

- Manthan Mehta

On August 5, Pali Chimbai Municipal School students has their first practical lesson in democracy. Aseema, a non-governmental organization that has adopted the school, organized a secret ballot to elect the heads from each classroom.

Said Maria D'Souza, a volunteer at the school, "This education institute is as good as any mainstream school in terms of imparting knowledge. We decided to take a step further by conducting elections to choose the monitor and heads of class among the students as we felt that students will get an early exposure to democracy, about which they have only read in the civics textbooks."

The elections were conducted on similar lines to those in any democratic body. "The kids were extremely committed about the whole affair. For 15 days, the teachers talked about the qualities and role of a leader in their classes", said D'Souza, who worked with St. Stanislaus High School prior to this assignment. The school imparts education up to Std. VII. D'Souza said, "On the ballot paper, the names of the candidates were mentioned and the students had to tick mark against their preferred candidate. The teachers had also signed the voter's slips to ensure that no bogus voting took place," informed Carolyn Fernandes, head of the Primary section.

A total of 17 monitors were elected and all of them took a 'pledge of office' to work with honesty and sincerity in the interest of school and the students. The elected students will have to aid the teachers in supervising the class.

Aseema had adopted this school in 2001. The initiative is a success story as the school also runs a Support Centre after school hours, where children are given personal guidance. Moreover they also have a group of volunteers who train them in martial arts, creative art, etc.

Most of the students come from a disadvantaged background and some of them are first generation learners. "Children are admitted to this school from the slums of Bandra Reclamation, Chimbai and Khar Danda. The medium of instruction is English and after completing their Class VII, they are admitted to Santacruz Municipal School, where Class VIII has been adopted by Aseema," informed D'Souza.

Sarafaraz Khan, a student of Class V, said, "I am happy to be elected as the monitor of the class. I will try to perform my duties honesty and thereby try serve my school."

Deepa Goel, a student of Class IV, said, "I am proud to be elected as the monitor of the class. I know that a lot will be expected of me. I am also looking forward to serve the school in this capacity.

Westside Plus Bandra-Khar
August 7, 2008.
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