashtra) launched on June 22, 2015, to institute child-centred teaching-learning practices and to enhance learning achievements of children across the government schools in Maharashtra. Through reforms in classroom learning, teacher education, and the other significant initiatives, PSM geared up the state's entire educational system, in order to achieve the vision of 'equitable, inclusive and quality education to all children.'

Two-year after the PSM, by August 2017, Maharashtra is at a tipping point of reform implementation with about 18,000 schools out of total 65,000 declaring themselves as 'Pragat', based on the pre-set criteria by the government.

Growing excitement and commitment around improving the learning outcomes is evident all across the State. Hence, as a logical next step, School Education Department decided to take an ambitious step and raise the bar for student learning.

### **Vision of International School Project**

International School Project envisions that by 2021, Maharashtra State will be ranked in the top 20 in student learning outcomes of Mathematics, Science & Reading as measured by the prominent international level assessments, namely PISA, TIMSS & PIRLS.

*The **Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)** is a worldwide study by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in member and non-member nations of 15-year-old school pupils' scholastic performance on Mathematics, Science, and Reading.*

*The **Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS)** is a series of international assessments of applying the mathematics and science knowledge of students around the world.*

***Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS)** is an international study of reading achievement in fourth graders. It is conducted by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA).*

The vision is being brought into reality through creation of excellent schools, from among the existing public schools run by local governing bodies, with motivated teachers who have skills through a strong international curriculum & access to effective learning resources. A strong structural and centralized support system is being created at the level of the Education Commissioner, to oversee and co-ordinate

the project along with Maharashtra State Board (SSC) and the Maharashtra Academic Authority (MAA). Cambridge University is the knowledge partner in this project and project costs are being raised through CSR.

Eventually, the idea of creating high performing schools will be scaled to different geographies to include more schools in the ambit who will learn and be coached by the first set of 100 schools. The number of schools which needs to be scaled will be significantly larger which should be able to commit to cater to the 20 million children across the State.

### **Quality of Education is crux of learning**

International School Project is also based on the realisation that the mission to accomplish RTE vision - universal and quality education for every child - will remain unaccomplished unless a focus on developing quality in a progressive manner. Parents, from all social and economic strata, seek best possible education for their wards. Especially the disadvantaged social groups view formal education as a way of liberation from backwardness and impoverishment. They want good, engaging education for their children, and not just other incentives, like free mid-day meal, books, uniforms etc., which are necessary but not sufficient to attract or retain children in schools. The underlying reasons for the problems like school dropouts and out-of-school children are more internal than external, and hence, a conscious focus on quality is inevitable to address these problems. The growing trend towards private schools and declining enrolments in public schools can also be interpreted as the inability of school system to assure quality outcomes that the parents seek and win their trust. Thus, upgrading quality is a key to many of the education related problems.

### **Our Children Deserve the Best**

The School Education Department recognises and respects the fundamental expectation of parents for the quality education. PSM started with a belief that 'every child can learn; their pace may differ' and that a teacher should be a facilitator to 'allow children to learn at their pace.' By shifting emphasis on 'learning' from 'teaching', PSM also provided space for teachers to upgrade their knowledge and skills through capacity building and exposure. Now, the motto of International School Project is that 'Our children deserve the best.' Teachers and officers at block, district and state level, are expected to work together in raising the quality bar upwards in a progressive manner.

### **First International School in Toranmal**

The GR on International School Project was issued on 14 July 2017, which states the concepts of these schools and invites applications from public schools that wish to upgrade themselves. Schools, fulfilling the basic minimum criteria, were asked to submit online applications. While this process is on, the School Education Department identified Toranmal, District Nandurbar, to launch the pilot International School.

Toranmal is one of the most challenging terrains geographically and socially. In this adivasi dominated hilly terrain villages are dispersed and inaccessible. Therefore the schools are ridden with several problems, from lack of basic infrastructure to irregular attendance and low learning outcomes.

Deliberately choosing this most challenging location as a site for the first international school the Education Department wishes to demonstrate that quality education should be universally accessible.

A total 180 teachers responded and showed interest in working for this school, in response to online call for applications. Of these 80 were shortlisted and called for a written test, however only 30 appeared for the actual test on 4 August 2017. The test paper was set in reference to PISA level questions related to applied mathematics and science. More than fifty percent (16 teachers out of total 30 appeared for the test) scored more than cut-off (40%). Through personal interviews 8 teachers were selected for Toranmal School. An intensive training was planned for them in support with the knowledge partner Akanksha. While the Toranmal International School was set up in August 2017, process for schools in other districts is also in full swing and these schools will be functional from new academic year in June 2018.

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