

From Education Group

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# The Headmaster Stroke

**Govt School Teachers Work To Eliminate The Line Dividing Government Schools And Expensive Private Schools**

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Despite external appearances, it is not easy being a government school teacher. Over the last few years, many have been struggling for regular pay and salaries across Punjab. In the absence of assured income, they have been hard pressed to maintain their families. Still, there are others who have not lost track of a larger purpose — students' welfare.

These teachers have come together to overhaul infrastructure in as many as 1,700 schools. Efforts are on to take the number to 4,500.

Principals, head teachers and teachers are spearheading the change with the help of philanthropists.

Here are a few stories of faith and transformation.

**Primary school teacher makes NHA1 shift toll plaza**

The grit, tenacity and commitment of a government primary school teacher forced National Highways Authority of India to change its acquisition plan on Ludhiana-Chandigarh national highway, which is still being built.

**SETTING AN EXAMPLE**

Secretary education, Krishan Kumar gets pictures from the pathbreaking schools. Every day, he picks the picture of one school and forwards it on WhatsApp groups of the education department. This motivates the others and generates healthy competition. The schools are promoting extra-curricular activities and helping students speak English.

**TAKING THE LEAD**

As school infrastructure is improved, teachers feel more motivated. They share ideas and help each other even while competing. Sometimes, we spend from our own pockets as bonding with schools and children has improved," says Ashok Bagra, principal, Government Senior Secondary School, Jambher Khans near Jalandhar. He has now been asked to guide other schools in the district.

For 11 years, Sanjeev Kumar, a teacher at Government Primary School, Ghurali village near Samrala in district Ludhiana, worked to construct a new school building with the help of philanthropists from the village.

In July a team of NHA1 officials told him to vacate the school in two months.

"The NHA1 planned to build a toll plaza here. They needed to widen the road for this and the school building was in the way. Over the past decade, we spent around Rs 20 lakh to construct the new building. When I told village residents, they were shattered," says Sanjeev Kumar.

Kumar first approached the district education officer and sent a message



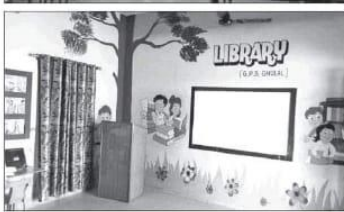
**STANDING ITS GROUND:** The school building of Government Primary School, Ghurali, escaped acquisition in the nick of time. It had been upgraded and renovated for 11 years by a dedicated teacher and residents



**Education dept steps in**

It is remarkable that despite their tough circumstances, government school teachers are trying to bring about a qualitative change in their institutions.

"I learnt that a few teachers in the state improved their schools on their own, because of which more students got enrolled. In February, we called a meeting of such teachers. As they spoke about their experiences, we thought the idea was worth replicating across the state and called on principals and teachers to volunteer," says Krishan Kumar.



The officer pursued returns in the education department during his previous stint as director general, school education for almost three years.

"By July, we had 425 schools with buildings turned into learning aids, improved infrastructure, amenities and sports facilities. The idea was to improve students' learning experience. We fixed the ambitious target of "Mission 4.250" by the beginning of the next academic session and asked these 425 teachers to motivate their friends and relatives in 10 other schools. Already, 1,700 schools have accomplished the task," he says.

According to the secretary, education, these teachers and communities are the biggest stakeholders in improving educational standards.

"Social accountability is much more result oriented than departmental accountability," he said.

Incentives offered to teachers include transfer of choice, promotion and good ACR. "All these benefits are non-monetary and the huge improvement in schools is written in an extra burden on the state exchequer," Kumar adds.

to secretary education Krishan Kumar. "He called me immediately. I went with a few village residents who have been helping us. As we sat there, he sent a letter to the Ludhiana deputy commissioner, asking him to do everything possible to save the school," Sanjeev recalls.

Ludhiana DC Pardeep Agarwal sent SDM, Samrala and other officials to the school. The SDM called NHA1 officials to the school. I heard the SDM telling NHA1 officials that the school had to be saved at any cost and NHA1 officials were asked to shift the toll

plaza," he says.

Sanjeev pursued the issue till NHA1 issued a fresh notification in October saying that the toll plaza would be shifted.

It is an incident secretary education Krishan Kumar will not forget anytime soon. "I could see his desperation and determination to save the school. Village residents were also committed to the cause. Such teachers deserve complete support. The Ludhiana deputy commissioner also took great interest in the endeavour and we are all happy with the result," he says.



**LITTLE ONES:** KG classes in Govt Primary School, Jhans started 2 years ago

**Govt primary school, Jhans, Hoshiarpur**

The school had just 17 students when Narinder Arora and his wife Manjit Kaur, both KTT teachers, joined in 2006. Now, there are 224 students. In an act that inspired trust, the couple got their daughter enrolled in the same school.

"There was nothing going for the small school but we decided to do everything possible to set things right. Apart from enrolling my daughter here, we motivated a few friends and fellow teachers to enroll their children as well. We assured them that their children's education or overall development would not suffer. Rather, we said they would see a marked improvement. My son is a UKG student here," said Narinder.

The teachers' dedication showed in exam results and students' performance in co-curricular activities.

"Soon, educated families also started sending their children to the school. We also had our own uniform," says Narinder Arora.

With this, village residents started pooling money for infrastructure upgrade. "Philanthropists opened their hearts and pockets to us. Jalandhar-based Sarpal Singh Malraani constructed two rooms. Jagjeet Singh

Joeria and his family in the village opened their house for us to accommodate 100 students as the school did not have enough space," Arora said, estimating that people spent around Rs 15 lakh to Rs 20 lakh on the school.

Two years back, they started kindergarten classes on the lines of private schools. "Now, we get children in nursery and have around 125 kids in kindergarten," he says. In June, Arora was promoted as master in a secondary school.

"It was very difficult for me to leave the school and children. Residents literally pleaded with me to stay. When a village elder asked me to stay in a chokod wala, I decided to decline the promotion. After this, village residents provided 56 maras of land to the school and raised a boundary wall. Now, we have enough space," he says, adding that they need the education department to provide more teachers as the strength of students is increasing.

"NRIs and other villagers have helped to improve the school. Now, the entire village is involved. People from other villages also come to get their children enrolled here. We have transferred 56 maras of land to the school. If the number increases, we will provide an acre and a half more of Punjab land to the school," says Jagjeet Singh.

**Government Primary School, Nathwal**

The Mathematics room in the school is its latest addition. The walls of the verandah have pictures of donors and those of well turned out students on a board with the title, *AJ De Sohne Bache* (the smart children of today).

"We write names of five children on this board every day to inspire the children to remain clean," says teacher Almer Singh who started the transformation in 2007.

"When I joined the school, two snakes were found in the storeroom," he recalls. It is now an office.

Outer walls and walls inside the classrooms have paintings, poems and messages painted on them. "We want to attract students. Coming to school should be a pleasant experience for them," he says. It has worked with the children. "Janti, a Class II student sustained an injury on her



**LIFE IN COLOUR:** Students are encouraged to be well turned out here finger last year. But she came to school the next day," Almer says. According to him, NRIs and philanthropists from outside the village pitched in and around Rs 22 lakh has been spent so far.

"Apart from improving the amenities, I have been focusing on the core issue — improving learning outcomes among students," he adds. The school has a sprawling park and playground. Students have mid-day meals on tables with granite tops.



**Burka Kalan (Jalandhar)**

The village has two government primary schools — one for girls and one for boys. In ambience and facilities, these schools could give private schools a run for their money.

Walls of both government primary schools have been turned into learning aids for children. They also have libraries and reading rooms. The girls' school also has an LCD screen to screen educational programmes.

"When I joined on July 1, 2006, the school building was in bad shape, with doors and windows missing. There were around 80



**IN THE SUNSHINE:** The healthy competition between the girls' and boys' school leads to a constant effort to improve educational standards



The Youth Football Club of Burka Kalan, which is working to promote football in the area, helped

us procure desks at a cost of Rs 50,000," says school teacher Sanjit Kumar, the man behind the transformation.

This was just the beginning. Over the years, infrastructure, education and sports in the school were upgraded.

"Philanthropists spent Rs 19 lakh on the school. With the way things have come up, more donors are volunteering," he says.

At Government Primary School for Girls, Rupa Ram, who was promoted as centre head teacher and shifted to the boys' school a few days back, brought about the transformation.

"My daughter studies in this school. After I joined here in 2015, we managed to mobilize resources

and undertake works worth around Rs 22 lakh," he says.

The school has its own logo and calendar. Numbers and letters are painted on the walls and a park based on the theme of mathematics is being constructed. Sanjit and I are competing with each other to improve our schools," smiles Rupa Ram.

Both schools have well-furnished and neat kitchens to cook mid-day meals.

The boys' school is in stark contrast with the street. The backyard of the adjoining senior secondary school is also overrun with weeds like a dark reminder of how things used to be and what could happen if these efforts are not sustained.