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### **Abstract**

This school is a co-education centre where moral values and cultural practices are carried out extensively. To do this, they have a “Traditional Attires Day” every Friday where each student comes in his or her own traditional dresses. The school conducts parent’s teachers meetings to discuss over issues related to their rights and problems. The students participate in various National Level activities like Yoga, Science Quiz, Cultural events, etc. in the school level. They have created space for organic farming. There is a designated Happiness Class once a week at the end of the day. The Scottish Bagpiper Band is the pride of the school which was another innovation that was introduced in the school.

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### **Socio-Cultural Context of the School**

Lying in the primitive and protected zone, SONAM CHODA LEPHA MEMORIAL SECONDARY SCHOOL (SCLMSS) is situated at Lingdong, a small village that lies along the mighty Teesta in Upper Dzongu, North Sikkim. Majorly inhabited by the Lepcha Community along with other community through marriages, works, education, etc. The local people here are mostly farmers, carrying out various farm activities, dairy and poultry farming, eco tourism, transportation, shop keeping, and the government sectors.



Picture no 1

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The key strength of SCLMSS, Lingdong is that, it is the only secondary school in North Sikkim that has the highest enrollment of students. We have a total of two hundred and forty four (244) students, out of which one hundred and thirty seven (137) are girls and one hundred and seven (107) are boys. One hundred and one (101) are in the pre and primary level and the rest i.e one hundred and forty three (143) constitute the secondary. We keep working with the help of SMCs, and local bodies like the panchayats, self help groups, etc to increase the enrollment every year.

**Distinct Identity-** SCLMSS is a co-education centre where moral values and cultural practices are carried out extensively. To do this, we have “**Traditional Attires Day**” every Friday where each student comes in his or her own traditional dresses. It has becoming a matter of importance for our society wherein we have forgotten to wear our traditional attire or rather we do not give importance to them owing to our busy lives and daily schedules.

SCLMSS felt the need to take the initiative of starting and reviving the importance of our tradition and custom by introducing the traditional dress routine in school every Friday. The entire school will be dressed in their respective traditional attires including the staff members. We also had the advantage to start this programme from the school level because of the fact that the futures of our society are all present in the school and in one group.

On the same day, one house will present a patriotic or a folk song on any language or any community in the morning assembly. Along with the choir group, the rest will also join them. With this we not only fulfill and communicate the idea of our community and traditions of our state but it also gives a sense of unity among the students.

The **objective** behind these practices is for the need of carrying out and preserving our customs and traditions inherited from our forefathers to our generation and then further to our future generations. Through these, the skills and moral values of the students are all sharpened and they are all able to apply what they learn in school and inculcate in their life.

**Equity and Equality** The school is located in the Lepcha Tribal zone, a fully Lepcha dominated area. However, we have children coming from different communities and irrespective of their caste, creed, community, religion, gender etc; they are all treated equally and in a fair manner.

**Challenges-**To initiate something new is a challenge in itself. Our school also faced such challenges while starting this tradition. One reason being the fact that most of our students are first generation learners and they come from lower middle classes families who are dependent on agriculture and farming. So to convince their parents to invest and spend much more amounts than usual on extra new initiatives was a major problem faced during the initial phase. Once introduced, the problem arose again when they failed to get dressed neatly and correctly to the school.

However, like the saying goes, “Practice makes a man perfect”, now with the help of the teachers, our students are able to get dressed properly. They have also learnt the importance and the significance attached to their traditional attires and their customs. They enjoy and know the values and the ideas related to the ways that they are worn and take pride in wearing their

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traditional dresses. They rather look forward to Friday because of this new initiative taken by the school. This day brings a lot of color, vibrant and vigor among the students as well as the teachers. It also represents the fact about India's "UNITY IN DIVERSITY" in all forms be it language, religions, culture, tradition and customs.



Picture no 2

### **Efforts initiated or the Process of Transformation**

The school is located in the rural zone so this is a challenge we face almost on a daily basis. The children commute from far and wide. Therefore, because of this we face irregularity of the students, early marriages and dropouts because of various reasons. Moreover, most of the students are the first and the second generation learners. Hence, they fail to acquire support from their parents because many of the parents are uneducated or rather involved in farming due to which they are unable to dedicate their time to their children's education. Hence, we conduct parent's teachers meetings to discuss over the issues related to their rights and problems of the children. If needed, we assign the teachers to visit the student's house in case of any serious problems related to their irregularity, illness, etc. We counsel them from time to time and do our best to work for the welfare of the students.

**Opportunities-**The school tries their best to expose the students as much as possible through different educational programmes and excursion trips which provides a platform for them to



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learn new things. We have some instances where our students got opportunities to participate in various National Level activities like Yoga, Science Quiz, Cultural events, etc. in the school level. The students are provided with various occasions to discover their talents through different programmes beside daily academic classes like performing musical bands, painting, dancing and singing, skits, Happiness classes and Teacher-Guardian, etc.

For overall improvement of the school and students, the school has tried to bring small changes in the attitude of the students by making our school (Government School) an English Medium School. Breaking the stereotype that the government schools are dominated by their mother tongue or other languages, we have focused mainly on English language to make teaching-learning more effective. So, we have made English as a medium of instruction in the school and is made mandatory in the school campus both by the teachers and the students. With this new found attitude and knowledge, they can communicate and present seminars and interact effectively. English being the official language of our country, and is widely spoken around the globe, it gives them utmost pleasure and confidence and also brings a lot of advantages in lives.

### **Innovative Practices Taken by the School**

#### **Organic Farming**

Apart from all the above programmes and academic fields, SCLMSS has its own curriculum, different from other programmes being carried out and participate for the overall development of the students and the school. One such programme is the practice of **Organic Farming**.

The objectives behind implementing this program in the school are to make the students aware of the importance of organic produce and since Sikkim boasts being the first organic state of India, it adds all the more to the purpose of introducing organic farming in the school. It creates opportunities for the students and also helps them to be self sufficient, reliable and work towards future business prospects. The students and teachers work together, learn simple calculations practically and gain knowledge about the soil biodiversity; the previously unused and barren lands are put into use. We can develop the sense of participation through community mobilization and above all the young learners are able to prepare organic manures by themselves now with team work and dedication.

At an age when entire nation mourns over the use of pesticides in the edible foods and vegetables that we consume, SCLMSS stands tall amidst all the other schools soaring high up in the sky promoting the use of organic produce under my leadership since 2015 by creating two greenhouses. We are able to produce safe chemical free products. While enhancing the skills of our students, we are also able to protect the soil and the environment. We also have some challenges that we face or will continue to face in the process. Extra time and energy are required besides the academic and other important daily activities of the school but we manage to cover most of them in the zero hours or during holidays and the students as well as the teachers put in a lot of effort and do it with utmost dedication.

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We prepare organic pesticides from all the locally available plants along with cow urine to fight the pests on the crops. Together with it we prepare our own fertilizers with the mixture of uprooted unwanted grasses, madhyam and water in our compost pits to be utilized on our crops.

Very often the crops are attacked by pests and so on. But the hard work and the time given to such important tasks never fail to bear sweet fruits. Hence, the saying, “As you sow, so shall you reap” goes quite relevant in our case. We continue to learn and adopt new methods each time we work. There are positive remarks from everyone that consume our organic products or simply when they see the hard work of our students bloom.

Hence, as long as I am a part of this institution I shall keep encouraging the school to continue with such activities which also contributes in skill development and to promote organic farming with great zeal and dedication, contributing towards making Sikkim a pesticides free state and maintaining a sound and healthy body.



Picture no 3

### **Social Inclusion or Community Mobilization**

Along with the school fraternity, we also have the community people who tirelessly render help in the working and the development of the school whenever needed. We have the school management committee, Self Help Groups, panchayats, parents, different departments like Agriculture, Horticulture, Forest, NGOs, spices boards, ICAR, etc. They come forward to volunteer and help in any form of kind, physical help, and donations which goes towards the welfare and upliftment of the school. They also sometimes cook Mid Day Meals for the students whenever possible.



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Picture no 4 : Social Mobilization

**Happiness Class:** To make teaching learning more effective and to divert it from the monotonous pace, we have started with what we call the HAPPINESS CLASS once a week at the end of the day. Here, the students will keep away all the books. Instead, they will showcase their talents in any form, share their experiences or storytelling, singing, dancing, etc. Everyone, including the teachers will take part and enjoy themselves in the process of learning. It also helps the students ease their minds and become empathetic and compassionate.



Picture no 5- Happiness Class

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## Visible Results of Transformation

### Scottish Bag Piper Band

This was another innovation that we introduced in our school. It was not an easy task for the school as it cost a huge amount to introduce and to maintain it. Since this was an all together new project, involving and motivating the students to join the band club, finding the band instructor and the salaries were some major challenges initially. We somehow managed and yes today, **THE SCOTTISH BAGPIPER BAND** is the pride of SCLMSS. One way of involving new students to learn the art is by encouraging the existing member to take one standby student (new recruit) under his or her guidance.

This way when a student passes out, the school need not worry about the club. Besides, the band instructor is hired from time to time for the overall inspection and performance. Hence, our band has since then been the pride of our school. It is one of the first kinds in the entire North Sikkim for which I take utmost gratification.



Picture no 6\_



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### Segregation of Waste Materials

The students collect waste, plastic materials from the school premises and the surrounding areas, segregate, wash and dry them before they are converted into useful products. The same are showcased along with the organic produces during various exhibition sales and funds are collected for the welfare of the school.

- **Herbal Garden :** is another programme that we have started in the school. All the locally available medicinal plants and herbs are planted in this garden and are looked after by the Eco Club members. In case of emergencies, for instance of bleeding due to injury, we make use of the herbs to control the bleeding before proper First Aid arrives.



Picture no 7- Herbal gardening



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- **Bird Nest-** To protect our biodiversity, I started a new initiative of constructing Bird houses on the tree branches. And we can see birds visiting these houses in the different seasons to build their nests. This has helped produce an asethetic natural environment for teaching learning.



Picture no 8 Bird Nest

- **Swachh Vidhyalaya Abhiyaan-** This is one important initiative that I, as a leader of the institution thought was of a vital importance. Every day the school starts with cleaning the campus and ourselves to make our day bright, beautiful and fresh. It sets and prepares us for the whole day. Hence, we engage ourselves in Swachh Vidyalaya Abhiyaan before assembly from 9 to 9:15 am every day.

### Visible Results of Transformation

*“Success is not final; failure is not fatal: It is the courage to continue that counts.”*

- The success story of our Organic Farming went to the extend in which a documentary film based on it was shot by SCERT (Gangtok) with our children as lead roles in it. The same lasted for three long and tiring days for the school and the students. It is because of the dedication most importantly of the students, the school, the staff members and also with the help of the local people that this was possible.
- In the year 2015, the Eastern India science and drama competition was organized by Birla Industrial and Technology Museum in Kolkata. SCLMSS represented Sikkim and was awarded with 3<sup>rd</sup> Best Drama Trophy.
- Based on all India rating of Green Schools, the Center for Science and Environment – GREEN SCHOOLS PROGRAMME was held in Delhi in 2015. Our school was included in the top 5 schools in the entire country and was ranked 4<sup>th</sup>.
- HRDD, Government of Sikkim also conferred Swachh Vidyalaya Puraskar to SCLMSS in recognition of excellence in sanitation and hygiene practices in school and undertaking significant steps towards fulfilling the mandate of Swachh Vidyalaya Abhiyaan campaign.
- Swachh Vidyalaya Puraskar 2016-17 from Sikkim at the National Level held at Dr. Radha Krishnan Auditorium in New Delhi was conferred to SCLMSS from the hands of Honourable Union HRDD Minister Prakash Javedkar, for recognizing Excellence in water Sanitation and Hygiene in school.
- The school represented in the yoga Olympiad for the consecutive three years.
- In March 2016, we produced 100% result in CBSE, AISSE. This was a great achievement in the history of the school.
- SCLMSS was conferred with State Green Award and Chief Minister Green School Rolling Trophy in the year 2016 on the eve of World Environment Day held at Mangan, North Sikkim.

### Impact on the Students

The students feel very proud to be a part of this institution. With various projects and transformations, there has been a positive change in their attitude. They are more responsible, disciplined, confident and energetic. And also with the help of the local bodies, the dropout rate of the students has come down.



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### **Further Areas for Change / Transformation**

- Enhance quality education.
- Minimum level of learning which can be related to their daily lives.
- Opening up an Alumni Association.
- Adequate skilled and qualified staff members.
- Proper infrastructure.
- Smart classes.
- Boundary fencing around the school premises, etc.

### **School Leader and Transformation**

“The character of the school reflects and proclaims the character of the headmaster” - P.C.Wren.

I’ve been a part of SCLMSS since July, 2014 and being the leader of this institution; I keep encouraging and motivating my staff members and students every now and then. I make it a point that my staffs take part in all kinds of programmes and activities that we organize or conduct in the school. I make sure that all the members of the institution are present and properly dressed when they come to school and encourage and motivate them to be the role model for the students. Emphasizing on punctuality and discipline and making sure that everyone follows and adheres by it (both the teachers and the students).

Working with this organization has not only had a positive impact in the school but has a positive influence in my life as well. I see myself more as a confident, visionary leader, a person who can contribute more to the society, a community builder and a leader who is emotionally stable, empathetic and passionate.

The school under my leadership and with the support from my faculty members, the SMC, panchayats and other supports from local bodies, has been able to achieve many goals and still aims to move forward with great commitment and dedication. With great team effort, we have made the seemingly impossible, possible. However, sky is the limit and on this note we shall continue to work for the betterment of the school, our state and ultimately our country.

**“Miles to go before I sleep and Miles to go before I sleep.”**

**Robert Frost**