

With a little help from friends and govt, new life for border school

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Written by [Raakhi Jagga](#) | Chananwala (fazilka) | Updated: April 15, 2019 7:20:10 am



At the school in Chananwala in Fazilka. (Express photo by Gurmeet Singh)

Until September last year, little separated Government Primary School at Chananwala village in Fazilka from the others in Punjab. About 13 km from Fazilka city, and among the last schools near the India-Pakistan border, it too had leaking roofs and blocked bathrooms, students had started moving to private schools and there were few blackboards or lights in classrooms.

Then, on October 1, 2018, Lovejeet Singh Grewal took charge of this school as Head Master. And in less than six months, with help from his friends, and government schemes including the MGNREGA, the school has been renovated.

It now sports a new library and computer lab and furniture and air conditioners have been installed in most classrooms. Work has begun on an open gym and experts have been roped in to teach Vedic Maths, Calligraphy and Abacus. There are also coaches for Karate, Giddha, Bhangra and Gatka. The Chananwala school is an English medium school now but older students have an option to pursue studies in Punjabi. In the new session, English will be the medium Class 1 onwards. And all new facilities come with no extra cost, thanks to Grewal's enterprise. Speaking to The Indian Express, Grewal said the school had enough space, and a dozen rooms, but their condition was deplorable. "When I joined Chananwala school, some rooms were just dumpyards. The school badly needed a whitewash. There weren't lights or even blackboards in classrooms. I and my friend Navdeep Asija, President, Graduates Welfare Association of Fazilka (GWAF), chalked out a renovation plan," he said.

The plan included tapping the MGNREGA scheme to build parks, pathways with interlocking tiles, and boundary walls. Then, they approached voluntary donors for resources. And the turnaround shows. The school now has green lawns and eight of the 12 rooms are air-conditioned, well painted, decorated and have new furniture.

The furniture was provided by the Education Department, and in all the school spent Rs 18 lakh, of which Rs 12 lakh came from the MGNREGA, which has been reimbursed up to Rs 5 lakhs.

Sakshi Nagpal, a teacher, said, “All classrooms have LCD panels for smart classes. We also have a

computer lab. Manisha, another teacher said, “Now we don’t have to go to the village to call students to study. Earlier, absenteeism was about 15-20 per cent, and now, it is almost 0.”

Grewal said arrangements have been made for the surge in power bills. “I am aware of the power bill issue. But we have arranged donors who will pay the power bills in months the AC works. It is for four months only and the rest of the year, we can get the bill reimbursed from the education department as usual,” he said.

The infrastructure upgrades have even ensured a spike in admissions – from 137 students in October 2018 to 200 in April, according to Grewal. “We will have a class strength of 40 given availability of staff. We can enroll not more than 240 students (including the KG section). As of now, 20 students are in KG and 180 in primary. So, we can admit 20 more students in KG and primary sections, respectively,” he said.

Students who left for private schools have returned too, said Grewal. “It was just another government school earlier. We too had a staff shortage. But the

change is beyond our imagination. Students used to bunk classes but now they don't want to go back home," said Sakshi Nagpal.

The school has six teachers including Grewal and two education providers and the staff tries to cover all the work in the school since students do get much support at home. Navdeep Asija, President, GWAF said, "We are always there to raise the standards of this school and I am really happy to see the transformation of this school in merely six months."

Before joining this school, Grewal was posted at the Government Primary School Dona Nanka which is also close to the Indo-Pak border, where his work earned him a state award in 2015 and a national award in 2017.