

Letter from Helen Jones

Roseberry School is on the outskirts of Darjeeling packed in among among a jumble of buildings on a steep mountainside. From the edge of the school yard, tea gardens come into view some 500 metres below where the houses run out.

On the edge of the tea gardens is another school, but I've never seen any children near the place. It is a Government school and though it is staffed with well paid teachers, it seems that no actual education happens there, just a child minding service with whichever teacher turns up that day. This kind of situation is replicated in many other Government primary schools, forcing parents to look elsewhere in order to have their children properly educated.



That is why private schools flourish in Darjeeling, a town of roughly 200,000 inhabitants. Most of these establishments are over-subscribed and expensive, and are therefore the preserve of a well-to-do middle class.

So what happens to the poor? Roseberry School is a unique private school catering for some of the under privileged children from surrounding areas. Its founders believed that good education is the right of every child, whether rich or poor. So fees are highly discounted and families pay according to their means, some paying nothing.

Roseberry may lack the snob value of the older private schools, but in the last few years it has gained a reputation for delivering the best primary education in Darjeeling. And so it too is highly sought after. Its pupils are cared for and supported by teachers drawn from the local community, and ex pupils return with great pride to tell of their achievements at Secondary School and beyond.

From a vantage point on the lane which runs down past Roseberry, it is possible to glimpse our school perched on the steep hillside above, where its smart terracotta bulk stands out like a beacon of hope for families all over the area.

Many of Roseberry's pupils have experienced the loss of a parent or some other traumatic event in their young lives.

The bright eyed young fellow (pictured above) is Aditya Karki. He is only five years old and is just finishing his third year at Roseberry.

His mother is a single parent, the father having abandoned his wife soon after Aditya's birth. His mother obtained work as a housemaid and managed to organise accommodation near the school so that Aditya could attend Roseberry and get a good education in spite of their poverty. He is curious about everything and good at his studies, but he especially likes to draw and paint.

Thanks to Roseberry, Aditya's prospects are bright.

Eight year old Shreeyansh (pictured below) enrolled at Roseberry five years ago. During the Covid pandemic, his young father died very suddenly, and shortly afterwards his mother abandoned Shreeyansh and left the area with another man. Luckily his grandparents who lived nearby were able to take care of him, and along the way school has given him some continuity. In spite of all he has gone through, Shreeyansh is a cheerful and eager pupil who's good at his studies, but he especially loves playing football.

If all continues to go well, Aditya and Shreeyansh will go on to join the ranks of ex-pupils of Roseberry who are just beginning to take their rightful place as fully contributing members of the community.

It is very pleasing that the school itself has gradually become more self sustaining, thereby making its future more secure. If the school charged fees at a commercial rate there is little doubt it could become fully independent of SAI but that would automatically exclude all the disadvantaged children it currently serves. So I must stress that they still need significant support from SAI to carry on the great work they are doing.

Thank you for your interest in this heart warming project.

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