

Inspiring Initiatives by the Wabalewadi School in Shirur block in Pune District

Wabalewadi Zilla Parishad Primary School, Shirur block, Pune district, stands apart in many ways. The transformation process started in 2012 and fully bloomed in a span of five years. Within this period the student strength also increased from initial 32 to present 107 in this school. The school has students upto 6th grade. An Aanganwadi Centre, with 43 children, is also run in the school premises, like a part of the school. The school believes that when the pre-primary class is attached to primary school, it helps to create a sound learning base for children, and their smooth graduation into 1st grade class.



Now, the school is set to achieve one more milestone in its successful journey. In response to appeal of the School Education Department, GoM, Wabalewadi school is transforming itself into an International School. SED wants to set up model schools, as a step towards enhancing learning levels, not just on par with national toppers, but also to excel at the international levels.

The school is managed by two teachers - head teacher is Dattatray Ware and his associate teacher Eknath Khaire.

Head teacher Mr. Ware said, "Involvement of parents and community is crucial in school development. Therefore we started by winning their trust and confidence and sharing our vision of developed school with them. Soon it became a shared vision."

Mr. Ware took the first village meeting two months after he joined in September 2012. "In this meeting I have a status update of school condition to teachers. I said that lack of facilities will ultimately affect the future of our children and proposed to make a joint plan to give best possible learning in the school." The committed teacher was able to convince the parents. School development work started on 23 September 2012, with contribution, in cash, kind, and labour by parents. In first few days almost Rs. 17 lakh were collected, which kick started school development work.

In the next nine months Wabalewadi school was renovated with parents' active participation. "Although the school is protected with a stone compound, in our minds school has no boundaries. It is a community responsibility, since it is shaping the future of our children," said one parent.

"Quality of education and community contribution go hand in hand. Parents do not hesitate to support us, because they are sure that they will get quality education here. They feel they are investing in their child's future," said Mr. Ware.

In 2016 Wabalewadi villagers donated 32 guntha land for school expansion; Rs. 2.5 crores worth land from the then market price! A plan for a new school campus is already being made. And when the new School campus will be ready it can accommodate more children.

Innovations in learning methods

Out of total five teachers sanctioned for this school, only two have been actually appointed. Teacher strength is less, but the school has turned this problem into an opportunity to introduce new learning methods, such as subject-oriented learning and peer learning.



"We do not have standard-wise classes. We divide children into subject-oriented groups. Every subject is taught through activities and projects. Therefore, a subject group can have children from various standards. For instance, a mathematics class will have all children who have attained a level to understand the topic to be covered in the class. Similarly with geography, science, language and other subjects."

The subjects and lessons are broken into parts and these parts are serially arranged. This chain of lessons is completed by group of students at their pace.

Each topic is covered comprehensively and with lot of practical's. For instance, subject like 'water' will cover all aspects of water, from its source, utility, composition, availability, conservation and so on.

Ample space is given to children to understand every subject. Learning assessment is in-built aspect of the learning process itself. Student responses are observed to understand what they are clear about and what they are not. Difficulties in understanding are addressed by using alternative methods of teaching. The school believes that every child is unique and learns at his/her own pace.

‘Vishay Mitra’ (Subject Buddies)



The school involves students - as ‘Vishay Mitra’ (Subject Buddies) - in the teaching process.

Subject Buddies are children with better learning levels in any one or more subjects, who assist other children to learn the subjects. Sharing his observation the teacher said, “Children do not hesitate to ask their problems to other children and therefore their doubts are cleared faster.”

The school teachers recognise that the learning needs differ from child to child. “It is our responsibility to be sensitive to children’s needs. We are also aware of

their family backgrounds. Some children come from poor households, some are migrants from other states, who have no prior exposure to Marathi. We consider all these problems, because they affect the child’s involvement in learning process in the school.”

An indigenous hand washing station in Wabalewadi school

Innovative projects are encouraged. A mechanical device for hand washing is developed by Siddhi using locally available material and placed near the toilet and other areas in the school. The water is pumped with a lever that is operated by foot. Hand washing can be done in less water.



Siddhi has developed a hand washing device from trash. It requires three wooden sticks to create a frame, one more wooden stick to act as a foot lever, a plastic can as a water storage device, and some ropes, wires for tying.

You can spot a hand washing device near the washroom area. A plastic can is tied to wood frame in a slanted position, this is water storage. The can has small holes in upper parts, to let water out when needed. The water storage can needs a slight tilt to get water to wash hands, this tilt is given with the help of rope attached to another wooden stick

lying on ground. When the bottom stick is pressed with a leg the can tilts to pour water. The foot pressure can be adjusted to get exact tilt and avoid water wastage. This device is developed with experimentation and its fine-tuning is still underway. But now it is in operative state.

Siddhi explained two important merits of the device developed by her. “The system needs less water for washing hands than tap water. There are less chances of germ transmission, since the water outflow is controlled with foot pressure on the wooden stick at the bottom, and not with our

hands like the tap. When there are many users, tap handle can become a source of germ transmission.” A small pot of fine ash is also attached to the wooden frame. “Traditionally ash is used as a cleansing medium. It is far better than commonly used soaps, which are made from chemicals. The soap smell remains for a while when we wash hands with soap, it is because of chemicals. That is not the case with ash,” explained Siddhi.

Increasing student strength

One of the interesting fact about the Wabalewadi School is that student strength in this school is more than double the households in this tiny village. Wabalewadi has 60 families, with 700 population, and the school has around 150 students. It is primarily because the school not only accommodates all the children in the village, but also attracts students from nearby villages. Parents who had earlier enrolled their children in the private schools, are now keen to enrol them in Wabalewadi School.

Along with neighbouring villages, the school also attracts families who migrate in this area for their work. Three siblings - Shruti, Abhishek, and Sneha - are recently enrolled in the schools in grades III, IV and V respectively. Their parents are labourers, who got work on a site in a village near to Wabalewadi. Since the family wasn't a local resident, school teachers were earlier unwilling to enrol the children in village school, and asked them to take admission in their village of residence. But the parents had heard so much good about Wabalewadi School, that they decided to shift their base to this village and took a room on rent in the village.

The school uses digital technology, but uses these devices sparingly, only as an aid. “We consciously decided to limit the use of tabs, when we realised their use can be addictive and over-reliance on them may hamper process of human thinking. Our students have access to up-to-date technology, which supports their learning, but they are not totally dependance on them. We encourage use of all methods to facilitate learning, and digital learning tools are one among them.”

This goes well with the school's motto - ‘Use your hands and use your brain before using tablets and laptops!’
