

Expatriate couple help turn around government school in Kerala

FAIZAL AND SHABANA MAKE ONCE-CRUMBLING SCHOOL A MODEL OF EXCELLENCE

DUBAI

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A UAE-based Indian couple's efforts to elevate the standard of a girl's government school in Kozhikode of India's Kerala has paid rich dividends, with the local government now set to implement its exemplary model across 141 government schools in the state benefitting 300,000 students.

The Nadakkavu Government Vocational Higher Secondary School (GVHSS) for Girls in Kozhikode has also been ranked as the No 2 government school in the Education World (EW) India School Rankings in 2019-20.

EW, India, is the world's largest survey of primary-secondary schools with scores based on interviews with parents, senior students, principals and teachers. The schools are evaluated in 14 categories.

120-year-old institution

A once-crumbling school, the 120-year-old GVHSS underwent an infrastructural transformation in 2015 with funds from UAE-based Faizal and Shabana Foundation, the philanthropy arm of KEF Holdings, a Dubai-based company.

The school is run by Faizal and Shabana Kottikolon, co-founders of the foundation.

Faizal, founder and chairman of KEF Holdings, said: "The top-ranking for Nadakkavu school is a true testament to the success of our foundation's vision, 'Giving to Create Impact'. Our goal is to drive the positive transformation of government — and private — schools through an integrated and participatory approach."

How it all began

Faizal said that it all started with an interview in which he was asked what he thought India needed to do to change the face of public education.

"I realised dilapidated infrastructure was the first thing that needed change. When we arrived at this school in 2014, we saw the structure was dilapidated. The building housed classes for 2,400 girls, but had only eight toilets. The mid-day meals were not providing enough nutrition and teachers were qualified, but had no upgrading of skills programme," he said.

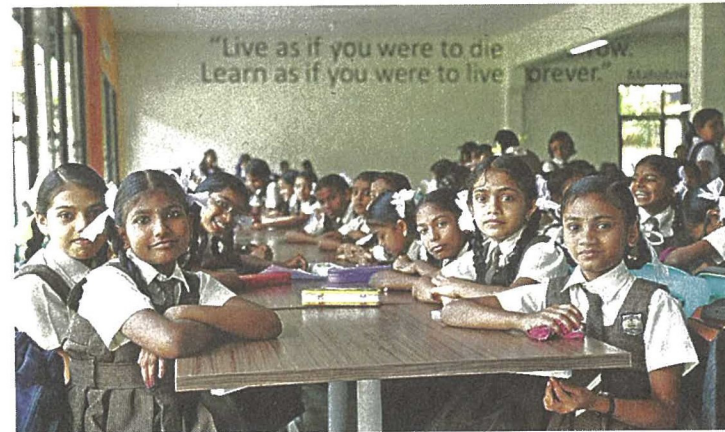
With the help of local legislator Pradeep Kumar and an Indian Institute of Management (IIM) Calicut study on the school's functioning, they completed the refurbishment in



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■ Faizal and Shabana Kottikolon's UAE-based foundation transformed the 120-year-old Nadakkavu Government Vocational Higher Secondary School for Girls in 2015.



■ The school once had just eight poorly-maintained toilets for its 2,400 girl students. It now has 92 spotless toilets.

just 95 days. Toilets were built and teachers imparted training through IIM Kozhikode. The self-confidence of students and teachers went up manifold in the new academic year in 2015.

New structures at the school included a 132,000 square feet landscaped garden, a library with around 25,000 books and an 18,110 square feet astro-turf

multipurpose playing field for athletics, football and hockey.

A sports complex with a 13,000 square feet indoor stadium, wood-floored basketball and badminton courts, and changing and locker rooms for students were also built.

Classrooms were digitally equipped and labs were built. Hygiene went up several notch-

STUDENTS SAY ...

■ **Ayina P.P, grade 12, studying in Nadakkavu school since grade 5 (2013)**

"When I joined the school in 2013, there was a small canteen and buildings were not clean. Then suddenly things changed for the better. In this school, we are asked to decide for ourselves and this has made me responsible and confident. I can make mistakes and still believe in myself."

■ **Neehara E, grade 12, studying in Nadakkavu school since grade 5 (2013)**

"The school gives us opportunities to grow and develop ideas on our own. Shiju sir, my teacher, pushes me to make speeches and present thoughts for the day. I feel confident and my efficiency has grown over the years. My dream is to become an entrepreneur."

■ **Suhina Cherott, studied at Nadakkavu in 2010-12 and is now a health care technician**

"Earlier, when I was studying, the school was in a bad condition. When I passed out, the sudden change happened. I wish I had been there during this change."

es with 92 spotless toilets, a corporate-style kitchen and dining hall that can seat about 600 students at a time.

In the 2015 board examinations, every student of the school passed, with 21 out of 393 students securing A+ (above 92 per cent) in all subjects — a 400 per cent increase in A+ grades since 2012.