



# Towards real education

In order to improve the social capital of the country, the Tata Education Excellence Programme is helping schools radically transform themselves into creative temples of learning

English essayist and poet Joseph Addison once said that what sculpture is to a block of marble, education is to the human soul. Unfortunately, very rarely does education live up to such high standards. Schools are expected to be institutions that sharpen the intellectual and moral acumen of students. Ironically, they rarely seek to improve their own skills to meet the challenges that each new generation of students and a rapidly changing world thrusts upon them. This is where the Tata Education Excellence Programme (TEEP) aims to make a difference.

The idea for the programme initially came from NK Sharan,

former chief of business excellence and quality at Tata Steel, and currently vice president, Tata Quality Management Services (TQMS). Mr Sharan was on a visit to the US when he learned about the Malcolm Baldrige Criterion for Performance Excellence and how it was being used to improve the quality of education. Impressed with the outcome, he wondered if the programme could be replicated in India. B Muthuraman, then managing director of Tata Steel, approved the idea. Thus, TEEP was initiated in 2003, under the aegis of Tata Steel, at schools in Jamshedpur in Jharkhand (where the company has operations) and nearby areas.

Later, Dr JJ Irani, then chairman of TQMS, and Mr Muthuraman felt that the programme would achieve far more if it was run by TQMS. And so TEEP was formally handed over to TQMS in 2009. Tata Steel's corporate social responsibility division continues to fund it.

TEEP's objective was to embed excellence in schools and improve the quality of education, thereby creating social capital for the country, and empower students to realise their fullest potential. In many ways, the programme is similar to the Tata Business Excellence Model (TBEM) assessments that Tata companies go through. It is also the only one of its kind to be managed by a private enterprise. Similar programmes in the US, Australia, Europe and Singapore are promoted by their respective governments.

When Mr Sharan and his colleagues began to reach out to schools in Jamshedpur, they faced roadblocks. "Schools wondered about the need for improvement, when hundreds were queuing up for admission. The school teacher, the very fulcrum of quality education, was neglected. Most teachers had not attended a single training



**"Last year, schools submitted 47 innovative teaching practices and we awarded about eight of them."**

*NK Sharan, former chief, business excellence and quality, Tata Steel, and vice president, Tata Quality Management Services*

programme in years. There was no focus on planning for the short and long term, no improvement or all-round development and the only measurement was academic," he recalls. One of the first challenges that the team faced was getting school managements to understand the programme. Since it was based on TBEM, the programme included a lot of corporate jargon. The language has since been suitably modified and the criteria are refined every two years.

### EQUIP STUDENTS TO DEVELOP WINGS

Over the years, TEEP has initiated a number of platforms to encourage schools to participate. The first of these was Education Quality Improvement Projects (Equip). Equip provides schools an opportunity to identify, analyse and solve problems using improvement tools and techniques. This has encouraged them to explore and implement solutions for issues such as safety, ethics and discipline, academic performance, student assessment etc. The creation of a Science Park using discarded material is one such illustration of innovation through Equip. More than 40 success stories of improvement are uploaded on the TEEP website ([www.educationexcel.co.in](http://www.educationexcel.co.in)). Participating schools can log in and learn from one another's experiences.

Another platform called Innoteaching seeks to encourage innovation in teaching to make it more student-centric, a departure from the chalk-and-blackboard method traditionally favoured by teachers. Mr Sharan says, "The classroom is the sanctum sanctorum for education, the only place

where real change can happen. We recognise that teaching methods need to be constantly innovated in order to meet the needs of the content, the background of the student, and the cultural nuances of the situation. Last year, schools submitted 47 innovative teaching practices and we awarded about eight of them."

*Pankh* (wings in Hindi) is a programme that empowers students to improve their capabilities. It directly touches students and helps them effect personal improvements in their lives by undertaking an activity such as managing a club or writing for the school magazine. The fourth programme, Pearl, involves the

sharing of good practices. The TEEP website contains as many as 200 such 'pearls'. At the end of each academic year, the best improvement initiatives of all these platforms are shortlisted, presented before a panel and felicitated at an annual reward and recognition programme. Dignitaries like Dr APJ Abdul Kalam and Dr Narendra Jadhav of the Planning Commission have graced TEEP's annual awards functions in previous years.

### APPLICATION FORM AS INTROSPECTION TOOL

While these initiatives enable TQMS to handhold the schools in their quest for educational



Winners of the students' improvement project for the visually impaired with B Muthuraman, former MD, Tata Steel



Ashu Tiwary, principal, Motilal Nehru Public School receives the TEEP award from TV Narendran, MD, Tata Steel

excellence, the assessment process reflects the changes happening on the ground. The TQMS team at Jamshedpur has a comprehensive engagement with schools, similar to the TBEM programme. Schools write a 40-50 page application, based on the TEEP criteria customised

to the requirements of schools. These criteria are based on the best thinking on the education system available currently. Schools are graded on a maximum of 1000 points, and positioned at different commendation levels.

Writing the application

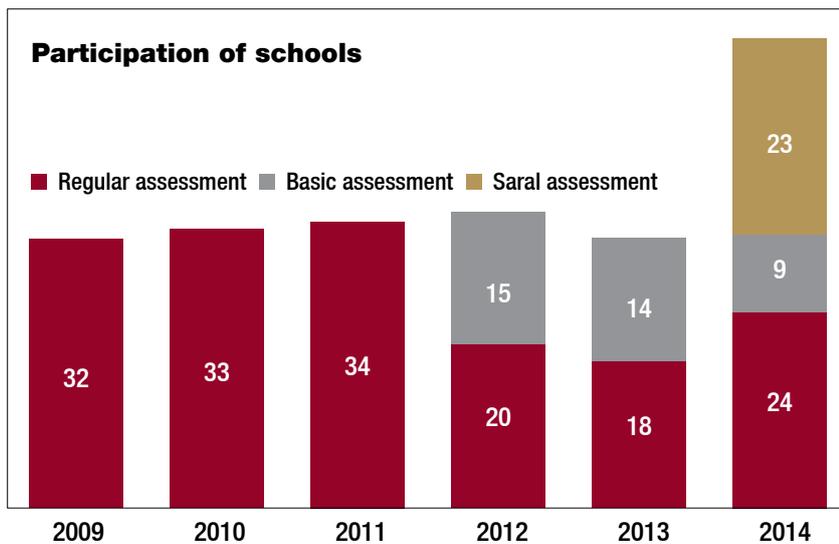
encourages schools to formulate their vision and put in place strategies to achieve it. TQMS helps them throughout the year by organising seminars and workshops and sharing best practices.

A unique feature of the assessment process is the involvement of principals and teachers trained as assessors. Not only does the applicant school get quality feedback, this process also ensures cross learning through the identification of best practices. Over a period of time this has ensured the critical mindset change essential to ensure real transformation.

The services of the TEEP team, including workshops and seminars, are provided almost free of cost to the schools. TQMS acts as a window to the world for the schools of Jamshedpur. Various workshops and seminars on lesson planning, science and social studies, counselling, ethics, etc have been organised, covering more than 300 teachers and principals.

Over 60 schools in Jamshedpur have benefitted from TEEP and this success shows that it has the potential to evolve into a pan-India programme. Beyond Jamshedpur, Erudite School in Assam; Ramakrishna Mission School, Kolkata; St Joseph's School, Ahmedabad, and Mayo College, Ajmer, have also initiated their improvement journey through TEEP. A survey conducted by the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) in 2013 found that a large number of stakeholders were in favour of continuing with the programme.

The TEEP team has successfully translated TQMS's experience in institutionalising excellence across



## Kerala Samajam Model School

This is an established co-ed school affiliated to the CISCE board. In the early days, there was lot of resistance and scepticism, but the school is now seeing the positive change effected by the Tata Excellence Education Programme (TEEP). The school has introduced many Equip projects to motivate “weaker” students and enhance engagement with its stakeholders. TEEP has helped the school to become more systematic. Competency mapping of teachers has helped identify training needs. Meetings with parents has ensured engagement on the part of this key stakeholder group. The school has sought feedback and suggestions from parents, teachers and students, as well as from alumni, and introduced counseling for highly stressed parents and their children.

As a result of these efforts, the school has succeeded in making continuous improvement a habit among teachers and students. Time management skills have improved. Today, the school credits TEEP for helping it realise that creativity and innovation are at the core of education.

the Tata group, to the field of education. Group Chairman Cyrus P Mistry has expressed his belief in the programme and in the need for the Tata group to make a significant intervention in the field of education.

The strength of TEEP lies in the schools' commitment to getting better. Schools that have adopted TEEP have reported a host of benefits, including a focus on academic excellence, IT enablement for better teaching, focus on overall development of students, student safety and ethics, and making learning fun. Schools have also learned to look beyond Indian shores for good practices to imbibe. The hierarchical structure has given way to a creative one, paving the way for activity based learning, peer group teaching, etc. There is tremendous emphasis now on teacher training and development.

TEEP has its ear to the ground when it comes to fine-tuning itself. Schools are now encouraged to appoint an "excellence coordinator" to increase the engagement of teachers in the excellence programme.

A first of its kind feature of this programme has been the creation of a repository (on the website) of 'common performance parameters'. Around 20 common school performance parameters, for academics, student and teacher development were put in place, allowing schools to compare themselves with others.

### POTENTIAL TO REVOLUTIONISE EDUCATION

Having achieved success, TEEP is not about to slacken its pace. The team's mainstay, 'Education



Gulmohur High School receiving the Equip award from B Muthuraman



Chairman Cyrus Mistry at a session with school principals in March 2014

Excellence Criteria (Regular)', grew from 17 participating schools in 2004 to 50 schools in 2014. For schools that began their TEEP journey, addressing the requirement criteria posed a formidable challenge. The 'Education Excellence Criteria (Basic)' was created as a simple assessment tool for schools to accelerate their excellence journey in their early stages. To help government and rural schools, a simpler version, 'Education Excellence Criteria (Saral)', was created. This programme touches 22 schools.

With various versions of the

criteria, participation has increased to 88 schools. The number of assessors has gone up from 54 to 192 in 10 years. Mr Sharan says, "Our efforts to strengthen our offerings will continue. We believe that change happens with co-creation, not by enforcement."

The widespread adoption of TEEP has the potential to revolutionise education in India. The programme has shown that it has the potential to transform education from the "filling of a pail" to the "lighting of a fire". □

— Cynthia Rodrigues