



Sarvodaya Ashram Programme Evaluation EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

November 2015

1. Introduction

Over the past four years, the Kusuma Trust funded Sarvodaya Ashram to deliver an accelerated learning programme for girls who had dropped out of the education system after primary school, or who had never attended school. The overall aim of the Pehchaan¹ programme was to reintegrate adolescent girls into the mainstream secondary education system.

Now that Kusuma's funding for the Pehchaan programme has come to an end, this report discusses lessons learned from delivering the programme and implications for other aspects of Kusuma's work in supporting students from disadvantaged communities. The report also identifies evidence of impact on students, their families and communities.

2. Aims and objectives

The aim of the study is to improve understanding of factors that help or hinder out-of-school girls to re-integrate into the secondary education system. To explore this topic, the Pehchaan programme delivered by the Sarvodaya Ashram² was selected for evaluation as a case study of good practice.

The evaluation seeks to answer the following questions:

- What works well in the delivery of the Pehchaan programme from the perspectives of key stakeholders (teachers, students and parents) and how have challenges been addressed?
- What lessons can be learned about effective teacher professional development and practice in the context of remedial and accelerated learning?
- What is the impact of the Pehchaan programme on girls' educational attainment and trajectories, aspirations and well-being?
- What are the social costs for girls who drop out of primary school and do not make the transition to secondary education?

¹ Pehchaan means 'identity'.

² Henceforth referred to as 'the Ashram'.

The evaluation complements other research commissioned by the Kusuma Trust, including ASER/Pratham's investigation of factors influencing children's access to secondary education, and the planned evaluation of Kusuma's Secondary School Readiness Programme (SSRP).

3. Research methods

In-depth qualitative interview and focus group methods were utilised to undertake the evaluation. Qualitative data was supplemented by a review of documented evidence on student attainment and their destination following completion of Class 10 Board examinations. Interviews and focus groups were semi-structured to allow for an exploration of key themes while also enabling unanticipated issues to emerge.

Student focus groups and interviews

Initially, a focus group was held with 8 students who were asked to discuss their experience of school prior to joining the Ashram, views about teaching, learning and everyday life at the Ashram, their aspirations for the future, and perceived constraints.

A student-led focus group was also held in order to find out whether students raise different issues without the potentially inhibiting effect of having a researcher present. The researchers advised students on how to conduct the focus group and provided an opportunity for them to be actively involved in the research.

Subsequently, individual interviews were undertaken with nine students to discuss issues raised in focus groups in more depth. Students were selected from the following three categories:

- students who live and study at the Ashram up to Class 10 (n=3);
- students who live at the Ashram but study in Class 11-12 at the local Inter College (n=3); and
- students who dropped out of education after completing Class 10 at the Ashram (n=3).

Parent interviews

The parents or guardians of 6 students (three who continued with their studies at the local Inter College and three who had left the Ashram after Class 10) were invited to take part in the evaluation. In total, 11 interviews were held with parents or guardians. In 4 cases, the mother and father were interviewed. In one case, the father had died and consequently the brother and sister-in law were interviewed, and in one case only the father was interviewed. Interviews explored family size and composition, parents' education, views about their children's experience of primary education and the Pehchaan programme delivered by the Ashram, aspirations for their daughters' future and perceived constraints.

Staff focus group and interviews

A focus group was conducted of all teachers (n=11) working at the Ashram. The focus group explored reasons for choosing to teach at the Ashram, participation in in-service professional development programmes, their experience of delivering the Pehchaan programme and lessons learned.

An in-depth interview was also held with the Secretary of the Ashram which explored the development, underpinning philosophy, funding and management of the Pehchaan programme at the Ashram. Interviews with the Pehchaan Programme Co-ordinator, and the village-level Community Liaison Worker explored, respectively, the administration of the programme, and the role of community outreach in facilitating access to the Pehchaan programme.

Analysis

A thematic analysis of the qualitative data obtained from all stakeholder groups was undertaken. Documentary evidence on attainment and destinations following completion of Class 10 Board examinations was also reviewed to provide 'hard' data on the extent to which the Ashram was successful in raising student attainment and reintegrating students into the secondary education system.

4. Programme description

Sarvodaya Ashram

The interview with the Secretary of the Ashram highlighted the important influence of Gandhian ideas about community mobilisation and service to the community in the development of the Ashram. From this perspective, education that focuses solely on classroom pedagogy is viewed as insufficient for raising attainment and improving the lives of students from the poorest communities. The underpinning philosophy of the Ashram is that teachers and other staff need to be immersed in local communities in order to understand their everyday lives and needs.

Accordingly, the need for a residential education programme for adolescent girls emerged out of the Ashram's experience in delivering an accelerated learning programme for girls who had never enrolled in primary school, or who had dropped out at an early stage. This Udaan³ programme helped girls to complete their primary education to Class 5 in 11 months, using participatory teaching methods. However, staff found that students tended to drop out at Class 6, mainly due to the poor quality of education delivered by government schools. The Pehchaan programme was developed to meet the needs of girls who fell into this latter category.

Currently, the Ashram comprises a number of different projects, including a co-educational primary school for Classes 1 to 5, a co-educational Inter-College for Classes 6 to 12 and a residential educational programme for girls only.

Pehchaan Programme

Admission

The Pehchaan programme prioritised girls for admission who lived in remote rural areas, had dropped out of primary school after Class 5 and had no locally accessible secondary school. Additionally, the Ashram favoured girls whose parents were supportive, or could be persuaded to support, their daughters' continued education.

Three cohorts have completed the Pehchaan programme (recruited in 2009, 2010 and 2011 respectively). 40 students were recruited to the first cohort (2009-2013), 48 students to the second cohort (2010-2014), and 49 students to the third cohort (2011-2015). Parents of students in the second cohort were asked to contribute to the cost of their daughter's education but most students are educated free of charge.

From 2014, students who pass their Class 10 Board examinations and want to study Science and Maths to Class 12, have access to Anil Public School, which is located a short distance from the Ashram. Girls who wish to continue their studies in other subjects to Class 12 attend the Inter-College run by the Ashram. Parents whose daughters live at the Ashram but continue their studies to Class 12 are asked to contribute to the cost of their board and lodging.

Curriculum

In line with its community ethos, the curriculum for the Pehchaan programme was developed in consultation with teachers, students and community members. Keeping parents informed about and actively engaged in their child's education was identified as an important component of programme effectiveness:

'It was important that parents should know the learning level of their children for each class and what they were studying. We educated the parents to ask the child to say the times table...When parents are able to monitor the children, they understand the importance of what the child is learning, and they are motivated to continue the studies of their children'. (Secretary, Sarvodaya Ashram)

Teachers were trained by IGNUS⁴ to deliver an accelerated learning programme that addressed initial remedial education needs and covered the State curriculum for Classes 6 to 10 in four academic years. To achieve this, the programme focused on developing competencies and skills and in using interactive teaching methods. The Secretary and Programme Co-ordinator monitor teaching performance through listening to teachers just outside the classroom door and offering feedback on their performance. Feedback on teacher performance is also obtained from students.

Health and social skills

In addition to the formal curriculum, girls are taught about sexual and reproductive health, and the negative consequences of caste discrimination and the dowry system. The residential nature of the Pehchaan programme provides opportunities for discussion on a range of topics, including those raised by girls themselves.

'Learning is everywhere. We take girls to some meetings, and if someone visits, we ensure that they participate'. (Secretary, Sarvodaya Ashram)

In order to encourage girls to think about their future, and to inform their subject choice, the Ashram arranged for career counselling sessions to be delivered to each cohort by college lecturers and career coaching centres.

Challenges

The Secretary identified parental expectations that their daughters should be educated free of charge as the biggest challenge for the future of the Ashram. Even parents who were able to contribute were described as unwilling to do so.

³ Udaan means 'flight'.

⁴ IGNUS is a specialist education consultancy

'Their role is not limited to admission to school. They also have a significant role in the education of their children and in finding out what the children want to do'. (Secretary, Sarvodaya Ashram)

With the exception of foreign donors, delay in obtaining grants on time was identified as a second challenge that created difficulties for programme planning and delivery. Lack of funds meant that, although staff recruited to the Pehchaan programme were well-qualified and committed to working with out-of-school girls, their salaries were low compared with teachers in other schools. In this respect, the Secretary identified the need for advocacy with the district and State education authorities.

5. Key findings

The following discussion draws on interview and focus group data with all stakeholder groups (students, parents or guardians, and staff).

Reasons for drop-out

With the exception of one student who had never attended school prior to joining the Pehchaan programme, all students interviewed had dropped out of school on completion of Class 5. The main reasons given were the long distance needed to travel - usually on foot - to the nearest government secondary school (up to 15 km in some cases), fears for girls' safety travelling to and from school, and risks to the reputation of the family should girls be 'teased' or harassed en route. Most students said that their families could not afford to pay the fees of private schools that were located closer to home. A further important factor was the reported poor quality of teaching in government primary schools from which children received little benefit in terms of learning.

'In my earlier school, there was no proper teaching. Children were coming to play and to eat the midday meal only. Teachers were not teaching, they were just gossiping'. (Student)

As a result of their experience of primary education, girls were ill-equipped to cope with the demands of secondary education. Parents and students also had low expectations that secondary schools would be any better than their primary school counterparts.

'Secondary school was far. I used to get tired walking and the teachers didn't teach'. (Student)

It could be argued that, in these circumstances, dropping out of school represented a rational response. However, other factors were also at play. In some cases parental attitudes were not in favour of daughters continuing their education to secondary level (preferring girls to help with domestic chores or work in the fields). Some girls identified neighbours as putting pressure on their parents to keep daughters at home rather than allowing them to continue with their education.

'The problem is not the parents but the neighbours who don't let the parents send their daughters to secondary school'. (Student)

Access to the Pehchaan programme

While most girls had dropped out of school for one or two years, at least two students from the third cohort of students had not been to school for five years prior to joining the Ashram. The community outreach worker had a key role to play in facilitating girls' access to the Pehchaan programme. He developed strong relationships with families and spent considerable time persuading parents – particularly fathers – of the benefits of secondary education for their daughters. He also explained to parents how the Pehchaan programme helped girls to reach age/grade-appropriate learning in a short period of time, and gave feedback on their daughters' progress, thereby helping to sustain their continued participation.

'When the girls get late in joining the academic term, I visit her home to enquire why she has not come back to the Ashram. Parents sometimes send the girl back with me on my bike. They have full faith in me'. (Community Outreach Worker)

Although fathers largely determined whether or not their daughters were permitted to join the Ashram, girls were also able to influence decision-making. For example, one student described how, prior to joining the Ashram, she had been out of school for five years, was unable to read Hindi and desperately wanted to re-enter secondary education:

'At first instance my parents refused. They said they are not going to send me for further studies. But I insisted a lot and wept a lot. I did not eat for two days. I said to them, 'if you are not going to send me, I will not eat at all'. Then my father allowed me to come to the Ashram'. (Student)

The community outreach worker and teachers at the Ashram stressed the importance of working with local communities and in understanding how they live and think. As part of the Ashram's work in identifying out-of-school girls, teachers estimated that they might speak to 400 villagers, out of whom 50 might visit the Ashram to find out more about the Pehchaan programme. Some parents expressed fears that girls would be vulnerable to exploitation in a residential setting, but after visiting the Ashram, most fathers were persuaded that it was a safe space that offered a good quality of education.

'The name 'Ashram' can be misleading. There is a fear that girls are exploited and killed. We convince them to come and see the Ashram. As they see girls from their village in the Ashram gaining in confidence and growing well, they phone and say they want to send their daughters too.' (Teacher)

For most students, food and accommodation was provided free of charge, and this provided an added incentive for parents. Equally important, the sequestered nature of girls' lives at the Ashram helped to convince parents of their daughters' physical safety and moral reputation.

'I heard about the Ashram in 2008 when girls from my village started studying there...when I visited, there were women in the team, I liked the atmosphere and that the girls can't leave the school grounds.' (Guardian)

Finally, peer group networks among current and former students had a key role to play in encouraging out-of-school girls to apply for admission to the Ashram.

Holistic approach

Compared with their earlier experience of schooling, girls and teachers interviewed described an holistic approach to education that addressed girls' physical, social, emotional and educational needs.

Student-teacher relationship

Girls highlighted the care and attention they received from teachers in helping them to settle down in the first few days and weeks of living at the Ashram. Teachers strived to provide a family atmosphere where the student-teacher relationship was friendly and affectionate:

'Here the intention is that we bring out the best in children, spend time with them. When we talk to the children, they open up...we talk in their language and we become like friends. We share our personal life with them.' (Teacher)

'They did not make us feel that they are teachers we should be scared of. There was Preeti ma'am who said 'don't call me ma'am because it will widen the gap between student and teacher. You can call me Didi so that I will be teaching you like an elder sister.' (Student)

The care offered by the Ashram extended to medical care, providing medicine and funding hospital treatment when needed, sometimes at considerable cost to the Ashram.

'Just before the English exam of the first batch (cohort), a snake bit a girl. We were very worried. We were praying. We took her to the Hardoi hospital...We could not sleep the whole night. We were worried that she would miss her Board exam and lose one academic year...Fortunately, she appeared for the English exam and cleared the exam.' (Teacher)

Girls also valued the information and advice given by female teachers on the need for self-care and hygiene and in explaining periods and sexual health matters, including birth control.

Promoting social equality

In addition to adjusting to a different quality of student-teacher relationship, all girls interviewed described the initial difficulties they experienced in living with girls from other castes. Girls of higher caste said that at first, they refused to eat or share a dormitory with girls of a lower caste, or to participate in shared chores, such as cleaning lavatories.

'When I came here on the first day, I saw that I have to eat and sleep with scheduled caste girls which I did not like at all. At home, we did not eat anything if it is touched by a scheduled caste person...It took two months to adjust and the biggest reason was untouchability. But when teachers convinced me, I came to know that these things are wrong.' (Student)

Teachers took an active role in addressing caste discrimination and this helped lower caste students to believe that in and outside the classroom, they would be treated as equals.

'I am from a low caste. Other girls refused to talk to me, they would not share food from my home. I told the teacher. The teacher explained to the girls that we are all children and that caste is created by society. Teachers said that 'if we teachers can eat together, why can't you eat together?' This brought a change in attitude among higher caste girls'. (Student)

This underpinning ethos of equality was reflected in girls accounts of teaching practice in which they were encouraged to study and progress regardless of their caste background.

'Teachers in the government school used not to spend so much time on teaching. They didn't talk about caste discrimination. I used to feel so bad but the teacher here takes the initiative to address the issue'. (Student)

In keeping with its community ethos and belief in social equality, teachers highlighted the care they took to include children with disabilities in classroom and social activities.

'Once we took the class to the zoo. We did not want (the disabled child) to miss this outing. I had to help her around in the zoo and missed much of the visit but her care and inclusion were very important'. (Teacher)

Similarly, it was only through getting to know students that teachers were able to identify those who had hearing or sight problems and who therefore needed to sit at the front of the class.

Social and cultural activities

Girls identified other aspects of Ashram life that contrasted with their earlier experiences of school and village life. Play and physical activity were a particular focus for comparison. Whereas students were discouraged from playing outdoors and tended to be restricted to the home, in the Ashram they benefited from a large play area. Almost all students said how much they enjoyed learning how to play volleyball and kabbadi. They also valued opportunities to participate in cultural enrichment activities, such as dance, drama and music. Festivals and trips to historical sites and local cities helped students to appreciate Indian culture and history.

'The Krishna Janmashtmi festival was my best day at the Ashram. On that day, we danced and sang...We made Rangoli and also ate in the open air. We went to see the riverbank and put our feet in the water. That was the best day of my life'. (Student)

Teaching and Learning

Teacher recruitment and qualifications

The Secretary of the Ashram took care to recruit teachers who were qualified to teach and whose attitudes were sympathetic to the ethos and objectives of the Pehchaan programme. In reviewing the qualifications of teachers at the Ashram, all had obtained a Bachelor in Education (BEd) and a majority was educated to Masters level. Most teachers had taught at the Ashram for 2-3 years, with the exception of two teachers who had lived and worked there for 10 and 15 years respectively. All taught the subject they were qualified in apart from one teacher who had an MA in Sociology and a Diploma in Fine Art but taught economics and drawing. In interviews, all teachers expressed strong support for the Ashram's underpinning principles of equality and community as a guide to living and teaching at the Ashram.

Teaching practice

An understanding of education in the broadest sense of the word provided the essential backdrop, and to some extent the pre-condition, for effective teaching practice in the classroom. Teachers reported that the caring and community-oriented ethos of the Ashram helped students to feel comfortable asking questions. In turn, this approach supported engaged, interactive and accelerated learning.

However, a key challenge for teachers was how to address the learning lag in students in a short space of time while also accommodating different learning levels. A professional development programme delivered by IGNUS was instrumental in supporting teachers to reflect on these issues and develop new skills. Teachers identified the use of interactive teaching methods and learning by doing as central elements of their new approach.

'For instance, to teach grammar, we asked students to select verbs in the newspaper and make a sentence, we used role play to teach poetry, we used drama to teach literature and Hindi idioms...We realised that students learn faster and more easily by doing'. (Teacher)

These skills were developed through practice and with the support of more senior teachers in the Ashram. In this respect, teachers developed their own 'community of practice', dedicated to resolving problems and finding new ways to meet the needs of students who had dropped out of school.

Teachers and students also highlighted a number of other factors as contributing to the effectiveness of the Pehchaan programme. First, teachers adopted an approach that promotes students' agency in their own learning.

'We ask them to find their own mistakes. We deliberately make a mistake and then ask students to find the mistake. We encourage girls to reflect. We try to clarify the concept using examples...The role of the teacher is how to make them think and let them struggle and find answers'. (Teacher)

Further, teachers identified group work as an essential means for achieving multiple objectives, including the fostering of peer support generally and between weaker and more advanced students. Group work was also instrumental in enabling girls to develop oral communication skills and confidence in speaking up in the classroom.

Additionally, teachers identified the residential nature of the Pehchaan programme as providing opportunities for extended contact time between pupils and teachers. Compared with 40-minute lessons in government schools, lessons in the Ashram are of two hours duration.

'What can one teach in 40 minutes in a traditional school? There was hardly any time to talk to the students, let alone addressing their questions'. (Teacher)

Living and studying together meant that teachers had time to respond to students' questions and difficulties outside of formal lessons and girls were enabled to support each other.

'Discussion of academic work is, I think, the biggest benefit of living with other girls. For example, many times I have not understood something in the classroom but then I ask the girls and I can learn from them'. (Student)

In terms of assessment, monthly and annual tests were used as an essential means for tracking student progress in reaching age-appropriate learning levels in a short space of time. Tests enabled teachers to identify students in need of additional support and to tailor lesson plans accordingly. Test results were also an important motivating factor for students and reassured parents that their daughters were benefiting from continuing their studies.

'I could not read Hindi. Now I can. In monthly tests I am strongest in Hindi...I feel very proud when teachers show copies of my work to my brother and mother'. (Student)

Finally, students' commitment to learning was another key element in the effectiveness of the Pehchaan programme. Girls expressed a sense of urgency to learn as fast as possible and appreciated the discipline that was instilled by the timetable of a typical day at the Ashram:

'We get up at 4am, brush our teeth, and we study to 5am when there is prayer time. Breakfast is at 8am. School starts at 9am ...until 4pm, with one hour for lunch. There is a game period between 5pm and 6pm. At 6.30pm there are prayers. After prayers, we study and then have dinner at 8pm. We also study after dinner.' (Student)

Researchers observed that a large blackboard was positioned on the wall at the end of the dormitory that was used by students to support learning outside the classroom. Girls were aware that time spent learning in the Ashram would otherwise have been spent on domestic chores or agricultural work in their homes and villages.

'There is competition here, so I study more. I get more time to study as I do not have to do domestic chores. I have made great progress, especially in Science, Hindi and even English.' (Student)

Aspirations and expectations

As students developed confidence in their ability to learn and to progress in their studies, their aspirations for their future and what they were capable of achieving began to change.

'After coming here, I came to understand the real meaning of having a dream. Today, my dream is to become an engineer and to achieve that dream, my teachers have shown me the way.' (Student)

'When we were in the village, we never thought that we could do anything. But when we came here the aspiration to do something arose in me. We saw that lady teachers had come from far off places and were teaching us. This inspired us. We realised we too have the capability to do something'. (Student)

The most common professions that students aspired to were teaching, engineering, medicine, and banking in that order. Two students wanted to get married and have children after leaving the Ashram.

The motivation to fulfill career aspirations was not entirely individualistic. Teachers encouraged girls to view their careers as an opportunity to support their parents later in life and girls expressed a wish to make their parents proud. Those who wanted to teach said that they wanted to teach other girls in similar circumstances who had no access to secondary education in their village communities. The impact of the Ashram might therefore be interpreted as promoting a virtuous circle of service to the community.

To achieve these dreams, students were aware that they would need to continue their education to Class 12 and beyond. However, a number of barriers were identified in this respect. Girls were aware that, although parental attitudes were changing, social norms tended to reinforce the pressure on parents to marry off their adolescent daughters.

Nevertheless, parental attitudes were more nuanced than might be expected. Some parents felt that a larger dowry would be required to find a marriage partner for a more educated or older daughter and that therefore it would be better to marry off their daughter on completion of Class 10. Others felt that a well-educated daughter with good career prospects would make it easy to find a good marriage partner in the future. Some parents thought that an educated daughter could also support her parents financially, and that therefore girls should be supported to finish secondary and higher education.

'There are so many advantages to her completing her studies. If she studies, she will get a good job and she can be our helping hand'. (Father of student who continued her studies after Class 10)

Nevertheless, marriage loomed large as a significant barrier to girls who wanted to complete their secondary education. Some parents and students felt that the education girls receive should be tailored to their future role as wife and mother.

'Why should I ask Mona about her dreams? In our set up, girls do not talk to their father like this. After marriage, every girl's dream is her family'. (Father of girl who left the Ashram after Class 10 Board exam)

'About 50% of the girls have taken Home Science. I have learned cooking and management of the home for when I get married. What will boys do with this subject?' (Student)

In some cases, evidence of commitment and effort helped to influence parental attitudes in favour of supporting their daughter's continued study. In one case, a brother who was head of the household and his wife were determined to support their younger sibling:

'Her dream is to study more and I will support her in fulfilling her dreams. I may not be able to send my children away to be educated but I will leave no stone unturned for Chitra's⁵ studies'. (Student's sister-in-law)

Students, teachers and parents identified the availability of safe and affordable accommodation as a key factor in enabling girls to study to Class 12 and progress to higher education.

'I want to do a BSc and then MBBS....My parents are supportive but they ask where will I stay? Who will help me and guide me? My father will not send me if I am the only one from the village who goes for further studies.'
(Student)

For promising students with supportive parents, the Ashram made arrangements for students to live at the Ashram while studying at the Ashram's or an alternative local Inter-College. Parents are charged a monthly fee of up to INR 1100 but some families found this difficult to afford.

'There has been a great change. She is very good at her studies now. She wants to be an engineer but I don't have the money....When she comes home, she carries her books. She studies here – we don't have to tell her. I wish I had the money to make her an engineer'. (Parent)

⁵ Please note: all names have been changed to protect the identity of the informant.

6. Outcomes

Following the holistic approach to education at the Ashram, perceived and evidenced outcomes were similarly varied.

Subject choice

School records show an increase in the number of girls selecting Maths (as opposed to Home Science) as their subject of choice between cohorts 1 and 3, as follows:

Cohort 1 – 7 students

Cohort 2 – 10 students

Cohort 3 – 24 students

In relation to this change, teachers reflected on their own attitudes, as well as gender bias in the attitudes of parents and students. Teachers found that initially most girls expressed a preference to study Home Science. Teachers began to reassure students that they were capable of studying Maths and, at the same time, initiated career-counselling sessions that highlighted the importance of Maths for career choices.

'I love Maths because I am good at application, not in rote learning. I was not good at Maths in the government primary school but here the Maths teacher is excellent. He uses group work and activities like using pebbles for calculation. He follows up these activities by teaching with the blackboard in the classroom'. (Student)

Teachers also discussed the importance of Maths and Science with parents and claimed that parental attitudes were starting to change.

'In the first batch⁶, we did not counsel much on the importance of Maths and Science. The thinking here in society is 'what will girls do with Maths?' But it is our belief that they can do it and now guardians are also interested in these subjects. If we have more students who take up Science, we will have more teachers of Science in the future'. (Teacher)

Educational attainment

In addition to prizes won in district-level kabbadi, volleyball and dance competitions, results of Class 10 Board examinations show an overall pass rate of 100% for all three cohorts, as follows:

Cohort 3 (2011-2015) - 49 students (48 students were entered for the exam).

Overall pass rate: 100%

Pass rate by subject: 100% (Hindi, English, Maths, Social Science, Home Science, Drawing).

Pass rate in Science: 98% (1 fail).

For comparison, the pass rate in KSPI schools in Hardoi by subject for 2015 is as follows:

English (76%), Maths (68%), Science (75%). The overall pass rate for Class 10 across the Hardoi district was 86% in 2014-2015.

Cohort 2 (2010-2014) – 48 students (46 students were entered for the exam).

Overall pass rate: 100%

Pass rate by subject: 100% (Hindi, English, Maths, Social Science, Home Science)

For comparison, the pass rate in KSPI schools in Hardoi by subject for 2014 is as follows:

English (72%), Maths (62%), Science (68%). The overall pass rate for Class 10 across the Hardoi district was 72% in 2013-2014.

Cohort 1 (2009-2013) – 40 students (All 40 students were entered for the exam).

Overall pass rate: 100%

Pass rate by subject: 100% (Hindi, English, Maths, Science, Social Science)⁷.

Destinations, post-Class 10 Board Examinations

Of 40 students in Cohort 1, 37 enrolled at an Inter-College in Hardoi district. 3 discontinued their studies due to marriage.

Of 48 students in Cohort 2, 40 students enrolled at an Inter-College or other higher secondary school. 2 discontinued their studies due to illness, 3 due to marriage and 3 due to family problems (e.g. bereavement).

⁷ 'Batch' refers to the first cohort of students on the Pehchaan programme.

⁸ NB: Data on pass rates for KSPI schools or district-wide data for 2013 is not available

Of 48 students in Cohort 3 who left the Ashram in March 2015, all continued to higher secondary education. Of these, 41 enrolled at an Inter College in the district and 7 enrolled at a Senior Secondary Residential School funded by the Ministry of Social Welfare, Government of India.

Social impact

The way in which the Ashram challenged caste discrimination among girls was reported as having a significant impact on parental attitudes and behavior. Girls from a higher caste said that their parents had gradually become more willing to interact with families from lower castes in their village.

'When I went home, my parents scolded me a lot for eating with lower caste girls. But after convincing them for a few days, they also understood this and now my mother does not say anything. Now she invites them to sit in my house and she gives them food to eat'. (Student)

'I told my family about my experience in the Ashram. My father has changed. He treats lower caste labourers well. If anyone from a lower caste visits us at home, my family does not discriminate'. (Student)

Similarly, life at the Ashram demonstrated to girls from a lower caste that girls from different caste backgrounds could live together and this experience, in turn, planted a seed of optimism among their parents:

'We are from the lowest caste but I have shared my experience of living with girls from different castes in the Ashram, and I can see that there is a change in my mother'. (Student)

Only one student said that her parents' attitudes to caste had not changed. However, this did not deter her from visiting the homes of families from a lower caste in her village.

Social skills

Compared with visits to other government schools in the vicinity of the Ashram, researchers who participated in this evaluation were struck by the confidence of students in giving voice to their experiences and opinions. This perception was echoed in students' accounts of their own progress:

'I have grown so much...Living in the Ashram has increased my confidence. I can talk to others. I have learned how to converse. I can now talk to my grandfather and father'. (Student)

Students also thought that life at the Ashram had made them more self-reliant and 'able to stand on our own two feet'. Staff cited student involvement in managing the upkeep of the Ashram and the kitchen as supporting the development of management skills. Students and teachers developed a plan for each year, and identified cleaning and other rotas for maintaining the building. This latter task, in particular, proved a flash point for caste conflict and an opportunity for changing hearts and minds.

Health

The Secretary to the Ashram noted that several girls were undernourished when they first joined the Ashram. Girls enjoyed the vegetarian diet offered. Some girls mentioned that, at first, they enjoyed fruit and milk but that these foods were no longer provided. Other girls also complained that portion sizes were often inadequate and that the quality of the food had decreased over the past year. The Programme Co-ordinator confirmed that the budget for food had to be reduced recently, owing to decreases in funding. Nevertheless, girls reported that they were more aware of the importance of diet and exercise, and most believed that their health had improved.

'I think I am healthier as I play here. I know about nutritious food'. (Student)

One student who had left the Ashram after passing her Class 10 Board exams to get married, reported that the information she had received on sexual health and birth control had helped her to delay having children so that she and her husband might continue their education.

Social cost of early drop-out

Girls reported that friends in their village who had also dropped out of education post-primary school were now married, and that some had children. Dropping out of school early was identified as creating a negative cycle of under-achievement across generations.

'If the mother is not educated, they will not encourage their children to study. They will not be able to guide their children. My married friends say that they cannot go anywhere and their life is limited to cooking and looking after their homes and babies'. (Student)

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Staff commented that girls who drop out of school were also more likely to view harassment and violence as a natural part of life and were less likely to question discrimination and inequality. Without knowledge of birth control, such girls were also identified as unable to control the spacing of children, and that this was likely to have a negative impact on the quality of life and economic well-being of parents and children.

7. Recommendations

During interviews, informants identified the following recommendations to improve the Pehchaan programme.

Recommendations from students

- Improve the teaching of English
- Provide training in the use of computers
- Improve the variety and quality of food provided
- Upgrade dormitory facilities to reduce overcrowding

Recommendations from staff

- Extend the use of solar lights
- Improve playground facilities
- Improve heating during winter months
- Develop short vocational courses for students
- Recruit volunteer teachers to teach English and other subjects
- Develop a profile on social media, including Facebook, to recruit volunteers and improve fundraising capacity
- Improve advocacy efforts for out-of-school education programmes for girls
- Establish a local higher education college to provide degree-level programmes

Recommendations from parents

- Make scholarships available for out-of-school girls to continue their studies to Class 12 and higher education
- Provide hostel accommodation for girls to enable them to complete their secondary and higher education

8. Implications for research and practice

Findings are relevant to other research commissioned by the Kusuma Trust (e.g the study conducted by ASER/Pratham on understanding access to secondary education) by identifying causes of drop-out from primary school, as well as barriers and facilitators to children's re-integration into mainstream secondary education.

The evaluation is also relevant to the work of the Secondary School Readiness Programme delivered by the Kusuma Foundation in Hardoi and Sambalpur in terms of programme content and delivery, the professional development needs of teachers, the importance of regular monitoring of teacher and student progress, and the benefits of an holistic education programme.

Findings also highlight the importance of facilitating parental and community engagement in students' primary and secondary education, and provide a model for informing the work of School Management and Development Committees.

Kusuma Trust UK

5th Floor | 55 New Oxford Street | London WC1A 1BS
T: +44 (0)20 7420 0650 | www.kusumatrust.org