

# Free Schools India

## The School and the area

Free Schools India is a small organisation dedicated to the provision of high quality education for girls, in an environment of complete safety. The 345 girls studying this year at our school in Chakarsi Village are learning well: in a state of 200 million people, this year 4 out of 17 girls scored so highly on their senior secondary (high school) examinations that they were in the top 1% in the state, and are now receiving government scholarships to study sciences at university. The appeal of our school is clear and strong: girls have been travelling from surrounding villages as far away as 12 kilometres (about 8 miles) to attend this school, in a social context where parents are often unwilling to let girls travel beyond their own village.

Nearly all of our teachers are women, and all have university degrees, while three-quarters are fully qualified in teaching. They all have respect for the children that they are educating – a requirement for employment at our school – and work hard to make sure that children are learning. They are actively engaged in every lesson, making sure that children grasp the subject matter and giving extra help where it is needed. Discipline is compassionate and reasoned, with no corporal punishment allowed.

Our girls receive physical education and get the chance to develop their artistic side through art and music classes, and through taking part in drama and dance which they perform in the annual school festival for the school community. The girls enjoy this side of school life so much, that they are keen to sing, dance, recite poetry and draw pictures at every available opportunity! We have also been able to add IT classes to the curriculum, thanks to our newly-equipped computer room. We do our best to balance the demands of a rigorous and ambitious national curriculum and parents' desire for as much academic learning as possible on the one hand, with our desire to encourage girls to develop their artistic and sporting sides, allowing the time and space for each girl to develop to their full potential in all areas.

We provide pre-primary (or kindergarten) education to prepare children for the start of their primary schooling (2 class levels for ages 4-5/6); 5 primary school grades (for ages 6-10/11); 3 upper-primary classes (for ages 11-13/14); and two lower-secondary classes (for ages 14-15/16).

## Our school's development over time

We originally started our school with two kindergarten classes and 4 primary classes, and have expanded to the 12 classes that we currently have now. To accommodate this expansion, our school building has had to develop too:

The first phase of construction took place over 2003-2004. The main school building of 8 classrooms, principal's office and staff room were built. We also built a separate high quality toilet block with flush toilets and running water, and a boundary wall around the school grounds for security reasons. We also needed to attract teachers from outside of the area so we built a teachers' housing block with four rooms, all with en-suite bathroom facilities, built-in furniture and covered and outside verandas. At this stage of building we opened the school on 4th July 2004.

Over 2005-2006 we built three additional classrooms, and a fifth (larger) bedroom was built at the teacher's housing block.

In 2009-2010 the library/computer room and new entrance porch were built, finishing the front of the school (while the library/ computer room could only be used as a classroom until funds were found to equip it in 2013).

In 2010-2011 two science laboratories and a store room were built upstairs at the back of the main school building (these are currently waiting to be equipped and are currently used as music and art rooms – the building of these rooms was a legal requirement of the government for us to gain permission to operate at the lower-secondary level).

2011-2012 saw the final phase of construction which was necessary to meet government requirements: three classrooms, and an additional laboratory. We also built a small guard's room at the front gate with a toilet for the few male members of staff. In addition, the computer room was also fitted out with computer desks and built-in shelving to allow for books – which will eventually make it a real, functional library.

In May-June of 2013, the computer room was equipped with 11 desk-top computers. These are currently run off a generator, but we plan to install a solar power system in the future. At this time we were able to install a solar power system at the teachers accommodation block, with battery back-up so that resident teachers and pupils can have power and fans working at any time they need them.

*Updated October 2013*