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Mala News

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An action programme for the elimination of child labour in rural India

Greetings!

A word from Anne Bate, one of our Education Advisors

Recently Mukesh Dubey, Education Officer for Project Mala schools, sent me some photos of a group of senior pupils who had recently left school after their class 12 exams. Roshani, Suresh and Himanshu had some free time ahead of them before starting the next stage of their studies. Schools were closed for the hottest weeks of a baking summer month, but rather than take the opportunity to rest, these pupils had returned to the school where they had first embarked upon a Project Mala education 10 years ago, to run extra coaching classes for those children from their village who had not been fortunate enough to win a place with Project Mala, but were eager to learn as much as they could in the summer break.



Looking at the photos and videos of these exceptional students, who I have been lucky enough to get to know and to teach, I couldn't help thinking back over the past eight years that I have been involved with Project Mala as Education Advisor and Trustee.

I first met Roshani, Suresh and Himanshu and their classmates when I came to the schools to prepare some older children to speak English to the guests who would be coming to the grand opening of the new school in Turkahan. They had been studying for three years in the old school, crammed into two tiny rooms and were eager to start middle school in the new building. At this time, although we had opened a middle school in Guria, and the first pupils were just completing their third and final year there, we had no provision elsewhere for pupils to continue their studies with us after primary school. We were not sure that we would be able to run a middle school permanently in Turkahan: the new school had only 4 classrooms and once the full contingent of primary school pupils were in place there would be no room for a middle school. But we promised the existing primary class that they could continue into class 6 in the new Turkahan building.



The original two roomed Mala Turkahan school where Roshani, Suresh and Himanshu first started their education with us



Turkahan school today with a new middle school extension being built

That was less than eight years ago, and yet what a long way we have come since then.

Roshani's classmates completed middle school in Turkahan and then joined the recently opened senior school in Guria, lodging in the newly built boarding houses.

They graduated from class 10 just in time to join the first intermediate classes 11 and 12 at Guria school and to take part in the opening ceremony for the new boarding and senior classroom block.

Meanwhile, they would return to their homes for holidays and hear about another initiative; the new pre-school for girls that opened in Turkahan School and was so successful that we opened one at each of the four other village primary schools.

Not only did we manage to squeeze a permanent middle school in to Turkahan by teaching split shifts, but we have finally completed the new classrooms that give the space to run a full timetable for both primary and middle school pupils.

Last year middle school classes started in Mujehra primary school as well and finally, this year, we were ready to open our second senior school in Patehra.

Project Mala schools look very different now to the way they were in 2011 and it is not only the buildings that have changed. A completely new programme of English teaching has been introduced throughout the schools which has helped the children become more confident and fluent speakers. We have built on the already excellent standards of teaching by bringing in more interactive methods for teaching maths and science and giving the teachers plenty of training in the new methods. With new science labs in place, practical science could be taught at last. Eight years ago the children learned IT by looking at pictures of computers; many had never had a chance to handle a real one. Since then, the computer lab has grown from a handful of old laptops donated by a UK school to an impressive network of machines linked to the teacher's computer and senior pupils are proving to be quick learners.

However some things never change: the dedication of our staff in India to providing the best education possible is still the same, and the readiness of our pupils to turn around and give something back to their communities reflects that sense of duty they have learned from their teachers.

If you know someone who might like to read this newsletter, please pass it on.

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