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Makeover, villagers' role help school increase enrolment

TURNAROUND Closed due to low enrolment in Aug 2014, govt primary school was reopened two months later on request of villagers; school now has highest students' intake in Dholpur

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JAIPUR: In 2014, the government primary school in Rajasthan's Sherpur village was closed due to low enrolment. Two months later, it was reopened on the request of villagers and assurance by teachers to increase enrolment.

Today, it has 217 students, the highest for a primary school in the district (Dholpur). Primary schools run Classes 1 to 5.

In August 2014, under the programme to consolidate schools, the state government merged the Sherpur primary school with the nearby upper primary school in Kalyanpur. Upper primary schools run Classes 1 to 8.

School's 30 students and two teachers were asked to go to Kalyanpur, around 3km, for classes. However, the villagers didn't send their children to school in protest and met the then district collector. An official was sent to verify the villagers' grouse - that the new school was too far for students of Classes 1 to 5 - and the district administration agreed to reopen the Sherpur school in October that year.

"The villagers met the district collector and told him that they will work with the school staff to increase admissions. We fulfilled our promise and today the school has the highest enrolment in the district," says Hari Krishna Baghel, president of the school management committee (SMC).

Headmaster Rajesh Sharma says the enrolment rose gradually through the years - 84 in 2015, 114 in 2016, 154 in 2017, 210 in 2018 and 217 in 2019. Sharma and the second teacher, Bhikam, who doesn't use a surname, pooled their resources to provide free uniform to all 84 students in 2015.

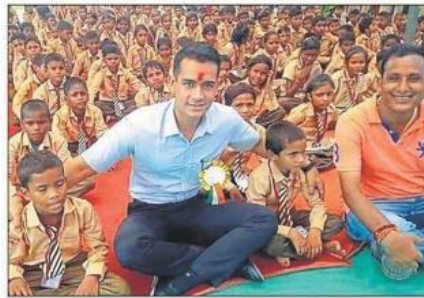
The following year, the teachers with the help of donations from philanthropists, got a third classroom with a tin shed to accommodate new admissions.

"Classes are held in the three classrooms and on the verandah. Students sit on the floor. We are trying to mobilise funds for furniture," Sharma adds.

In the winter vacation this



The newly developed garden at Sherpur primary school in Dholpur, which is painted like a train. HT PHOTO



Dholpur superintendent of police Mridul Kachawa with students and headmaster Rajesh Sharma (right). HT PHOTO

year, the headmaster got the school painted like a train to make it attractive. "I had read in newspapers about a school in Alwar that looks like a train. I got in touch with the painters who did that and called them here," says Sharma.

The painters worked for 20 days, and on January 8, the school was ready to welcome new admissions. Sharma spent Rs 100,000 from his savings for the paint work and landscaping.

"When I heard about this school, I came to see it. I found that this is better than all private schools in our area and decided to withdraw my children from them. My son, Om, is now studying in this government school in

Class 3," says Deepak Rawat, a parent. Several others have transferred their children from private schools to this one.

"On my birthday (July 16) this year, I donated an air cooler to the students," the headmaster says.

From donations, a third, makeshift classroom was constructed. Last year, government sanctioned funds for a new classroom. As the number of students increased, so did teachers.

In September 2015, four teaching posts were sanctioned for the school. In May 2019, when the staffing pattern was revised, the school got seven posts. Now the school has six teachers and a Shiksha Mitra, a contractual teacher.

Villagers met the district collector and told him that they will work with the school staff to increase admissions. Now, the school has the highest enrolment in the district.

HARI KRISHNA BAGHEL, president of school management committee

"The young teachers and headmasters are taking inspiration from each other and going an extra mile to make their schools attractive and improve facilities," Sharma said.

Recently, two teachers, who joined the Sherpur school in August, donated a table fan for the makeshift classroom.

There are four CCTV cameras in the school, a water cooler for drinking water and well-maintained toilets.

Sharma likes to invite officials to his school for them to see the change and donate something.

A day before the Independence Day this year, Dholpur SP Mridul Kachawa visited the school for uniform distribution. He liked the school and sat on the floor with the students.

"This is the best school in our area. It is sad that I have only one year left here," said Anjali Kumari, 12, a student of Class 5.