

**NAMCHI BLIND SCHOOL**  
**(Under Social Welfare Department, Government of Sikkim)**

I visited this School today in the afternoon, the 23<sup>rd</sup> day of September, 2014, along with my Liaison Officer, Shri. Chetak Subba. We walked around the classrooms of this neat, low-slung stone building and watched the differently-abled school children hard at studies.

This is my first visit to this remarkable school, a school which offers hope, education and a new life to sightless children from Class I to Class V. I am informed that currently there are 36 students, including 15 girls.

Had a look at the dormitory of the boys and the girls. Both were very neat and clean. Also, visited the classrooms where the students were busy studying Mathematics, English and EVS. I also interacted with the students as well as with the teachers. All were enthusiastic about their studies, their life and their future.

Shri Jiwan Rai, the head of institution informed that books in Braille were difficult to come by as there was hardly any market for the books. This posed a serious challenge to them as they had to scrounge the markets of Siliguri and of Kolkata for books in Braille. He also mentioned that abrupt changes in the syllabus by the Board affected them badly as the textbooks had to be procured, then translated into Braille and then printed in Braille. This procedure was a long and tedious affair and adversely affected the studies of the children. He appealed for the syllabus to remain unchanged for at least five years at a stretch.

The third problem mentioned by Shri. Jiwan Singh was the absence of a Braille printing press in Sikkim. Such a press could cater to the needs of nearby places, including Kalimpong and Darjeeling. He wished that the Government of Sikkim would take the initiative in this regard.

Other members of the staff mentioned the anomalies in their pay structure after the Department of Social Welfare, Government of Sikkim, had taken over. Earlier, the National Blind Association – which was primarily responsible for setting up the School in the first place – used to disburse their salaries. Once the Government took over, the services of only some of them had been regularised. The rest continue to receive their pay from the NGO. This disparity in their pay structure was not only invidious but

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was also causing unnecessary tension in the School. They hoped that the concerned authorities would take note of this problem.

This School is a very impressive effort made by the Sikkim Chapter of the National Association for Blind. It is a beacon of light for the many children who are differently-abled. A visit to this School is soul stirring.



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**SPECIAL SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF & DUMB UNDER SOCIAL JUSTICE  
EMPOWERMENT & WELFARE DEPARTMENT, SOCIAL WELFARE  
DIVISION, GOVERNMENT OF SIKKIM**

Next door to the Observation Home for Boys & Girls at Upper Sichey, Gangtok, is another multi-storeyed building. This houses the Special School for the Deaf & Dumb children of Sikkim. It is a unique venture under the Social Justice Empowerment & Welfare Department in the Social Welfare Division.

The school was started with just 3 students on June 1, 2004 and has classes from the primary level up to Class IV. The age of the students housed here range from 4+ to 12+. After they complete Class IV, they are sent for further studies to Special Schools available in Kalimpong and Darjeeling on a scholarship. Today, there are 16 students (11 boys and 5 girls).

The boys and girls dormitories are separate. The male cook stays with the boys in their dormitory while the School Mother stays with the girls in their dormitory. Both the dormitories were neat and clean.

The subjects taught to the children here are eclectic and covers a wide range of knowledge. They are taught English, Mathematics, Sign Language, Environmental Studies, General Knowledge, Vocational Activities, Computers and Nepali. The school timings are from 10 am to 3 pm. Summer and Winter vacations are for 15 days each. During this time, the Parents come and take their wards home.

Visits by Parents are allowed on a monthly basis. They are allowed to bring much-needed toiletries and uniforms. More visits are allowed on case-to-case basis.

There is one kitchen for all the students. A cook takes care of their meals. All meals are served in a spacious and clean dining hall.

There are 11 computers here for the use of the students. These have been provided by HCL under a Government grant. A dedicated computer teacher is available here.

The staffing pattern of 10 is as follows:

Principal (Shri. N. Dhutraj)	-	1
Special Educators	-	3
Computer Teacher	-	1
School Mothers	-	2
Cook	-	1
Safai Karmachari	-	1
Peon	-	1

Field trips are organised by the Principal of the School. They have been taken on day trips to view the mighty Kunchenjanga and to Namchi town.

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**Summary & Recommendations:** The staff, in one voice, requested for a good music system. They explained that this was required to showcase the ability of their charge when asked to perform outside on stage. The boys and girls here were well-versed in songs in sign language and dance. In the absence of a good music system, the children felt inhibited.

There is acute lack of space in this rented building. The children are unable to practice any outdoor games. In the absence of a dedicated bus and driver, the staff find it very difficult to take the children out to a playground.

The staff also felt that this School needs more publicity so that NGOs would be aware of the existence of the school and would pay some attention to the special needs of the children. Currently, hardly any NGO visited them.

The staff also complained about the non-regularisation of the pay for the past few years. Of the 10 number of staff, only the pay of 5 had been regularised. Those whose pay needed fixation included the Principal, 2 Special Educators, the Computer Teacher and one School Mother.



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