Beaconhouse School System Gulshan Middle 1

How teaching progressive values brings change

WORLD'S BEST SCHOOL
Community Collaboration

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WORLD'S BEST SCHOOL PRIZES

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Introduction

Beaconhouse School System Gulshan Middle 1 is a private school in Karachi, Pakistan, that has created key outreach programmes based on progressive values. The school seeks to help some of the most vulnerable people in the community, in particular transgender and intersex people. Beaconhouse School System Gulshan Middle 1 ethos centres around the idea that education and the youth who inherit progressive ideals can invoke greater change – even if that change is small. To achieve this, the school has launched a number of socially-focused projects and initiatives that work closely with some of the most marginalised communities within Pakistani society.

Profile:

Country:
Pakistan

Region:
Karachi

School type:
Private school

Location area:
City

Student population:
550 to 600

Prize Category:
Community Collaboration

"The emotional stability of our students is most important... this is not a women-oriented society, but men are the ones who are dominant. So, we need to tell our women and little girls how to deal with those changes and how to survive in society."
– Maliha Noman, Headmistress, Beaconhouse School System Gulshan Middle 1

In-depth look

CONTEXT AND CHALLENGE

Beaconhouse School System Gulshan Middle 1 is a member of the Beaconhouse School System family and one of the oldest campuses in Pakistan. It hosts students from Classes 6, to 10, catering to the 10 to 15-year-old age group.

Beaconhouse School System Gulshan Middle 1 has graduated notable scholars who have gone on to pursue higher education at internationally-renowned universities like BPP University London, University of Regina, and Bridgeport Canada. Some former students have become company CEOs and notable market leaders.

The school seeks to enlighten its students and encourage them to help bring about positive change through its Personal, Social, Health, and Economic (PSHE) education. The core PSHE strands are Personal Development, Social, Health, and Emotional Values and Beliefs.

Due to a high level of illiteracy and unemployment in the wider community, there has been little progress in construction-related projects, and very little has been done to improve the local education system or address the high level of ungainful employment. As such, the school has used PSHE as a foundation for club activities that engage with different parts of the community and promote various initiatives. One eco-friendly initiative was the 'Team PNEC- NUST, Shell Eco-Marathon', which encouraged

students to research and help design models for a fuel-efficient car. This, in turn, helped broaden their understanding of how eco-friendly transportation could be adopted within Pakistani society.

This is an example of how Beaconhouse School System Gulshan Middle 1 seeks to address some of the wider issues within Pakistani society, further acknowledging some of the country's inherent, systemic problems. "This a male-dominated country," says Talha Saleem, a teacher at the school, talking about the various challenges the school faces. "There is not a fair justice system. Instead, women become the victims of so many abuses. There is a lot of hatred and intolerance in relation to religious conflicts, so these are some of the issues that prevail in our society."

As such, the school has a strong belief in the power of education, and that, together, educators and students can bring about greater change.

The school, therefore, makes a concerted effort to encourage its students to join initiatives that try to bring forth some positive change, no matter how small. And because the faculty is aware of the gender disparities within the wider community and society at large, there is a marked focus on discrimination against transgender and intersex populations.

"The transgender and intersex community in Pakistan is a highly neglected sector," says Saleem, "and it forms a huge part of our population overall. They're treated as a taboo in this society." Saleem explains that the school wants its students to learn to treat marginalised populations with respect and dignity.

"To make sure their thoughts and minds are not inflicted negatively by whatever is roaming around in our society – whatever the challenges we are facing – we, as a school, find the solution in community collaboration."

– Talha Saleem, Teacher, Beaconhouse School System Gulshan Middle 1
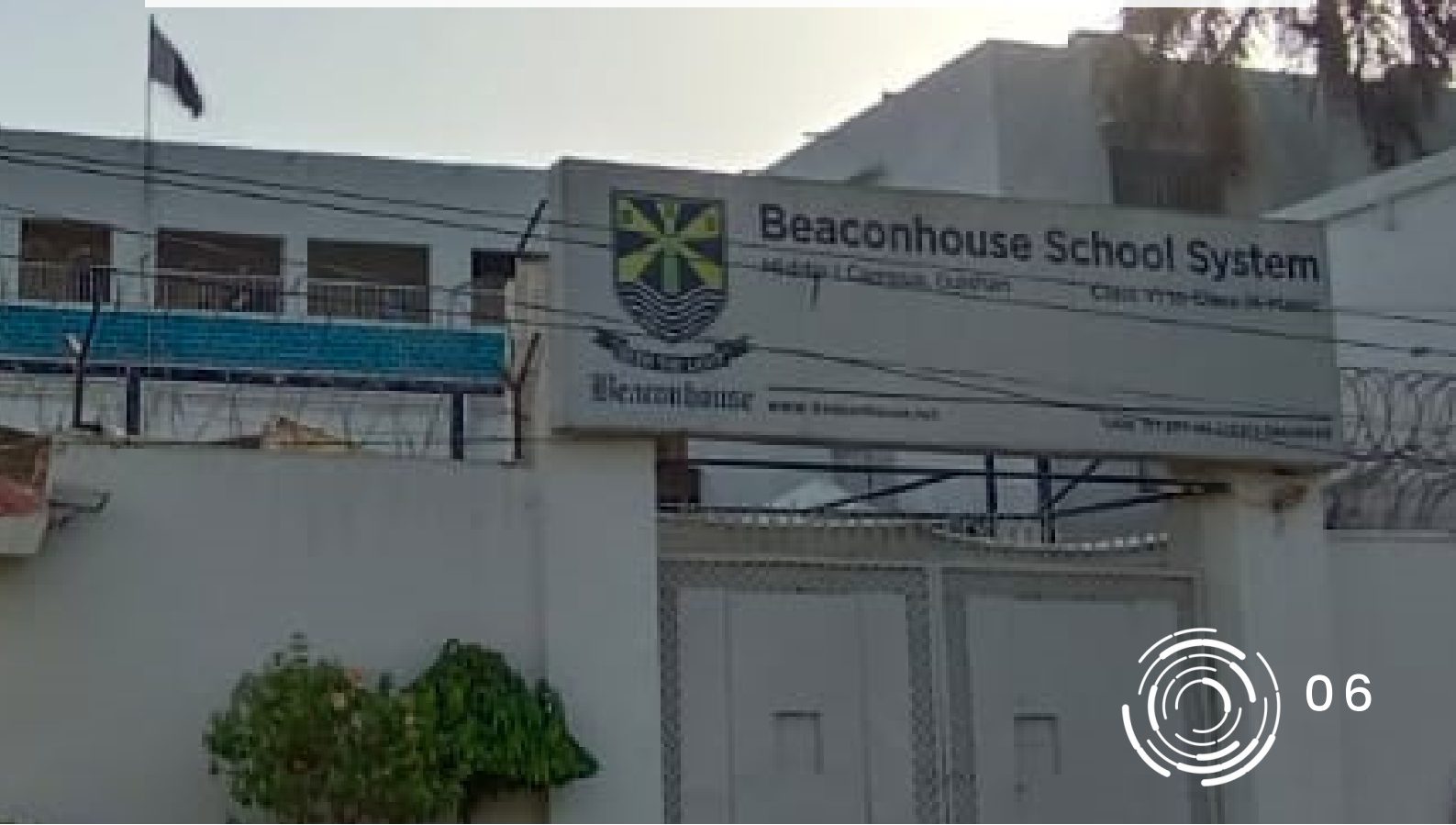
EXPERTISE AND APPROACH

To empower students and help them understand the values of mutual respect and tolerance, as well as to promote social inclusion and diversity, the school works year-round to create ties with different parts of its local communities, especially within the transgender and intersex community. With the expertise of the Social Services Club, students have approached and partnered with Nisha Rao – the first transgender lawyer in Pakistan.

One project with Rao was a documentary series, shot by the students, who spoke with Rao at length about the daily experiences of the Pakistani trans and intersex community. Some students have also partnered with the TransPride society and carry out Ration Drives and help raise awareness to spread a message of love, peace, and dignity for everyone.
This community partnership has proven critical in helping people develop and in promoting cultural enrichment within the wider community.

Other than scheduled Parent-Teacher meetings, parents can also make appointments to come and speak with the teachers or the management team to boost parental engagement. The school also conducts regular one-to-one meetings between students and teachers, which helps promote positive outcomes for students.

To further instil social development, students often participate in a wide range of extra-curricular activities and have won accolades in various regional and international competitions such as Inter-Regional Sports Competitions, Kangaroo Linguistics Contest, and the WWF Eco-Adventure.

The school clubs also cater to other interests, such as art, writing, and ICT.

A student council system gives the students a sense of leadership and responsibility. With 45 years of excellence to its name, Beaconhouse School System Gulshan Middle 1 conforms to initiatives such as Rotational Timetable, Child Protection Committee, and Free Student Counselling Sessions. It also creates the opportunity for teachers to help identify issues that may require a holistic, flexible solution. The school's Community Collaboration Coordinators mentor the students and help them develop values and intrinsic worth by ensuring the smooth execution of PSHE Lessons.

The PSHE strands of the school's educational model enable students to gain insight into different community outlooks and connect their own experiences with the classroom learning environment. As part of the PSHE component, there is an emphasis on gender roles within Pakistani society. The faculty arrange counselling sessions for both it's male and female students to help them learn how to navigate these issues and how to best survive the cultural stigmas they may encounter.

The school has also focused on getting all major stakeholders involved in its initiatives, believing that parents in particular would be a key factor in the initiatives' success. "Parental involvement has been an integral part of the success of whatever we do in the school," says Maliha Noman, the school's Headmistress. "Their feedback is really valued and welcomed."

At the end of the year, the school gives out a survey and faculty members analyse the responses, using them to improve their activities and programmes for the future.

"We want our students to be the change agents of our society."

– Talha Saleem, Teacher,
Beaconhouse School System
Gulshan Middle 1

OUTCOMES AND RESULTS

The school's programmes have given students the opportunity to learn and develop their own personal interests. For example, some students have become ambassadors for a project called 'Team PNEC- NUST, Shell Eco-Marathon' which is aimed at designing and building a single-seat, fuel-efficient car to participate in the global Shell Eco-Marathon competition.

Not only did the students involved in the project gain a deeper understanding of the ways Pakistan could develop fuel-efficient cars, but they also ran numerous social campaigns to promote the vision of an eco-friendly Pakistan.

The students' collaboration with Nisha Rao also proved to be highly influential and inspiring, where Rao spoke openly of her difficulty in coming out as transgender and pursuing a career in law.

Her story has given students a better understanding of gender expressions and gender identity, and students now actively support and take part in causes that promote gender equality, moral values, and true self-representation.

Beaconhouse School System Gulshan Middle 1 students and faculty have also taken a closer look at conflict management and community integration. Among the concepts they have learned, they were introduced to the peaceful use of force and the application of the law to bring the spirit of justice and fairness to conflict resolution. At the same time, they saw that community integration requires co-existence and harmony between communities, families, persons, and various other sectors.

Key Steps

IDENTIFYING KEY ISSUES WITHIN THE COMMUNITY

The first step in developing effective community collaboration was to identify and look for a solution to a key problem that the school was facing. The school, therefore, developed clubs in an attempt to engage with the wider community, which then allowed them to uncover the most pressing problems as well as the key stakeholders, such as local government representatives, teachers, parents, administrators, health officials, etc.
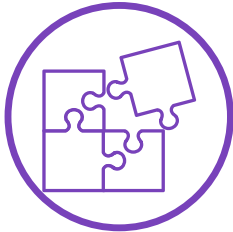
DEVELOPING INITIATIVES FOR STAKEHOLDERS

One of the most important steps the school recognised was to learn and understand what key stakeholders cared about.

One example was acknowledging the love most students had for animals. From this, the school initiated a programme called Animal Rescue Teams.

COORDINATION

With the help of its Community Coordinators, the school set progress targets and timelines. It held weekly planning meetings with key stakeholders, such as parents. These meetings helped set the school in the right direction and established how much they could achieve within a certain timeframe.

MEETINGS

These were one of the core activities with focus groups and stakeholders. These meetings allowed the school to collect key data to shape its initiatives and better inform future decisions. Having separate teams helped ensure everyone received the same amount of work and support, making them all feel valued and heard within their own communities.
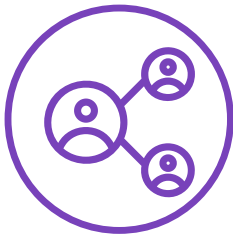
MAINTAINING PARTNER RELATIONSHIPS

The school sought to learn how its programme partners were faring and would stay up-to-date on their progress. Every interaction was clearly communicated to everyone else involved in the programme, which, in turn, helped keep the stakeholders properly informed. Social media proved to be a vital tool in sharing valuable information and engaging new stakeholders.

COLLABORATION WITH STAKEHOLDERS

The last step in the process was the school's commitment to working closely with all stakeholders to ensure that the partnerships remained focused and effective. This involved planning initiatives together, communicating, and engaging in different activities to help build relationships and bring people forward.

Advice and Guidance

Because of the different contexts each institution may have, it's important to consider the different ways that developing this expertise will better serve the students and the wider community. The issues that each school wants to address should be translated to fit their individual context. Collaboration and planning are crucial, in particular in coordinating with and informing parents and other key stakeholders on the initiatives the school intends to carry out.

Mapping every stage, from transport to the actual programme itself, and a detailed explanation of how students will benefit from the activity are also important factors to consider.

More information

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Learn more about their work by watching their event at 2022's T4 World Education Week: watch here