

THE HINDU DOWNTOWN

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School that is a boon to the downtrodden

Ganapathy National Middle School, Saidapet, has been providing free education for the poor since 1929.

While education is becoming a major commercial activity, here is an educational institution in the city that charges no fee from the students. The 81 year old school in Saidapet is committed to eradicate illiteracy of the downtrodden, with the support of the Government of Tamil Nadu.

Ganapathy National Middle School has been providing free education for the poor children from backward community, since 1929. The school has up to standard VIII, with strength of 420 students and 13 teachers. The medium of instruction is Tamil. Most of the students are first generation learners and their parents are generally poor weavers, scavengers and daily wagers from different slums in the locality.

The school is an aided institution and the salary of the teachers and some portion of the expenditure are met by the State Government, whereas the maintenance and infrastructure are managed by the school. In addition to free education, the students get the benefit of the nutritious noon meal programmes. "Teachers also spare a part of their salary for the school," says Krishna Kumar, senior committee member of Ganapathy National Middle School foundation.

The Government gives free books and one set of free uniform for the students. The other set is given by the school.

"We want to give them uniforms in a colour other than blue and white, as some of the students are reluctant to reveal themselves to be



QUALITY EDUCATION: R. Vasantha interacting with the children of the school.

PHOTO: S.VELANKANNI RAJ

studying in government school," says Mr. Krishna Kumar.

People behind the school

The school was started by a freedom fighter G. Rathinam Pillai. The credit for keeping the good work alive goes to T. Srinivasan, manager and correspondent and his wife R. Vasantha, retired headmistress and recipient of best teacher award. Vasantha says, "We want to take education to the economically and socially backward. They should not be deprived of education." With the funds from donors, they are making facilities for the children, she says. A decade ago, the management replaced

the thatched roof with asbestos sheet, made the gates bigger and modified the staircase, complying with the school building rules of the Tamil Nadu Government. With the help of a major donor, the school is being extended with additional classrooms and kitchen.

The school is mainly functioning with the funds from the donors and philanthropists who sponsor uniforms, plates for noon meal, infrastructure and other maintenance. "But we don't compromise on the quality," says T. Charumathy, headmistress of the school. "Systems of Sarva Shiksha Ashiyon such as Active

Learning Methods are implemented strictly," she adds. Apart from regular classes, pre-vocational instruction, special classes for slow learners, sloka classes and computer education are provided.

There had not been many dropouts in the school. "When a student takes leave for a long period without intimation, the teachers visit their home, talk to their parents and bring them back," says Ms. Charumathy. "We ensure that learning is interesting through practical oriented classes and the teachers act only as facilitator," she adds. The students are given regular lectures by representatives from the Tirumala Tiru-

patti Devasthanam Temple. Competitions are also conducted to hone their other skills. "Many of the alumni of the school are in high positions in different fields," she adds proudly.

The school also has a Parent Welfare Association. "We offer gifts to parents to make them come to school for parents teachers meeting and other celebrations in the school," says Mr. Krishna Kumar. Ganapathy National Middle School Foundation, established to support the school, has tax exemption under Sec 80 (G).

R. KEERTHANA

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