



**New Delhi, India**

# **MCD Co-ed Primary School Lajpat Nagar III**

**Developing parental  
engagement in low-income  
communities**



**WORLD'S  
BEST SCHOOL**  
Innovation

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**Lemann**



**WORLD'S  
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# Introduction

MCD Co-ed Primary School Lajpat Nagar III, a primary government school in New Delhi, serves some of the poorest communities in the city. With monthly incomes of under \$80, private education is unaffordable and public schools are the only chance for students to receive a quality education. But financial pressures often meant students had to drop out of school to support their families. MCD Co-ed Primary School Lajpat Nagar III is turning this reality around. In a typical government school in India, reports show that 50% of students from grade 5 cannot read a simple grade 2 text. However, in MCD Co-ed Primary School Lajpat Nagar III, 85% of the students meet or exceed grade-level expectations. Its interventions have seen school enrollment rocket from just nine in 2015 to 500 today. The school works closely with parents so they can see first-hand the value of quality education and dispel the stereotype that government school education is inadequate.





# Profile:

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**Country:**

India



**Region:**

New Dehli



**School type:**

Public school



**Location area:**

Urban area



**Student population:**

501 to 1000



**Prize Category:**

Innovation

“This whole ecosystem that we’ve managed to create... I think it is a testament of how much can be achieved if we just take into account what parents really want and what they’re really looking for.”

– Urmila Chowdhury,  
Education Director at  
Peepul



# In-depth look

## CONTEXT AND CHALLENGE

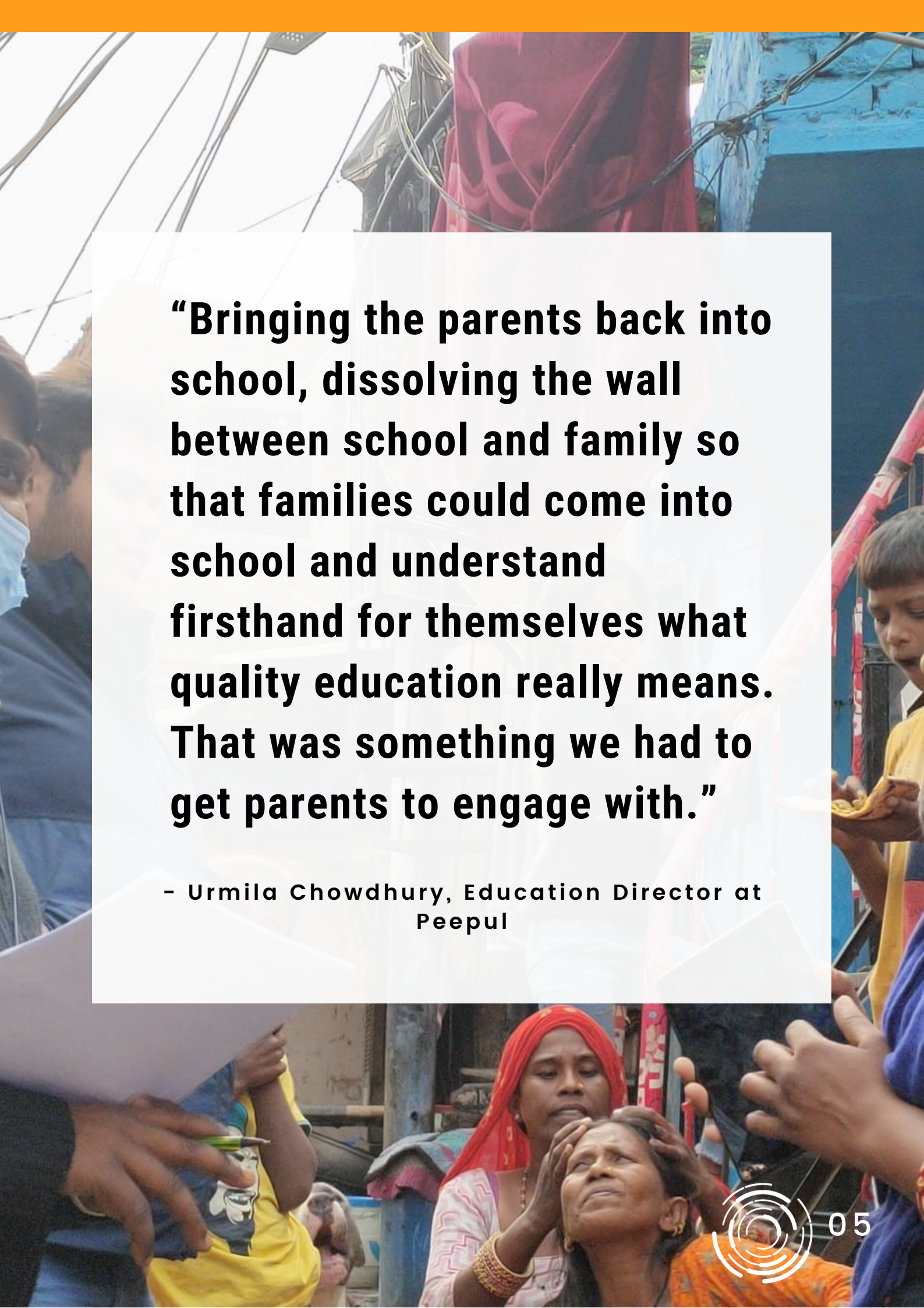
MCD Co-ed Primary School Lajpat Nagar III is a government primary school. Since 2015, The school has been run under a Public-Private-Partnership (PPP) between the South Delhi Municipal Corporation SDMC (local governing body) and Peepul (an education non-profit working towards school transformation in India).

At the beginning of its tenure, in 2015, the school had only nine students enrolled. The infrastructure was poor, student engagement was low, parents had lost faith in the ability of the government school to adequately educate their children, and the community relationship with the school was almost non-existent. Often parents would get their children to help support their families financially instead of learning in an educational system they believed had little merit.

These biases were generational: many parents of students had themselves gone through the government-standard educational system and left feeling abandoned by the system that was meant to serve them. In addition, because of the low level of education amongst many in the community, they were unaware of the ways they could get their children into a better educational system.

The school found that there was a strong myth around the idea that parents who were uneducated saw little value in gaining an education, but this was not true. “The truth is when parents do not have education themselves, education is really hugely important to them – what they don’t usually see is the value in education that is provided in a government school,” said Urmila Chowdhury, Education Director at Peepul.





**“Bringing the parents back into school, dissolving the wall between school and family so that families could come into school and understand firsthand for themselves what quality education really means. That was something we had to get parents to engage with.”**

**- Urmila Chowdhury, Education Director at Peepul**





# EXPERTISE AND APPROACH

To boost enrollment and to change the minds of those within the wider community, the faculty decided to increase its engagement with families in order to convince them of the benefits of their children receiving an education at their school. Faculty were aware that the community they were trying to serve was heavily neglected: “Respect is a game changer for us because of the communities that we work with,” the school staff says. “The communities that we serve are amongst the most vulnerable, underserved communities in Delhi.”

The teachers, therefore, worked closely with parents so they could showcase the quality of the education they were intended to offer and help dispel deeply held misconceptions about the value of government-standard schools in India.

This was achieved through a package of interventions. The first was creating visit days that gave parents and families an opportunity to see how students were taught and the level of teaching the school offered to their children. Because taking a day off from work would result in losing a day’s wage, the school worked to ensure that the visit days were worth their time – parents were allowed to observe classrooms in real time, had orientations on the school’s key values and held workshops about the community-wide issues.

At the heart of the school’s expertise is strong parental engagement and support best seen through its ‘Parental Partnership towards Learning Ecosystem Transformation’ initiative. This was deployed as a cyclical approach focusing on multiple touchpoints with the parents and the wider community – the process aimed to create parents who can act as champions for students throughout their lives,



helping them develop important competencies for the future and skills that would aid their learning. The school also wanted to change the power dynamic within the wider community and created space for community members to help shape initiatives launched by the school and voice their opinions on the kind of environment their children learned in. Because families were unused to being so actively involved in the learning experiences of their children, the faculty created School Management Committees which comprised a number of parents.

Activities aimed at improving student learning were also implemented and led the school to innovate its curriculum, focusing not only on academia but creating a safe and caring learning environment for its students. Teachers were also placed on a development programme that equipped them with the skills to teach students at a high level.





# OUTCOMES AND RESULTS

Within a year of its new measures to engage parents and change their mindsets around the value of government education, enrollment increased from 9 pupils to 225. At present, the school has a student population of over 500 children. In a typical government school in India, reports show 50% of students from grade 5 cannot read a simple grade 2 text. However, in MCD Co-ed Primary School Lajpat Nagar III, 85% of the students meet or exceed grade-level expectations.



# Key Steps



## CANVASSING THE AREA

The school canvassed the surrounding area to understand the number of students who were out of school or weren't aware of the available services at the school. To help spread the word, faculty gave out flyers, held street plays promoting the school's services, and campaigned door to door.



## INFORMATION

Through respectful and patient communication, staff members managed to relay information about the school's services that helped counter many negative misconceptions community members held about the value of government schools. Staff also followed up with parents who expressed some interest in the school's services and helped them with their documentation.





## **IN-SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT**

In order to nurture strong parental connections with the schools, there was a faculty-wide effort to develop a stronger rapport with parents. This started with an orientation for all the classrooms irrespective of grade. The orientation was used as a platform to help parents familiarise themselves with the school's system, principles and core values. Workshops were also conducted to showcase the different ways their children would be educated at the school.



## **CLASSROOM OBSERVATION**

Parents were then invited to observe in real-time how the school conducted its classes and how teachers instructed students. Teachers would encourage parents to ask questions and after the classroom visits, there would be an open forum for parents to discuss in detail with faculty members their teaching practices. Staff also use this time to understand parental feedback and incorporate it into their teaching practices.







## HOME VISITS

The school planned home visits by teachers and prioritise students who have historically struggled with engaging with faculty or have shown signs of distress. In these visits, faculty speak to the parent while aiming to understand the family's overall context. One-to-one conversations take place with parents to keep them abreast of any new developments with students.



## HIRING COMMUNITY OFFICERS

To maintain a strong rapport with the wider community, the school hired Community Officers. They continue nurturing deep relationships with the communities students hail from and often physically check in with students and provide need-based support to the families through counselling.



## REWARD SYSTEM

To incentivise and recognise good behaviour amongst the students, for example, when a child's attendance increases by 15%, the school makes an effort to celebrate their hard work by pinning their profiles and pictures on the school bulletin board.



# Advice and Guidance

In order to serve people within the wider school community, the institution needs to be able to change itself. Faculty should be open-minded to the experiences of students and families who enter the school. Community engagement is crucial. It is also important to understand the expectations parents have of their children's education and, if necessary, try and address any misconceptions they may have about the value of education and the ways a student could be taught. The school's teachers themselves had to go through a lot of deconditioning regarding their own biases, which helped them produce a deeper change in how a government-funded school functioned.

## More information



**Learn more about their work by watching their event at 2022's T4 World Education Week: [watch here](#)**

