

Creating child friendly schools



Photo: The Mid Day Meal in Nagar School.

Although the government has a general development plan for every village in Rajasthan, at a micro level there may be differences in how schools are run and whether they are being maintained properly. Some schools might not have a nearby drinking

water source; or the caste composition in a village may cause discrimination against certain children using the water supply; schools may be far from the closest villages. In some cases blackboards have lost their colour so children can't read from them. A new paint job costs 100 rupees but no one is prepared to spend the money. All this is happening while new school rooms are being built by the government, without looking after the existing facilities.

Corporal punishment has been eradicated but many teachers are still using emotional punishment, insulting children, removing them from classes and embarrassing them. These teachers have never been taught positive discipline.

Focusing on eight villages to develop Child Led Indicators, we've created child friendly school environments where children feel nurtured, stimulated and encouraged to learn. New teachers have been appointed to maintain the state recommended teacher to child ratio; drinking water is available; toilets are properly maintained, with separate facilities for girls and boys; and six school playgrounds have been made child friendly. The Mid Day Meal is prepared by a cook rather than the pupils, and enough is made to feed all the children. Teachers have been consulted to increase awareness of positive discipline, attended teacher training and have spoken to other Community Based Organisations for school development to create schools free from discrimination and abuse.

Cluster Resource Centres in each village are used regularly by over 12,000 children who take advantage of the sports equipment, musical instruments, books, newspapers and Information Education Communication (IEC) publications.

The Parent Teacher Associations and the School Development Management Committees meet to review their responsibilities towards ensuring a quality education for village children and attend GVNML capacity building workshops.

School Development Plans, facilitated by GVNML and created with input from the community, teachers and children help ensure their continued success. There's also been an enrolment drive and in 2009 the number of children attending school irregularly has dropped from 36 to just 9.