

## TRANSFORMATION OF PUBLIC SCHOOL EDUCATION – AN INNOVATIVE MODEL SCHOOL CONCEPT IN KASHMIR

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Born and brought up in the border town of Uri, famous for its good climate and scenic landscape, Rameez Ahmad Sudhan, believes education should be based on social justice, equality and equity. He introduced an “Innovative Model School” the details of which are presented below. He is actively involved in online teacher training programmes, and community classes. Besides, through the 'Art of Giving initiative' he is also reaching out to children during the Covid crisis to provide psycho-social and emotional support to the children. Shri Rameez holds a Master’s degree in Science and a Diploma in Disaster Management, and has done a certificate course in Remote Sensing & GIS. He is deeply interested in exploring how conflicts affect education and how these can be resolved to the best of the students’ interest.

Conflict affects education; for example, in 2016-17, a total of 130 days of the school academic calendar were lost to strife. Any such disruption leads to non-performing teachers, weakened infrastructure, poor public perception of education, decline in students’ enrolment, and low motivation all around.

Shri Rameez initiated a three-year long programme in June 2015 titled “Model College School Initiative” in Old Town, Baramulla (J&K).



Environment week celebration

### Phase 1

**Plan “Change”.** The first step was to understand the nature of change to be brought about in school, and its impact on the stakeholders, particularly students, teachers, parents and community at large.

**Location of the school.** He chose the district headquarters as the location for the college school. The aim was to reverse the downward trend of educational parameters in eight schools—these were clubbed into one functional institution, the Model College School. For better resource augmentation and visibility of the progress made, periodic review and timely monitoring were stressed.

#### Vision.

1. Education provided in the Model school would be holistic and integral touching upon the physical, emotional, vocational and aesthetic development in addition to academics.
2. Selection of students will be through an independent selection test.
3. The school will have adequate ICT infrastructure, Internet connectivity and full-time computer teachers. Special emphasis may be given to the teaching of Science, Maths and English in the first phase.
4. A good library with books and magazines for students and teachers will be provided.
5. Necessary infrastructure will be provided for satisfying teaching needs, as also for sports and co-curricular activities. There will be sufficient scope for sports, recreation and outdoor activities.
6. The school will also create facility for activities emphasizing common heritage, art & craft.
7. The Teacher-Pupil Ratio would not exceed



Students watching Motivational movies



Prayer meet

- 1:25. Further, the classrooms will be spacious enough to accommodate at least 30 students.
8. The school will have to follow the National Curriculum Framework 2005 and its subsequent versions as adopted by Government of India from time to time. At the same time, the curriculum should take into account the local culture and environment, and learning should be activity-based.
  9. The school curricula should include the material items that inculcate leadership qualities, team spirit, participation abilities, development of soft skills and ability to deal with real-life situations.
  10. Health Education and health check-up will be introduced in these schools.
  11. Field trips and educational tours will be an integral part of the curriculum.
  12. The school may provide NCC training to students to inculcate the value of nationhood, as also to make them appreciate a disciplined way of life.

### Phase 2

**Make Change.** Innovative solutions to challenges faced by the school & its perception management.

**Perception change about public schools & restoring public confidence.** Understanding why there is such a divide between what “we, teachers think of ourselves and how others view us” revealed many significant gaps. Rameez first prepared the students for a Teacher’s day event, in which a cultural item “Nanhe Munnay Bache” was presented at University of Kashmir. This brought out a fresh perspective about public school children.

**School Education Committees (SEC’s).** The next on his focus was to bridge the gap between school administration and parents. For

this, two major events were organized: a mega Parent Teacher Meet (PTM) and renewed public engagement to bridge the mistrust and neglect between parents and teachers. This was followed by periodic monthly PTMs.

**Consolidation or merger of schools.** The model schools came about after the merger of eight individual non-performing schools; now the merger seemed to be working.

**Renewed focus on pre-primary.** School readiness is an essential concern for students entering the educational system, especially those who are from diverse backgrounds. Young children between birth and age five make rapid developmental progress. Students enrolled earlier and for a longer duration demonstrate better short and long-term results. Students therefore participated in a full day pre-school program.

The school was in the direct line of fire due to frequent stone pelting incidents; however, the parents’ faith in the school remained unshaken. There was constant communication between the parents and the teachers during these difficult times.

**Shift system of classwork.** With insufficient infrastructure, increased enrolment became an issue. To resolve the issue, Rameez Ahmad came up with a two-shift system of class work, the first shift working from morning 7:00 am to 1:00 pm and the second from 1:00 pm to 5:00 (evening). In this way, a healthy student teacher ratio of 1:25 was maintained.

**Leapfrogging with Information and Communication Technology (ICT).** A pertinent issue in Kashmir was the absence of connectivity and frequent disruption of electricity—many government schools are still to be electrified. So, the way forward was pen-drives or offline mode of transactions like personal laptops, documentary screening sessions, and audio-visual aids. Civil society members who were witness to this new means of learning wanted to be part of this

renewed education system, and donated a few items for the school including a 40" colour TV set, inverter, lighting equipment and stationery.

**Creative work on curfew days.** The Extended Learning or home-based tutoring by staff after school and during the unrest of summer 2016 resulted in increased gains in academic skills and also plugged gaps in the summer learning loss. The students also engaged in various activities in school like pickle making and cooking. Besides, there were also personal hygiene lessons for girls.

**Activity-based learning.** Routine rote-based learning got a break as clubs for various subjects were formed to make education easy. The clubs helped in providing a quality teaching experience within and outside the classes given the paucity of laboratory and other logistical support driven by increased enrolment, totalling to more than 300 students.

**Skill Development for Girls.** In collaboration with a college for women a skill development programme in boutique technology was started for girl students for skill enhancement in cutting, tailoring and other crafts.

**Photography workshops.** To reconnect and re-imagine the old town as a socio-cultural milieu Rameez Ahmad conducted a photography workshop. The workshop helped to build in students mutual respect; take pride in what the parents did for a living to support the family; and appreciate the rich architectural heritage of the area.

**Sports Events.** Given that there was limited sports infrastructure in many schools, inter-school tournaments were held where the schools had such facilities.

**Art and craft classes.** Students were encouraged to take part in a variety of art and craft classes.

**Community outreach programmes.** The students were engaged in various community mobilisation programmes to sensitise people on pressing issues of environment, road safety and sanitation.

### Phase 3

**Sustain Change.** With the capability generated and the trust earned, it was important to motivate the stakeholders to drive the change further. However, in the fast-changing context, the school has to take permission from the administration to allow teachers to stay in the place for a substantial amount of time so that the progress achieved can be sustained.

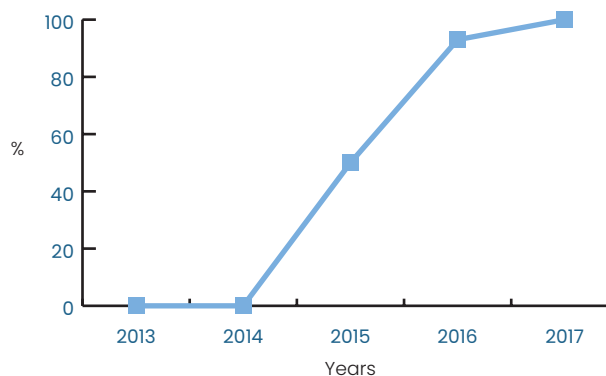
**Review.** Demographic information was collected for 180 children and 135 parents. Open-ended questions were asked to gain parents'

inputs. In addition, quantitative data on the progress was also collected.

Children Response on School Progress is given in the table below (number of students participated – 180).

STATEMENT	RESPONSE	
	YES	NO
Does your teacher encourage you to Improve your performance?	171	9
Does your teacher help you in understanding ways to improve your grades?	143	37
Does your teacher appreciate you when you work hard towards scoring well in a test or perform well in extra-curricular activities?	166	14
My teacher has fair rules for the class and is extremely impartial.	122	58
Do you have supportive classmates?	111	69
Do you think the students are happy to be in school?	133	47
My teachers make learning enjoyable.	159	21
My teachers give us time to explain our ideas.	122	58

The pass percentage of Class X examination has shown phenomenal increase in just three years. From no one passing in 2013 and 2014, the percentage went up to 50% in 2015, 93% in 2016 and 100% in 2017.



**Enrollment Increase.** The campaign which relied on public participation through improved education standards and positive parental perception about the school, managed to increase student admission and the enrolment from 175 in 2015 to 305 in 2018.

**Reverse Migration from Private Schools.** Sixty-five of the new enrolment was of students who had gone to private schools but came back for readmission to the model school.

**Accountability of teachers.** The Biometric attendance system that was introduced improved the attendance of teachers (94% in the 180-day school year).

Parents were highly satisfied, with 97% reporting that their children enjoyed the learning



Celebration with community members



Activity bases learning

process. There has been a revival of faith in the public education system owing to the visible and incremental yet marked change in students' performance and greater accountability at the school level. Gains in vocabulary and general academic skills have been observed among children.

Encouraged by the success of this initiative the J&K department of education is setting up two state-wide innovative programmes, "NANHE QADAM" and "LAB SCHOOLS". The former is an innovative kindergarten program under which

five preschool centres per district have been set up in the first phase. The idea is to catch the talent young and steer the children in this age group towards proper development, growth and prosperity. The Lab School is one in which a school has meagre resources but a potential to be developed. One such school has been adopted in every zone of the district for revival.

*"When you do things from heart it feels like a river is moving inside"*

*Mevlana Rumi*



#### QUESTIONS FOR TEACHERS

1. What activities can be undertaken to maintain a positive learning environment in the school?
2. What are the physical facilities in the school that help the children to study?
3. How to assess the knowledge of children to know the achievement of knowledge?

#### QUESTIONS FOR TRAINEES

1. What kind of activity can be done for the children to participate in the classroom teaching-learning process?
2. How can reference literature be used to provide children with information other than the curriculum?
3. State things to keep in mind when using ICT in the classroom.