



The Dignity Project Monthly operations update

March 2024 update

Introduction

At the end of March Madelene and Kanwal visited Khajuraho and spent some time at the school again including a visit to the new school site; Wonderkids received a crucial government recognition known as CSR-1 and a new breakfast menu was developed at the school. Work on our ACNC application progresses, with significant policy document preparation already completed.

Overseas operations update

Wonderkids, Khajuraho: March saw 3,231 breakfast served. During this time, we have been conducting research for new breakfast dishes to introduce at the school which will boost the nutrient intake of the students, while using locally available ingredients and respecting their pure vegetarian practices. As part of this process, the school is introducing and using additional ghee in the breakfast program and looking to source a local supply of buttermilk that can be delivered in a sustainable way (in a bulk reusable container directly from a local farm and not individual plastic packets). A new dish, halwa (a slightly sweet preparation of semolina, ghee, nuts and dried fruit), was introduced at the start of April – and the cook will now expand the menu to have a rotation of six dishes per week with extra ghee, more nuts and peanuts, lentils and buttermilk included in the meals.



We revisited the new school site during April. Civil works have progressed since our November visit and the landlord is still aiming for the buildings to be ready by the end of May. A new building recently added will be used as a kitchen, as it is centrally located in the school and ideal for supporting the breakfast program, and additional toilets will be added. A staffroom and dedicated female staff toilet will be preserved for the female teachers. Currently, crops are being harvested behind the school; once this is complete the landlord will fence off the school's play area and the playground space will be levelled. The school will need desks and chairs but plans to move first to determine what space is available and what is needed before any assets are bought.



The school held two parent meetings recently, one with class eight parents about expanding to class nine and seeking parent input on this decision, and the other, an update on the new site. Parents were also invited to register children for class 1 admission for next year. Class 8 parents are firmly in favour of their children remaining at the school and a new teacher will be found to allow the addition of class 9. The school will also seek admissions for class 1 from the community surrounding the new school site to establish relationships in that community. Parent and community support for the school and its work remains strong.

Lastly, students complete their examinations at the end of March. So far, these results are available:

| WONDER KIDS ENGLISH SCHOOL KHAJURAHO | | | | | |
|--|-----------|-----------|----------|----------|--------------|
| ANNUAL EXAMINATION - RESULT - 2023 - 24 | | | | | |
| CLASS | A | B | C | D | TOTAL |
| 1st | 14 | 4 | - | - | 18 |
| 2nd | 9 | 6 | 4 | - | 19 |
| 3rd | 4 | 10 | 4 | - | 18 |
| 4th | 10 | 6 | 2 | - | 18 |
| 6th | 6 | 14 | 2 | - | 22 |
| 7th | 10 | 10 | 3 | - | 23 |
| | | | | | 118 |

Items of significance (overseas)

We have spent significant time this month, together as a board and as individuals, researching, Wonderkids, Khajuraho: On April 1 the school received the government status known as CSR-1. This will allow the school's governing society to accept domestic donations and provide tax concessions to donors. In India, the law requires all companies to spend 2% of profits over a three-year-period on CSR, or corporate social responsibility programs. This is a significant step forward Wonderkids and we will now support them to use this as a tool to garner additional support for the school. The next step is for the school to apply for the so-called FCRA status.

From the board

The following report comes from Madelene's recent visit to Khajuraho.

With just 8 days on the ground in Khajuraho I had planned to spend that time continuing to work on conversational English with Class 8 and running sports lessons. However, that plan quickly evolved to meet requests from some of the teaching staff for support in the lower primary with maths and English lessons. Teachers are more confident with me now and I am thrilled to see them wanting to develop their teaching practice, especially as we seek to encourage more creativity in teaching and learning. As a result, while I worked with the class 8 each day on language skills, problem solving and creative thinking, I also spent a lot of time in class 1 and with the maths teacher. In class 1 we worked on teaching lessons that combined games, maths, English, Hindi and art in one. Students used dice to form sums, drew numbers and learnt to write numbers numerically, in English and in Hindi. I modelled simple counting games with pencils and mental maths games with dice. We also played games with fruit memory cards and used drawing and language to practice learning. In future, I plan to provide more support to class one to help establish some good, early skills.

In class 8 we had some great lessons again – timelines, negotiation, maths games, colouring and concentration games, plus working together to establish a set of rules for sports and games at the school. Class 8 then presented these rules to the whole school at assembly. Again, some of the students in that class really struggle outside the practice of rote learning and thinking. It's great to see them respond to my activities and see how some really embrace it and others have to really work through the challenge. While I was there, I also tested all the class 8 students twice for reading and comprehension, collecting very useful data to build a program tailored for this class going forward. One of the biggest issues is that the students know how to read by recall – as in they have rote learnt the words – and they don't know how to pronounce unknown or little used words and if they encounter new words they don't have other skills to determine pronunciation or meaning. My plan now is to build an intensive reading program with and for the students and help them improve their English. This may involve backwards teaching a phonics-type program. There are 3 or 4 students, the top students, that will progress quite quickly I believe from this, and the lower students we can lift to a more confident level of English conversation.

While we continue to search for a permanent sports teacher, we are looking for creative solutions to continue some sports and games at the school. I did one combined sports class with Year 8 and Year 1 as a test to see if we can establish a buddy system where the class 8s teach sport to class 1 and possibly class 2. This initial session worked really well and class 8 are great leaders. This needs to be developed further and a structure out in place, but I think it could be a great solution to some sport continuing.

Lastly, I took with me hundreds of pencils and crayons donated by Steiner schools and families at home. These are high quality pencils and boost the supply of resources at the school. While there, I modelled for the teachers how to add these into their lessons and to encourage the students to be more creative and take more pride in the look of their work. I was thrilled to see how quickly Manisha adapted this into her science classes. The teachers will need ongoing encouragement to add creativity in their lessons, though some are already willing.

The next step is to find some time to head back for a longer visit and work more on teacher skills, training and support and to work more intensively with class 8 on language skills. It is a privilege to have been there again and working with these wonderful students and I look forward to returning again.

