

## Dear friends, vanakkam!

Always hoping that this may find you in good health and that you are happy to receive word from us, we come to tell you about the latest faring and progress of the school.

## Name change

As you may notice from the appearance of this letter, we have changed our name..!

Some of you may know that for a long time we have been thinking of doing that, as there are two educational facilities within the New Creation compound. New Creation Bilingual School, now Aikiyam School, is run by Principal Shankar along with the school's support team, and the Child Development Centre is overseen by Andre T. and his wife Babu. Both schools are colloquially referred to as New Creation School, understandably leading to endless confusion.

The word 'Aikiyam' means "harmony, oneness, unity", in both Tamil and Sanskrit. It is a name befitting the school's high vision and aim, and its child-friendly and safe environment.

More than a year ago, Auroville's educational umbrella organisation, SAIER, approved of our choice of Aikiyam School as a new name, but we did not go ahead at that time because we had applied for recognition as a Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) school under our old name, and didn't want to cause any bureaucratic problems for ourselves.

## MISSION STATEMENT OF AIKIYAM SCHOOL (NCBS)

The school's mission is to provide an appropriate kindergarten, primary and intermediate education for children from Kulapalayam and other villages which are geographically connected to Auroville, based on the principles of integral education as defined by the founders of Auroville, the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. The school strives to maintain a creative and joyful atmosphere, where the uniqueness of each child is respected and nurtured, and to prepare children for life in a rapidly changing world, while maintaining contact with their Tamil cultural heritage.

The school aims to provide a quality bilingual education in Tamil and English, covering all of the standard academic subjects, physical education, and a wide variety of vocational options, giving children a range of choices in the type of education they will pursue when leaving the school.

Aikiyam School is an Outreach day-school under the Sri Aurobindo Institute of International Educational Research (SAIER) for more than 200 children, with classes which range from pre-kindergarten to the eighth grade. All tuition, educational supplies, nutritious snacks and mid-day meals are provided free of charge. In April 2008 the school received provisional affiliation for a period of three years from India's Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) and is entitled to issue a recognised school leaving certificate.

However, we now have decided to get around that by putting NCBS in brackets after our name on all official documents, for as long as it is necessary.

Starting this new chapter in providing rural, underprivileged children with solid, all-round schooling and integral, wholesome education, we sincerely pray that you will be able to remain steady with your financial support, so that Aikiyam School can continue to grow into the model school it endeavors to be.. Thank you very very much in advance!



## Integrated system



The new school year started off on a good footing with 21 new toddlers entering the fold, and three students were taken up in higher grades. We had more new applicants than ever (65) but are, as always, restricted in class room space. In our selection, we remained true to the commitment to first and for all make place for the children from manual workers

employed in Auroville. As before, many of these came through the French-oriented 'Surya Crèche', which is part of the Child Development Centre also located in the New Creation settlement. In this way a natural channel is forming for the future education of these village children, welcomed from Surya Crèche through Aikiyam School to 12th grade New Era School nearby. Things are taking shape!

Looking back at the five years since Aikiyam School was taken up by a new management team, the progress is quite evident. The new arrivals are received with a varied and hands-on lively programme worked out in detail, and successive classes are well prepared, with alert and ready teachers enticing the students to think and explore. Six 'special needs' teachers and extra tutorial programmes are available wherever a child indicates the need for it, and a general awareness is created that each child has come equipped with different abilities, - with a different role to play in life.

While India's mainstream media currently open up to the urgent need of better education in India, bombarding the public with pedagogic articles and warnings for setting unachievable goals and unrealistic expectations for one's children, we notice how integrated our system already is with its NCERT curriculum, child-centered approach, and individual education & vocational programmes.

At the same time we are keenly aware that we still have far to go. Just the other day Principal Shankar participated in a two-day CBSE workshop in Chennai, bringing back a yet deeper understanding of the opportunities and responsibilities which this important affiliation entails.

## Teaching in Transition School

With the school growing more and more into its true potential, the Auroville community cannot but notice its emerging qualities and responds accordingly. It is therefore not surprising that one of our long-term teachers has been accepted for a year as assistant

third-grade teacher in Auroville's Transition School. Prabha is a young, determined Aurovilian woman who has been teaching in Aikiyam School for the last 15 years, eagerly absorbing all the extra workshops given by visiting educationists. Born in Madurai, Prabha did her early schooling there, after which she studied four years Bharatanatyam at the renowned 'Kalakshetra Fine Arts College' in Chennai. Through marriage she came to Auroville, and Aikiyam School, and is regularly performing at various events in Auroville and, of course, also teaches students. Prabha is always eager to learn new and innovative ways to teach various academic subjects, and was enormously pleased with the opportunity to work for a year in Transition. She fully enjoys it and learns a lot. "For instance," she says, "I see now what a crucial difference it makes when the child's parents are really involved in the home work, in how the child feels at school. In Aikiyam, the children learn only from the teachers, and have hardly any support base at home. Hopefully this will change when older siblings will start helping the younger ones.."



Prabha

Another thing that strikes her in Transition School is the fact that each teacher there takes care of a particular aspect of the school's functioning, and is totally responsible for it. We look forward to seeing Prabha back next school year!

## Auroville Film Festival

This year Auroville organised its very first Film Festival, which included an educational outreach programme that invited participation of schools in its environment. Eight Aikiyam students expressed the will and courage to participate and learned, over a period of 10 mornings, the basics of cinema history through watching screenings of films from the past 100 years so as to inform their technical and creative study of



From l to r: Immanuel, Velvizhi, Murali, Arul, Vignesh, Surendar, and Darshan somewhere below, in rapt attention during a training session for the Auroville Film Festival

filmmaking. They went from preparation to shoot to editing, including the basics in camera, sound, team work, picture and sound editing. Their task was to each conceive and direct a one-shot film, and also to make a 'collective film' of approx 5 minutes, which they conceived and shot-listed together, and for which they rotated roles for each shot and during the edit process. It was an extraordinary experience for them, and their films were screened in the large auditorium in Auroville's Bharat Nivas, viewed by an audience, which included their proud parents and other family members. The idea is to make this a continuous educational programme available for the schools of Auroville and its bioregion.

**Greenness and cleanliness are our two eyes..**

While last year Auroville's Centre for Scientific Research (CSR) organised a solid waste management workshop with the students, this year it was Auroville's Botanical



The Eco Club on the road to save the earth..!

Garden's Eco Club that arranged for a cycle trip to beautiful Gingee and Devathampettai some 90 kms north, for four students from two Outreach schools and two nearby Government schools, along with three Aikiyam teachers. The group, adorned with banners and slogans on their cycles, would stop in Tamil villages on the way, approaching residents, schools and even police stations, handing out papers promoting a 'Save the earth' concept. Some of these expressed their concern in a typical local way, such as: "Pollution of the air mandala is the ruin of the life mandala", or "Greenness and cleanliness are our two eyes", and "Let us use Sun Shakti and protect Mother Earth.."

**Draw your own rupee coin...**

Also this year the school is blessed with a good and energetic group of young volunteers of various nationalities. New is the interest of the University of Washington (Bothell), USA, where Principal Shankar is teaching Tamil culture as guest lecturer from time to time. Professor Jean Eisele, an educationist who trains



Teachers in a workshop with Jean Eisele on the skills which have to be developed before a child is ready for reading and writing

teachers at that University, became a good friend of the school and started visiting Auroville regularly. This year, she brought a group of her students here, and conducted a course with Aikiyam's teachers, going in depth into a small child's growing ability to comprehend new concepts, and the way to guide the process and recognise the skills which have to be developed before a child is ready for reading and writing.

Says Jean: "I dearly love working with the Aikiyam teachers. They are always so very eager and open to new thoughts and so very joyful! They take the smallest suggestion from me and explode it into dozens of their own ideas which they then generously share."

Ms Amelia Bowers, educationist at the same university, did a workshop focusing on the power of observation and concentration enhanced through working with a set of small jeweller's loupes, which she donated to the school. Also this was a welcome and fun workshop, stimulating the teachers to develop their natural ability to observe, which will directly improve their teaching and the understanding of their students. Everyone was amazed at actually seeing details not noticed before, and at the beauty of things. And when asked to draw a rupee coin from memory..., the need for keen observation became all too clear..!



Teachers working with the jeweller's loupes, learning to observe life in its myriad forms..

## Joyful highlights & just cash

Recently an elderly gentleman picked up, during his stay in Abu Dhabi, several kgs of best quality dates, brought them home and sat with his wife for hours wrapping them up in 250 small packages of four dates each. They then visited our school and lovingly distributed them to students and staff. At times the family augments the school's nutrition account as well.



Proud and happy Aikiyam students on India's Independence Day.. - the future is theirs, thanks to your goodwill and support..!

And now, once a week, one of Auroville's restaurants receives a class of children from one of the various Outreach schools and regales them with a sumptuous meal. Imagine the ecstasy! These gestures bring moments of joy to the school and are deeply appreciated.

However, after the spontaneous reaching out by some of you when the school had to admit reaching rock-bottom last year, we cannot but notice – even though we tiptoe through our budget – that we definitely have to ring the bell again.

The new Library building, which is gradually emerging on the scene, may perhaps give the impression that all of our needs are met, but unfortunately we still very much rely on support from 'outside'. The new building is co-sponsored by the German Government and the funds are, as always, strictly accounted for.

**It is always the cost of the general upkeep of the older buildings, the infrastructure of the entire compound, the salaries of employed teachers & other staff, and the necessary basic school materials that just, very prosaically, need to be paid for, - in cash.**

We therefore strongly appeal to you to please pick up again your habit of sending us your regular donation if you can, however small it may be. Think of the children.. You now can do it online. Thank you so much!

*The Aikiyam School (formerly NCBS) Support Group*

***Principal Shankar, and Dianna, Franca, Françoise, Janet, Mauna, Suriyagandhi, along with all the school's children, teachers, other personnel and friends.***

*(Dr. Heidi Watts of Antioch New England Graduate School in USA, Martin Littlewood of Auroville International UK, Satyakam Karim and Devasmita Patnaik of Auroville International France, all long time friends and supporters of the school, attend our meetings when present in Auroville.)*

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