

Kolkata 2018

Day 4 – Monday 22nd January 2018

A very special meeting

This was to be one of the highlights of the trip ... meeting the children and teacher of Awami. I had heard so much about them from Mrs Wilderspin after her visit last year that it was great to finally meet them for myself. The culture shock was to be one of the biggest surprises. I thought that I had seen poverty around the streets near the hotel – and I had. However, the trip to the Bibibagan slum area was a real revelation and the walk from the car to where the school was showed just how great the need is for a free school.

We were told that places were available for those under a certain annual income, but we were shocked to find that the annual income in question was \$18 per year (around £15). Two people going to the cinema spend that in one go in England! It really does show the extreme poverty here in Kolkata in certain areas of the city.

The school itself is a one room building, that opens from 10.00am through to 2.00pm or so. Timings in India can be a bit flexible. The room then transforms into a board game venue for the rest of the day so it is well used. The teacher Sultana was very welcoming but was a bit shy, mostly because her English was still not very fluent but she had made good progress from last year. There were 23 children present for most of the session but they came and went through the day. Ages ranged between 2 and 6 although a couple seemed to be a little older. Overall, the age group was in line with our Infant department.

The lessons were mainly based on Phonics and Number. The children were very keen to show how they were still using the resources that Mrs Wilderspin had made for them last year. The very hungry caterpillar has been a big part of their education this year! I was impressed with their number work and most of them could easily hold their own in the English system. Their phonics skills were not as advanced but when you consider that these Infant children can speak at least two and sometimes three languages then it becomes clear that they are doing well in this area as well. The children in Kolkata all speak Bengali but some of them speak Hindi as well. Then they are expected to have their education in English. How would you like to have you schooling in a language that you only partly understood – a VERY BIG CHALLENGE!



I took some videos and pictures and told the children that I would send them back to Scargill and that I would ask the children there to make some short videos for me to show them on Thursday when I next visited the school. School finished with a game of Duck, Duck Goose! and they all went

back to their homes (although for many that does not actually mean a house – more like a tarpaulin hung up on the side of the road for them to shelter under).



In the evening, we all went out to Mother House. This was the Loreto convent house where Mother Theresa of Calcutta lived and work for her many years where she lived in Calcutta. She did an amazing job working with the poor of the city and became famous because of this work all over the world. She died in 1997 but only after she had won the Nobel Peace Prize for

her work. After her death, the Roman Catholic Church made her a Saint. Her tomb was in Mother House and this has become a place of pilgrimage for many Christians today. She was a woman who lived a simple life by a simple code – only do good and do not do it so that you get glory but rather that the glory goes to God. She won many awards but always accepted them on behalf of all those who do good work rather than taking any personal glory for herself. She is a woman that we could learn a lot from and I hope that you have a chance to do a bit of research about her life. Why not ask your teacher!

Day 5 – Tuesday 23rd January 2018

A day to forget!

Today I was meant to go to visit a new project that Scargill may be getting involved with. It is helping to fund the completion of a new school, women's refuge and a health clinic all in one building! I was very excited about the opportunity but unfortunately, I was unwell overnight and had to stay in bed. On a brighter note, this visit has been moved to Friday so I will be able to see the new project after all.

It was the Kolkata version of Delhi Belly (ask your parents!). I hope that I will feel a lot better tomorrow for the first day's training with the Kolkata teachers.

Off to bed to get some much needed sleep before tomorrow.

Day 6- Wednesday 24th January 2018

A day to learn.

Definitely feeling better today but still ever so slightly delicate! All of the teachers from Derbyshire had brought a big bag of resources to share with the different schools here. There were all sorts of things in the bag from magnetic letters to dice and from small black boards to reading books. The idea for today's session and for the other training session on Saturday was to give the Indian teachers ideas for how to use their new resources. I have to run a short Maths session on

Saturday about how we can use dice to help us to teach Maths. I cannot wait to teach them to play Dice Cricket amongst lots of other things. Today however, I was helping two colleagues with their sessions.

The first was a phonics session where we looked at different ways of making the short and long 'i' sounds. The session was repeated four times altogether so by the end I was becoming a bit of a mini 'i' expert! The second session was maths and it was lots of different ways to use a number line that the children could peg out on a washing line. I was more in my comfort zone here and felt that it went well.



Two things really struck me about the day. Firstly, it was how much the local teachers really appreciated the training and how hospitable they were. I was so impressed with this that I fully intend to take a leaf out of their book and attempt to be a lot more hospitable to others after I return to England. There are so many important lessons to learn from the teachers here. It is definitely not all one way!



The second thing that really affected me was the fact that the training took place in an amazing school called La Martinere. This is in fact two schools – a boy's school (where we were today) and a girl's school just across the road. Each of these schools has around 3,000 pupils whose families pay for the privilege of them attending the school. The school building and resources were amazing but I could not help but feel a little awkward as Sultana from Awami came in to this amazing building

when all she has is a little room for her children each day. I wondered what they were thinking Were they jealous? Were they cross? I really did not get that impression from them and again I find myself learning from them as I was certainly cross on their behalf!

It was an amazing day where I hope that I was able to do some training but I also felt that I learned so much from the rest. I will now go back to my room and hopefully download the messages from the children for the Kids at Awami.

More soon!