

A school where learning is fun

'Soham for kids' has been set up to provide education to children from underprivileged background, also focusing on nutrition and health care

Pavithra S. Rangan

HYDERABAD: As the afternoon sun blazed upon dusty streets in interior Mallapur, its several thatched houses, cramped together for want of space, lay lifeless. Further in, stood a brightly coloured building; a striking anomaly to the grey-brown setting.

It was not just this façade that was a contrast. Within, echoed unadulterated laughter and amazement of nearly a hundred children. Carrying the life of several homes in the village, the building with the tiny board, 'Soham for kids' is a school for underprivileged children in its vicinity.

Providing education free of cost, the school has been the sole resort for poor parents, for two years now. "My six-year-old daughter can speak in English fluently. Although I can't understand a word, it's amazing," beams Noori Begum, whose daughter studies at Soham. "Now she teaches me about cleanliness and how to do my work at home. You should listen to her," she says.

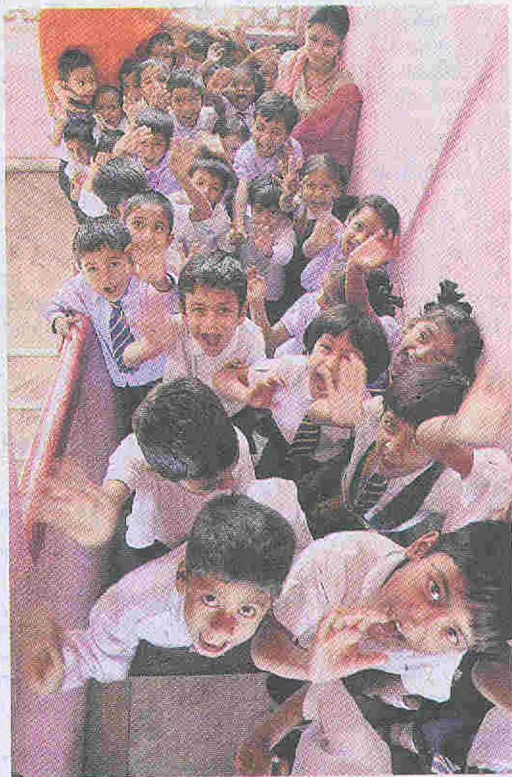
Funded by Faiza Seth, CEO of a UK-based firm, the school is being run with the help of Hope Foundation. Aiming to work for children in her hometown Hyderabad, Faiza has been providing free education, health care and nutrition to underserved children through the school.

Ironically, the government school in the area which ought to serve the purpose has practically been abandoned by parents. "Our children left homes neatly dressed to go to the government school. But when they came back they looked like labourers who have slogged all day long. With apathetic teachers and lack of any system, our children only wandered on the street," says Aameena, whose son now goes to Soham.

Adult education

The school also provides adult education and vocational training to parents of these children who are either unemployed or are daily wage labourers.

At Soham, 25 children occupy each of the four



PLAYFUL MOOD: Underprivileged children at the school 'Soham for kids'.

different rooms in the building. Playing, listening and fielding questions posed to them in an instant, the children belonged to nursery, LKG, UKG and first standard. And as the first grade children pass out, the school will provide for second standard education, and so on.

"We are not taking in children of all ages. This school was started with only nursery and LKG. Now, after two years, when they moved to first standard, we have provided for them. We will expand by one grade every year," explains Rajesh, Programming Head at the school.

The school caters to more than 25 poor students in the lowest grade each year. This, he says, is an attempt to ensure that the few children who come here have the strong foundation needed for further education. With hundreds of children still left with no access to good education in the area there is an indubitable need for several Sohams.