

## DRUK WHITE LOTUS SCHOOLS

*Learning, leadership, culture and spirituality in Ladakh*

Prasad Eledath, Principal, Druk White Lotus School, Shey, sets out the ambitious educational agenda ahead.



Druk White Lotus International is a Himalayan education programme based in Shey, Ladakh. It is gradually developing Druk White Lotus School, Shey, as the 'mother school', a Teacher Resource Centre, branch schools, scholarships, and vocational/enterprise activities. Druk White Lotus will be an institution with a unique character that provides quality education from pre-school to university level programmes and courses. The essence will be to create an institution that will nurture life-long learning and, over time, develop leaders who will contribute to Ladakh's economic, cultural and social growth.

Druk White Lotus School (DWLS) aspires to its own unique and distinct ethos of nurturing excellence. Through a whole-school based approach, it facilitates an environment that encourages innovation and looks into the future, while being firmly rooted in the values and principles inspired by His Holiness Gyalwang Drukpa. It aims to emphasise the social, emotional and psychological development of the child as a complete individual, within the spiritual and ethical framework provided by the rich cultural heritage underpinning life in Ladakh.

Druk White Lotus School enables students to develop the confidence and competence to succeed in the modern world, together with a grounding in Ladakhi language, culture and traditions.

The changing global context requires education to develop children as critical thinkers, minds that are able to question and find answers independently. Young people need to be equipped to do highly specialised and multi-skilled jobs, while at the same time being flexible to follow multiple careers in one lifetime. This will require a decisive shift in the way education is provided and a commitment to ensure access to quality education for all children, providing them with the opportunity and support to discover their unique skills and achieve their full potential.

Acknowledging this, DWLS would like a curriculum focussing on developing life skills, and providing wider opportunities for curricular and co-curricular activities. This will require the curriculum to recognise every child as a potentially independent thinker with a capacity to acquire knowledge and provided the space, have the ability to construct activities that will lead to effective learning outcomes. Pupil-led education, the underlying essence of the DWLS curriculum, will emphasise the achievement of learning outcomes as directed by the student and facilitated by the teacher. This will require the provision of mental and physical spaces that will encourage individual and group work, reflection and sharing with peers and facilitators.

Some salient features of this innovative curriculum will include:

- Pedagogy that lays stress on active, participative learning and engaging young learners in the classroom and outside
- Generic emphasis on learning how to learn underlying all subject and specialist knowledge
- Equal emphasis on co-curricular activities such as arts, music, drama, indoor and outdoor sports.
- Vocational guidance and career counselling interventions, including life skills programmes, study skills workshops, etc.
- Inclusion of new knowledge areas such as environment education, sustainable development and citizenship education.

- Opportunities for students to express their voice and play a key role in deciding the functioning of the school through student councils and school magazine.
- International linkages for faculty development and student exchanges
- Information and Communications Technology to enhance teaching-learning and school management
- Opportunities for action research for teachers
- Outreach - Opportunities to link with and share with the larger educational system for both, students and teachers
- Education Resource Centre for use within the school and outside, with subject specific teaching-learning materials (including those that are indigenously developed), library, audio-visual material and equipment, space for workshops and meetings, research documentation, etc.
- Community service and involvement in social issues ('Live to Love' activities).

In order to commence this transition to becoming a centre of educational excellence, DPKI intends to initiate a School Improvement Programme (SIP) that will lay emphasis on transforming the school culture, enabling its evolution into an effective "*learning organisation*". Through strategic, short and long term interventions, the SIP will work with the attitudes, behaviour, processes and tasks within the school and will lay down the initial steps towards developing as a centre of educational excellence. Some of the key intervention points will be:

- Developing a five-year Strategic Plan that will involve all stakeholders, including a year wise action plan.
- Focussing on curriculum delivery (including lesson planning) and facilitating the shift from teacher-led to student-led teaching-learning by providing more scope for exploration, pair work, group work, peer assessment, examining teacher questioning techniques, use of ICT and other audio-visual tools.

- Re-examining the syllabus, enriching it within the framework set by the authorities, and making it more student friendly by incorporating strategies such as project work, subject-theme webs, investigations, field work, etc. This will involve creating space and time for students to construct and co-construct their learning and enable them to see relevance and make links with the outside world (for example, How Science Works).
- Laying particular emphasis on strengthening teaching-learning in science, such as setting up a science club, participating in science events (including inter-school events such as quizzes and debates), preparing the school for progression into years 8, 9 and 10, special workshops for the teachers, conducting a feasibility study for 10+2, etc.
- Creating enabling platforms wherein all stakeholders can work together as a team, having the freedom and safety to reflect on their practices, share good practices, express their opinions and jointly solve problems. Particular emphasis will be laid on teacher empowerment and increasing teacher accountability (teacher workshops, career progression, opportunities to have subject related discussions, contribute to whole-school decision making such as inputs into the five-year strategic plan, preparation of the budget, etc.) and parent and governor involvement.
- Facilitating the growth of internal change agents within the school (teachers as resource persons) at all levels and in the community that will take the process of change ahead independently.
- Creating an awareness of the role of education within the larger community and how DPKI can contribute. This will also serve as a platform for image building and sharing the experiences of whole-school based change.

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