

How a school in Kerala is changing the way we look at government schools and teachers

“I believe that each student is a remarkable person and has his/her own individuality. Considering this, I am giving opportunity and making arrangements for each of my students,” says Koshy Alex, a mathematics teacher at Government Vocational Higher Secondary School for Girls at Nadakkavu, Kozikode in Kerala.”

An innovative educational development project initiated by the local MLA, Pradeep Kumar, has made this Nadakkavu School set an example for all government schools across India. It is one of the few government schools that boasts of offering world-class standards to the students.

The Rs -17crore initiative named Promoting Regional Schools to International Standards through Multiple Interventions (PRISM), besides establishing top-class infrastructure facilities in schools, also focusses on increasing the quality of education and enhancement of teaching and leadership skills, with inputs from Indian Institute of Management, Kozhikode (IIM-K).

Spearheading this change is Faizal and Shabana Foundation, which has been extending philanthropic support to various programmes in India and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The foundation is the brainchild of Faizal E. Kottikollon, 53, and his wife Shabana Faizal, 41, who jointly run KEF Holdings, a company working on six business verticals: infrastructure, healthcare, education, metals and investments.



“The Nadakkavu School project was a coincidence. I was in Kerala for a few days where I was told about the government schools in the region. There are 1.2 million government schools in India and almost all of them have poor infrastructure and fail to make a big impact. Upon my return to Dubai, I received a call from Mr Pradeep Kumar, MLA, Calicut. He expressed his concerns and plans for the Nadakkavu School and we decided to revamp it over the next few weeks,” recalls Faizal.

Today, this -123year-old girls’ government school has undergone major transformations. New classrooms, a well-stocked library, state-of-the-art kitchen, canteen, an astro-turf stadium (the first in any school in the State), toilets, multi-purpose hall, and interactive science centre have come up at the school. The school spread across 1,50,000sqft underwent transformation in a record time of 10 months and handed over to the government in December 2013.

Faizal and Shabana Foundation, which was registered as a non-profit in 2012, is headed by Joseph Sebastian, 45, who started his career as a community development worker in an island village in Kochi.

“The local MLA who had visualised the project was very positive and so were the teachers and other staff members in the school. All of us together have been able to successfully implement PRISM and now the school is ranked among the top three government day schools in India,” says Joseph.



KEF Holdings expertise in pre-cast and prefabricated construction helped remodel the Nadakkavu School within 95 days, with planning and execution included. “We were able to finish the project in time to surprise the students joining after the summer holidays. Seeing a new and improved school was a big confidence booster to students and teachers of the school,” says Joseph.

Apart from infrastructure, the other main focus of the project has been to enhance teachers’ skills at Nadakkavu School. Joseph credits the success of PRISM to the unstinted support and ownership from the teaching community.

He says, “We have teachers who are working long hours and beyond their normal call of duty to make a difference in the lives of children. The teachers in the government schools are best of all teachers as they go through the Public Service Commission tests. So we do have good teachers with high calibre. The challenge has been the opportunities, ambience and motivation. PRISM project and involvement of Foundation has been able to bring this aspect among the teachers.”

More than 250 schools have visited Nadakkavu and learned from it and of these at least 65 of them have taken up initiatives to replicate the model. Owing to the success of this project, the government has also announced scale-up of the Nadakkavu model to 1,000 more government schools of Kerala. A sum of Rs 1,000 crore has been ear-marked for the purpose. Apart from this, the project has also brought attitudinal shift to the families who have become more positive. There has been an increase in the number of applications to these government schools. Nadakkavu School, which only has 350 vacancies, has been getting more than 1,000 applications for last three years.

The one story that Joseph distinctively recalls is the remark he got from an Class XI student. The student had said, “Earlier when I left for school, no one bothered, not my mother, not the people on the roads, neither the staff of the private bus I took. I was just another girl. But today, when I come to school in this wonderful uniform it makes me stand out as a Nadakkavu student.”

Restoring belief in families and students towards education is the best a school can achieve, and Nadakkavu School has successfully accomplished this task. The school is on a path to change the way we think about government schools in India.