School Leader says...

One of our major struggles last year had been getting a space we can call it our own. After a full year of running around at Shikshan Mandal, chasing education officers to writing emails to the PMC commissioner, I have come to realize that things happen when we sit, talk, listen and work with the people at the ground level, irrespective of any amount of differences. We started this year with classrooms of our own, a staffroom of our own, and a huge achievement for SGM’s second year of operations.

As we stepped into our second year with our new space, we have a new team of teachers, a new batch of 107 VIII graders (50% of them had no intervention before), and a whole new set of challenges yet again. What has remain constant is the spirit to fight has gotten stronger and the purpose deeper.

My focus this year has shifted to working with my people, creating a strong workforce of dynamic teachers, exploring teaching not as a skill but as an art and our kids learning better from the best. This year we hope to impact more students.
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This year we welcomed 107 VIII graders into our school, 55 of them had no TFI intervention before. We are facing a massive learning gap again. At the beginning of the year we conducted Teach For India’s Beginning of the Year exams to understand where our students are at an VIII grade level. We mapped the skills they require to master to read, comprehend and write at an VIII grade level and made an average growth of 13% by the Mid Year.
This year we went from catering to 145 students to 232 students, which meant more talent stepping in, more opportunities to be created. We are exploring new territories this year, networking with different schools in the city, introducing new sports, learning and winning them, passing the chalk to our students and forming a Student Council.

- **Formation of Student Council**: Early this academic year, we held student elections to elect our first ever Student Council Body. The candidates went through a week long election process, from filing their candidacy, campaigning, speeches, and student body voting to the oath ceremony.
- **Udaan:** The 6 secondary schools in Pune came together to create opportunities for our students through an annual fest, Udaan, to be held 4 times a year. SGM walked away with the first position in Creative Writing and the first place in Kho Kho.

- **Inter School Debate Competition:** Dastur Girls’ High School invited us to participate in their Annual Inter School Debate Competition. Our students competed with 12 of the best schools in Pune and were outstanding in the Rebuttal Round.
• **Model United Nation:** Just like every year, we started this year by participating in Cogito Minds MUN 2016. Our delegates discussed money laundering and children rights in conflict zones. One of the delegates received a Verbal Mention in the Human Rights Committee.

• **Visit to NDA:** We took our Grade X students for a visit to the NDA campus and witness what it takes to be in the defense. This also pushed a few students to think around defense as a future prospect.
• **Mentorships & Clubs**: Our Mentorship sessions are running strong with our 10th graders. These sessions are mostly focused around support in making board examinations a smoother process for them, what post 10th grade, dealing with disappointments and failures ahead as they step outside the school and at the same time how to handle success smartly.

We run 5 clubs with our 8th graders: Music, Street Play, Art & Craft, Public Speaking and Creative Writing
Teacher Development

- Building a team and feeling as a part of a bigger movement

The team of teachers, Admin, ASL & SL meets as a whole group for the first 10 minutes of the day every single day going through our priorities and how can they better it today. We close the day, meeting as a whole group for 10 minutes again, updating on the same priorities, highlights and what needs to be worked upon tomorrow. These small huddles have helped the team get on the same page in terms of school expectations.

Friday’s school team meeting is more focused on celebrating the week that went by and being grateful to each other.
• Professional Development

As a team we explore outside our classroom every Friday for an hour and try contextualizing the learning back to our classrooms. Last month, we did a book called “One Minute Manager” together in our Friday School Team Meetings. Teachers took away setting individual goals with their students together, praising when these goals are met and holding them accountable when not met.

We also bring all the 4 iTeach Schools to meet by the end of each month for collective learning and sharing. We hosted our first iTeach Stepback at Chinmaya Vibhooti Ashram a month back, stepping back and reflecting how far we have come as teachers, as a team and as an organization.
Over the past six months I learned the ups and downs, the successes and failures, the jobs and duties and the joys and frustrations that define a teacher, and I still continue to do so with each passing day at iTeach Schools. As a first time teacher, things were not easy as this is not a very conventional sort of a school, but with the constant support, feedback, ideas of my Principal, made a lot of difference in the way I plan my lessons. She is always an example of an excellent teacher. I continue to mold myself based on the requirements of my students for better learning.

Another thing that was quite helpful was the learning from the observations of other teachers’ lessons. Not to forget the bi-monthly coaching sessions with my Program Manager and Fellow Advisor to train me being a better teacher and making the training so much fun and enjoyable each time. I also had the persistent support of my colleagues at all times making the work space so warm and fun loving. Lastly, my lovely students, who are so very dear to me, for they aren’t the only ones who are learning, it’s us teachers too. I have come to realize that teaching is an art and learning this art can never really end.
We started off the year with them knowing their children better, the struggles they face as a student, the peer pressure as a teenager with the parents. The parents then went on to define and present what their role is in their child’s education and future. Parents are our major stakeholder; we get them together after every unit to reflect with their students. Parent and the child discuss the reasons behind the data, and pens down clear actionable steps to keep improving their performance.
“Wait for the challenges, Make sure you have them!!”

There was two feet of rain on the ground with another foot expected to fall by the end of the day. We could hardly believe our eyes. Our little city which barely get 6 inches of rain all reason, was in the middle of a heavy downpour. As the evening started approaching, it was downpour. Somebody yelled with a scratchy voice.

Our city has never faced any disastrous nature calamities and today, suddenly there was a magnificent flood. The flood was so huge that it carelessly took away the innocent ones along with it. All of them were incredibly lost in the shock that they received. They were literally numbed and immobilize. Few of them were calling for the help but nobody received any because everyone was busy or actually tensed about their own lost families. Their hands were shaking like the vibrates of the phone. They were stitched, they were so lost and depressed as if somebody theft their heart and kidneys.

The whole city, our city was facing a flood for the time ever. Every single human being present there was panicked. Animals hold their tails to comfort themselves. The next morning, the level of water in the flood increased. People felt that they are on journey to their death. People were horrified.

Soon it was a shiny evening. Our city in fact our destroyed city became better. Few families fortunately met their lost ones. They were extremely glad to have them, the lost ones. They were extremely glad to have them, the lost ones, back to them safely. Eventually and luckily the city became more better. The flood did not grab anyone’s precious gift ‘life’. Everyone in the city was safe and secure.
It was a third day, our city took its original nature. There was lush green grass on the foot of hill. Black clouds were passing by and the clear blue sky was transitioned above our city. They would clearly see dew drops on pleasant leaves. Children’s were running here and there enjoying the nature.

It was slightly raining when I entered in to the beautiful city. Everything was looking marvelous to me. One major thing that hurt me was that the flood separates the families. Few of them are still away from their families. I overcame that pain and moved on by praying for the lost ones to the god.

“God please help the lost ones,
They might be distressed,
Please help them, for they are stressed,
Give them the strength so that they survive,
Let them know that you are the one who gifted
Them a new life, a precious gift of Life.
God please help the lost ones for they are
Waiting for your Help.”

The next amazing and glorious morning. Sangla Valley, my town. Birds were chirping, few drops smoothly falling on my eyes and the delicate rays of the massive sun forced me to wake up and brought me to the heaven. It seemed my town is a better place to live in. The last three days felt like I was on rendezvous.

We have our anthem of true love, true compassion and true friendship. It chants,
“Let’s have a friendship that is cordial,
We’ll just imagine, forget about real.
Let’s show the world who we are,
Rise up forever and become the superstar.
Let’s keep moving further despite the fence
Be brave and ignore the tense.
Let’s not break each other’s trust in to smithereens,
And reminisce our memorable scenes,
Memorable scenes, ,memorable scenes.

We all chant this anthem, we all believe that one day every part of this ecosystem will inculcate the values of compassion, love, respect and humanity in them. So this is how my great “Sangla Valley”. Everybody in town paved the downpour, the flood but despite these disastrous calamities, everyone in my town nosed up to create the world a better place to live in.

Do you know? History of the world started by cooperation. The same way my people in the valley work together in unity, no matter what the task is. They know that the world is not so safe place to be in neither to trust in.

Don’t be afraid of the changes, be like us strong, brave and extremely enthusiastic.

The downpour just changes the image or the geography of Sangla but the hearts and the mindset of the people remained the same. It left an indelible mark on everyone’s mind.