

June 2024

Dear Friends,

Asha Deep is now closed for summer vacation. It is much too hot to travel back and forth to school. Temperatures have been hovering between 44-47°C (110-116°F) for the past couple of weeks, cooling to the 90s at night. Most of our students do have a ceiling fan at home although, at these temperatures, they just circulate hot air. It feels like sitting in front of a blow heater. A fan does give some relief though if you are sweating! Frequent 20-30 minute power cuts bring on a



आशा दीप विद्याश्रम



*Longing for a little more of this right now
(taken November 2023)*

flood of sweat, followed by a wash of cool when the fan first comes back on. We plan to re-open on July 27 by which time, hopefully, the monsoon rains will have arrived.

When I last wrote, we had just one month left of school. For the most part, all went well. The government ordered schools to run half days because, even then, the temperatures were up to 42°C (107°F). But daily classes were running, textbooks were turned in and traded for next year's books, and summer homework was distributed and explained. During that month, about 50 new students came for admission. Here, most schools give final exams in March. Children who want to change schools usually do so in April.

And these new admissions caused another hiccup in our year. As in the previous July, teachers from the local government school, along with officials from the Educational Board Office, came to make a complaint about our school. While last year we did receive our affiliation to Class 5, we never received it for Classes 6-8. We decided to teach those children under our registration as a coaching (tuition) center. But, when the officers suddenly showed up at 11 a.m. and saw us teaching, they said, "Is this a time for coaching classes?" Admittedly, coaching classes normally run in the evenings. After admonishing us, they told us that we could teach our students, but that we would have to do so after 1 p.m. For the last month of the year we had to teach those students two online classes each morning. Then they came to school from 3:30-5:30 p.m. for three more classes in person.

Since Educational Board employees are called on to assist during elections, we could not pursue getting our full affiliation until this week. (India staggers voting over a six-week period to maintain order. It's a logistical feat to accommodate 650 million voters! Voting just ended on June 1.) Our biggest need now is to receive proper affiliation. Our affiliation to 5th class is up for review after a provisional first year, and we are still waiting for approval to teach Classes 6-8. Hopefully we can do the needful to get this work done before school re-opens.

Except for our 6th, 7th, and 8th graders not being able to study with the rest of the school, everything else went well in April. We had a written competition which included questions from all the general knowledge questions we had asked throughout the year. Twenty-two students scored above 135 (out of 160) to be able to participate in a pizza party. Three girls scored 100%!

*All those who qualified for the pizza party
received recognition and pizza!*



On May 10, the last day of school, we had a party celebrating those who had excellent attendance throughout the year or who got straight As on their exams. Our top students in various categories received merit certificates and prizes. The four students who scored straight As all year received a new school bag. All our students were formally promoted. And finally, we all ate to our heart's content in a happy watermelon party.



These students achieved 95-99% attendance over the year. Another four students (not pictured here) came every single day.



Our 8th class students have now graduated into high school.



While the students are on break, Siddharth Sir and I are working hard to get the remaining work on the school building complete. Today, our welders were working on the final grill that will crown the building. One team of workers is cleaning the cement that had dripped on the brick during the pouring of each roof. Another team is applying a waterproofing agent on the outside to prevent blackening of the bricks. The painters are painting the wheelchair ramp that is finally complete. Later this week, a team will be coming to install solar panels. In a very nice development, wifi has finally come to our location and is now working at our school. Last year nothing was available, and we limped along for the whole year on mobile phone data.

Another of my projects this summer has been to design photo book which will document the construction of our school building. It has meant going through hundreds of photos. I must admit, I was shocked when I compared photos from July 2023 with those taken in May 2024. Though progress on the building has felt agonizingly slow at times, we did come a long way during the year. Take a look for yourself at our before and after photos:



On opening day, windows had not been installed, the exterior had not been plastered, and the water tank screen had not been built.



On closing day, while not 100% complete, the building looked beautiful. Our students are also beautiful!

Our classrooms were also extremely barebones on the first day of school.



In July . . . no windows, just walls and a roof.



By September, most of the windows had been installed and our benches had been painted.

And here you can see the evolution of our courtyard:



In July, there were no railings. In October, scaffolding was erected to build the railings.

In November, the railings were finally complete. By December, they were painted.



We are pleased that work on the building is finally coming to an end. We are pleased with the healthy numbers of new admissions. We are pleased with the wonderful feeling among the teachers and students. Now we have to hope for a smile from the universe so that we can receive the affiliation that we deserve. It will be terrible if we again have to close our doors while waiting for the government to issue necessary paperwork.

With best wishes to you,
love, Connie

