

# Field Visit Summary Report



*Figure 1: One of our BONN sponsored student, Rashmi, Class – II, St. Joseph School, Ithari.*

**St. Joseph School, Ithari**

**Buxar, Bihar**

**Year: 2017 - 18**

## **Overview of the Bosco Delhi BONN Sponsorship program and task**

The field visit was a part of an annual visit conducted by Bosco Delhi at Don Bosco Provincial House, Jamia Nagar, Okhla, New Delhi along with BONN Office, Germany. The purpose of the visit was to develop an overall research and analytic design that will lead to specific findings and recommendations for a web interface our team has been working on to improve communications between the benefactor and the beneficiary. The findings and recommendations were developed through the vetting of a variety of methodologies for assessing and evaluating the beneficiary's progress and the role school plays in the process.

### **Objectives of field visit**

In support of the overall project objectives, the field visits were intended to serve the following objectives:

1. Evaluate that the school maintains the standards as per the needs of the students and the requirements enlisted by Bosco Delhi.
2. One to One interaction with each student to have a better understanding of the child's experience in the campus and to track the possible changes brought about in an individual through the sponsorship program.
3. To evaluate each student's academic progress, health and personality development through interactive sessions with the students, teacher in charge and program coordinator and understand their standard of living and lifestyle.
4. To understand the impact of sponsorship program on the students, at large.

### **Site of field visit – Ithari, Buxar.**

Buxar district is one of the thirty-eight districts of Bihar with headquarters at Buxar City with a population of roughly 1,706,352. It shares a border with Uttar Pradesh and is located on the banks of the Ganges River. Buxar district has Bihar's first open prison in Buxar city. It also has a central jail which holds an important place in the country as the hanging rope is only made there by the prisoners of the central jail and exported throughout the country. The famous battle of Buxar and battle of Chausa were fought in this district.



## Our School in Ithari – St Joseph School



*Figure 2: St Joseph School, Building, Front view from the main gate.*

The school is located very close to the national highway from Buxar to Ithari. It is in the middle of a densely populated village. Major populations of our students come from this vicinity. Everyday morning the Principal of the school Fr. Rajesh stands near the gate, interacting with the students and welcoming them into the school. As the bell rings approximately four hundred students fall in line for the morning assembly and prayer after which they go back to their classes to start their day.



*Figure 3: Fr. Rajesh practicing past perfect tense with the students.*

Although the medium of learning and the language to converse with each other is Hindi, It's fascinating to see that all the teachers encourage the students to speak in English. The principal himself takes a special initiative to inculcate English speaking within the campus. As soon the bell rings and the students assemble to go back home, he practices one exercise of grammar with them. This was an indeed a clever idea as the children assemble from each class the others who



are already in line are practicing tenses with their principal. As an exercise he calls one or more students from each class and allows them to speak on the podium for a couple of minutes. This drill removes stage fear from the child and allows the child to be confident and fluent for any of his or her future endeavors on the stage.



Another enriching sight was to witness all the bright and young smiling faces, smartly dressed with ironed shirts, neat sweater, their hair oiled and smartly kept and their shoes shining black. This was indeed an achievement for us because these students come from various sectors and background and cleanliness, proper hygiene or wearing shoes to school for that matter is not really a priority for some of the parents. But over the years we noticed that along basic education the children have a special focus towards their school dress and hygiene and somehow the management and the students together have been able to convey the same to the parents. These are signs of a better tomorrow.



## Highlight of Events

### Day 1

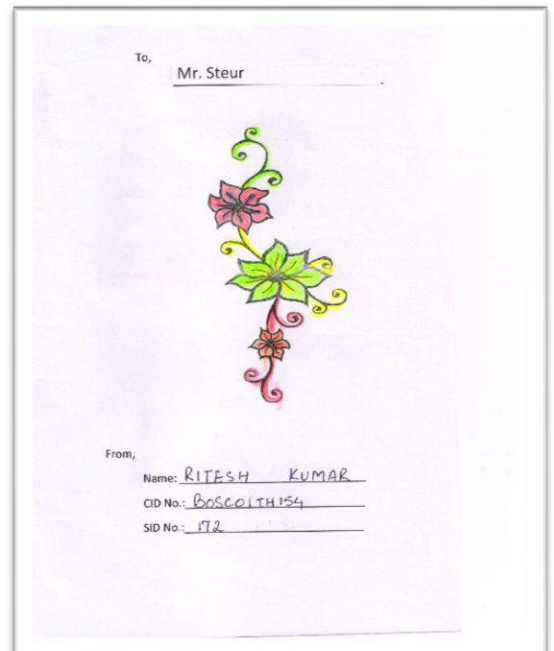
After a bumpy ride of 45 minutes from the Buxar railway station, blazing through the cold winds of a chilly Tuesday morning in the month of February we managed to reach St Joseph School. Ithari. We were welcomed by the Program Incharge Fr. Bijoy Parackle who gave us a brief tour of the school. After a quick tea break our team sat down with the Principal of the School Fr. Rajesh, Br. Justin, the Manager and Fr. Bijoy to discuss the agenda for the following days. After a successful discussion with the school management we visited the students in their classrooms and had group discussions about their studies, hobbies and lifestyle.



### Day 2 and 3

The second day we started off early as we had planned one to one interaction session with students. We had had arranged printed cards for all the students. The idea was to take them outside their classrooms and conduct a small activity where the students were expected to color the cards and write anything they wanted to share with their sponsors while on the other hand we utilized that time to interact with each student and get to know them. We used a survey form to record all the student response. Through this exercise we tried to understand the child's family background, their state of mind, their wants and wishes etc.

We spent our evenings to visit the nearby villages. Some of the students were kind enough to stay back after school, just so that they could accompany us back home and introduce us to their parents. It was a rather an enriching experience to see how welcoming the parents were.



Each house we visited they offered us refreshments and some invited us to stay back for dinner. It was a rather emotional experience to witness that most of them were living from hand to mouth only to satisfy their immediate needs. Parents send their children to school and leave their house early morning in search of job just so that they could return home with food. The



best feeling was that they were contented with what they had. They extended their heartfelt gratitude for all the help they received from us and promised to keep us in their prayers.

#### Day 4

This was our last day in the village. We spent most of our time recording memories through photographs and video recordings. We got the opportunity to interact with a group of students from Class IV and V, who also happened to be our first batch to be sponsored through the Bonn sponsorship program. We assembled in the computer lab and each student came up and shared their experience in school, their hobbies and passion. We were absolutely stunned to witness how beautifully each child spoke. They were filled with grace and their speech was full of enthusiasm and zeal.



We noticed that there was an increase in number of students dropping out of school compared to the last year. This was an alarming situation for us and therefore we spent the later part of the day visiting these students and their families.

Also, we tried to utilize all our leisure time to collect evidences to back up our student database and make it air tight. Documents such as student's birth certificate, migration certificate, admission details and transfer certificate would allow us to keep a proper track of each student. Also these details become raw data for our web interface which in turn allows us to remove any kind of data inconsistency in our data and keep an updated track of students. We also collected data from the student's school report card to keep a track of the child's progress and personality development.

## Key Observations and Findings from the field visit

Although, there are ample opportunities for improving the methodology of program monitoring and evaluation within our system we can reach to the conclusion that we are certainly approaching towards our goals to make Ithari a better village.

There were certain things which are definitely going well for us and the students –

- As per our survey we realized a majority of students have started emphasizing on their personal hygiene since our last interaction with them. It was earlier observed that students took bath only once or twice a week and would seldom wash their hands before eating anything. During our interaction with the students we discovered that less number of students were sick last year and a major part of the student population has started bathing every day before coming to school. We discussed the change in figures with the staff and management and emphasized on personal hygiene during our interaction with the students. Many of the senior students also suggested that we should have more role plays and discussion on this topic to spread awareness not only amongst the children but also parents.

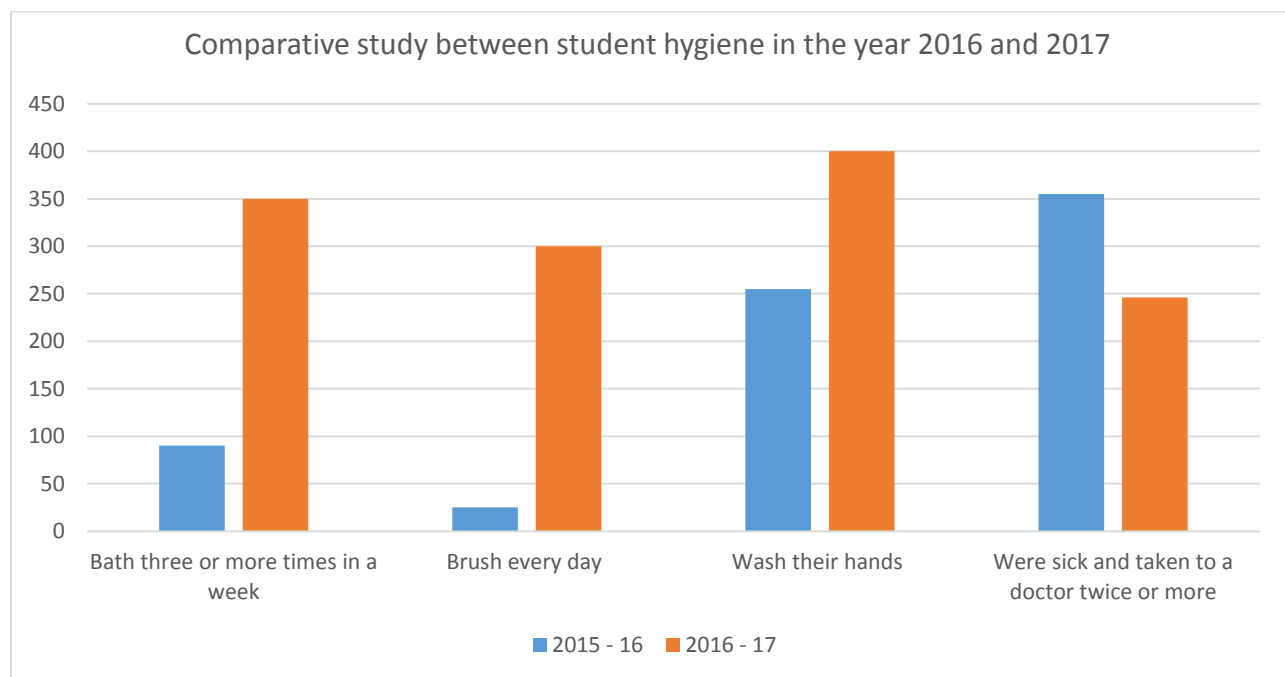


Figure 4: A comparative study drawn between student hygiene in the year 2016 and 2017 through our survey form.



- School fees is a major issues for most of the parents in the school. As majority of them are wage labours or farmers they find it difficult to cope up with the fees. Although the school has maintained a minimal fee structure keeping in mind the society and the occupation of parents it still needs to take care of the quality of teachers in the school. As discussed earlier, farming is a major occupation and it is very difficult to find a qualified, educated teacher to cater to the needs of our students. These teachers come from the nearby villages, some even take more than one hour to transit to school. The school needs funding to compensate the amount of hard work put in by the teachers. The Sponsorship program really helps in the process. *The school has been able to find a balance between providing the best to its students and rendering to the needs of the teacher through the funds provided by Bonn.* A minimum fees is taken from the parents depending on their financial status.
- Thanks to all the support received from the sponsors the school constructed different toilets for boys and girls. This was a must as it was important to inculcate the importance of using a toilet, to the students. Most of them do not have a toilet at home and this practice would make them question their conscience and even convince their parents to do the same.

A small part of the funding also helped renovate the hostel for boys and girls providing them a better living experience. The young salesian brothers from the Don Bosco institution take special care of the hostel students. They have a proper schedule set for the hostlers soon after school hours. They encourage the students in sports and also make them exercise every day in the evening. Before bedtime the students assemble in a common room to have a thanksgiving prayer.



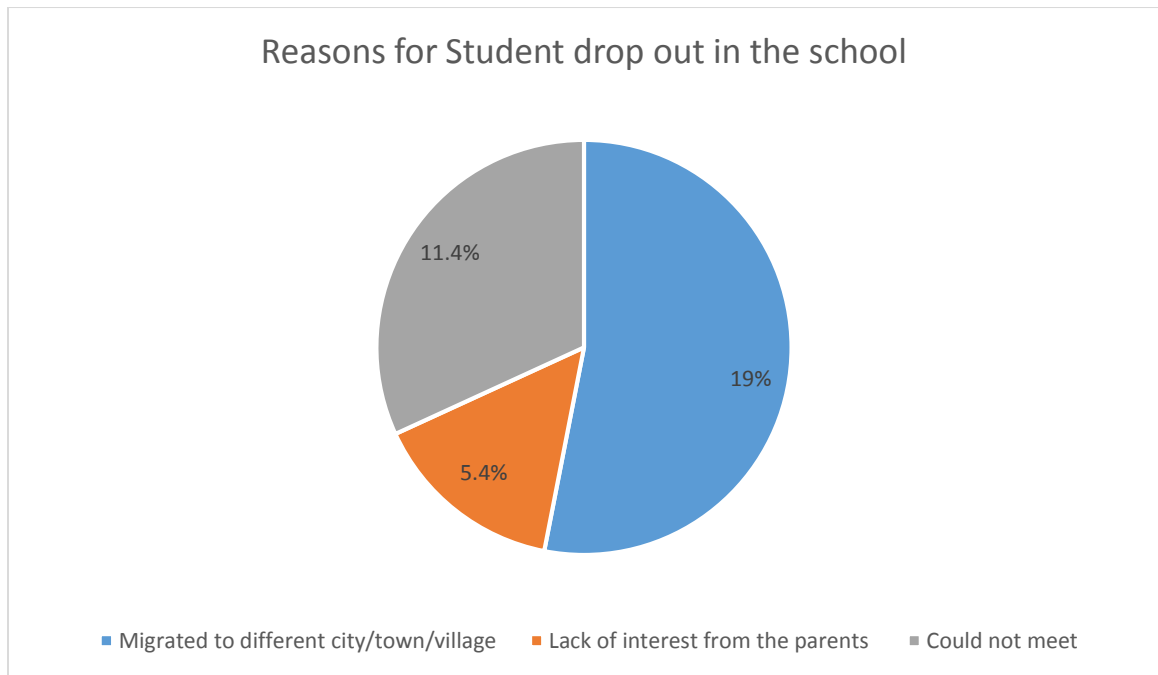
Also, the school management is planning to install CCTV cameras and lights in the campus as an added security for the students and staff. Lights were a must as the area has no street lamps, therefore, as soon as the sun is down the full place goes pitch dark which was inconvenient for our students in the hostel.



### Challenges faced -

Although, the program is implemented efficiently there are still certain factors which raised red flags:

- Unusual number of dropout students in the school –



After several home visits and interaction with the school management we realized that many of these parents work as wage labors. Therefore, when demonetization took place in India the poor daily wage labour fell prey to the aftermath. As both mother and father are working in most of the families they had to migrate to metro cities and places in search of a job. *Although the school takes several measures to convince the parents to let their child complete the current session by making the child stay in the hostel or with some local guardian, the parents, as most of them are not educated themselves, fail to reason out the possibility and simply withdraw the child from the school.* This session approximately 19% of the students left the school and migrated to a different city or village.

Also, during the home visits we got an opportunity to interact with some of the parents whose children were earlier studying in St Joseph School. When inquired about the child's current status some are sending their children to a government schools close to their area and some children have stopped studying and are working with their parents.

Most of the government schools in Bihar do not have a very good reputation because of lack of continuous monitoring and evaluation. This in turn affects the quality education of a child. A traditional missionary school requires the involvement of parent in the system for the overall development of the child and the parent needs to be an integral part of the child's growth. Somehow for an uneducated parent of this village it's very difficult to comprehend the fact that these steps are taken for the betterment of the child. Just to choose an easy way out the parent send their child to a government school where the performance or growth of the child does not really matter.

'Mid-day meal' is another attraction in government schools. Parents don't have to worry about providing a lunch box to the children. The school provides meals to the students. Addressing the very issue even our school started providing mid-day meals to the students but the quantity of food and the number of students wanting the mid-day meal has to be efficiently monitored.



*Figure 5: Student's standing in a queue for their meal, St Joseph School, Ithari*

After several debates we came to an understanding that the parents in the village had a fixed thought process and they still think that educating a child has no purpose in the future and that the child should learn basic skills to survive in his or her life rather than the parents spending money and effort and making the child go to school. Therefore, they rather take their sons and daughters to work at such a tender age than send them to be educated.

- Through the report cards and one to one interaction with the students we derived the progress report of an individual child and of the full school. The conclusion drawn very clearly shows that most of these students have performed better compared to their last

results. After much contemplation *we planned to keep one or more special teachers to cater to the extra needs of the students in the form of remedial classes or after school doubt clearing sessions.* This would in turn help the students to revise their work after school or clear their doubts which otherwise is difficult to clarify during the usual class hours.

Moreover, if the parents are able to see a positive change in their children they would think twice before taking a rash decision of withdrawing their child from the school.

- As per our survey, approximately 93% of students do not have a toilet at their home. This is indeed an alarming fact. During our interaction with the students we tried to discuss the pros and cons of having a toilet in their home and about proper hygiene.

## Conclusion

The annual visit to Ithari was indeed a success. We were able to fill in all the missing blanks and in the process obtained a better database of students. We received a lot of extra information about the child and his / her whereabouts which would be really helpful for our web interface in the future.

One of things that was evident from this visit was the support of the school received from the BONN sponsorship program played a vital role in sustaining many students who otherwise would have dropped out or moved with their parents to some other cities and ended up in child labour or many other illegal activities.

All the parents without exception expressed their gratitude towards the donor stating that the uniforms and stationary articles provided by the school through the support of benefactors (BONN) is a great additional support for them to meet the educational expenses of their children.

Also, when we visited the parents at their home, most of them said that they wanted their children to get educated and move out of this vicious circle of poverty, but then again it is very difficult for



them as they struggle with survival every day. Thus, they feel the little support that they get from us, is a huge help for them.

Another important observation we made was that the children were eager to write letters to their benefactors as they otherwise have no one to write to. They are glad that they have uncles and aunties somewhere who are interested in their well-being and send them unending support. It was all together a refreshing experience to get a sneak peek into the lives of our students which provides us a lot of raw data to work on and provide a better life style to the students who would grow up to be better citizens of this world.

Thank you,

Regards,

BOSCO Delhi.





