

Private Schools for the Poor:

Visit to schools empanelled in School Vouchers for Girls pilot

Every child in India deserves the right to education of choice! Centre for Civil Society's (CCS) School Choice Campaign (SCC) launched the School Vouchers for Girls [project](#) in 2007. As a prelude to the third annual **School Choice National Conference**, 16 delegates visited two schools in Seelampur, North Delhi on 20 December 2011 to interact with principals, parents and students. The first was Naveen Public School (Head Teacher: Bhagwati Prasad), which caters to approximately 260 students from classes 1-5, with a staff of 12 teachers and charges monthly fees between Rs 80 - 150. The second was Aryan Public School (Head Teacher: Daya Rawal), with approximately 300 students and over 10 teachers (including 2 Teach For India (TFI) Fellows) teaches children from classes 1-8 and charges monthly fees between Rs 120 - 450.

The satellite program included visits to the school facilities, and had an opportunity to speak to the parents and students at each school. They spoke about the improvement their children had made since their shift to private schools: A mother of four with three daughters and a son (the eldest girl with a scholarship from SCC), spoke of her desire to admit all her children into private school; but with the family earning barely enough money to make ends meet, could not afford to. She was adamant to do whatever it took to avoid moving her daughter back to a government school after the voucher expired.

Many of the parents were themselves illiterate, and worked as unskilled labourers, yet were keen to give their children a platform for a better future. They felt that the lack of effort from [government school](#) teachers (high levels of teacher absence, lack of feedback) left their children disillusioned with school. At the private schools, not only did the teachers pay attention to teaching, but monitoring systems (class visits, video surveillance) were also put into place to enforce other important aspects such as student discipline.

At the second school, two [TFI](#) fellows had been teaching for the past six months. The enthusiasm and energy which they brought to their classes was palpable, and the students appeared engaged in their activities. During a short discussion with them, we discovered the key to their success was their focus on conceptual, rather than mechanical learning. Although they faced some initial resistance from parents and staff, the effectiveness of their methods was soon recognised, allowing their students to learn in a holistic manner that they enjoyed and was effective. Teacher training programs to improve quality of education, a theme which came up several times during the following days' conference, could do worse than to mimic some of the methods adopted by TFI.

Keeping in mind the benefit these schools bring to their communities, it beggars belief that they may have to close if they fail to meet all the regulations listed under the [RTE](#) Act. These schools currently do not have the support of the government through infrastructure grants and qualified teachers; but they do have the support of the very parents whose children attend them. With studies emphasising the benefits of [private schools](#) and [PPPs](#) in education, and the need for greater monitoring of [teacher performance](#) in government schools, there is hope that more voucher programs are adopted to allow children the right to education of choice!



TFI Fellow teaching Class II at Aryan Public School (Notice the colour scheme in the classroom; this was a personal initiative of the fellows)



Discussion with the headmaster (left) and parents at Naveen Public School