DSS Kolkata Comprehensive Donor Report

January–June 2026

Children's Welfare Association High School for Girls, Sarsuna
and Haltu Kishalaya Shiksha Sadan High School

Executive Summary

The first half of 2026 saw DSS Kolkata move from initial engagement and consultation towards the establishment of a broad-based school-support programme in partnership with two government-supported schools serving economically vulnerable communities. The programme has deliberately gone beyond conventional academic support, recognising that meaningful educational progress is closely linked to confidence, aspiration, communication ability, health, emotional wellbeing, exposure and access to opportunities.

During the reporting period, activities covered educational enrichment, science learning, English communication, career and vocational guidance, counselling, creativity and life skills, nutrition support, environmental awareness, educational exposure and teacher wellbeing. DSS also engaged with school leadership, teachers and guardians through orientation meetings, surveys and ongoing interactions. These activities have helped build familiarity and trust with both school communities and have provided a useful foundation for sustained engagement.

Programme Background and Context

Initial discussions with the two schools brought out a number of common concerns. A significant number of students come from families with limited financial resources, which can affect access to educational materials, balanced nutrition, career information and wider learning opportunities. Teachers also highlighted concerns relating to motivation, communication, confidence, exposure and the ability of students to see possibilities beyond their immediate surroundings.

In response, DSS adopted a multi-dimensional approach combining educational enrichment with employability, wellbeing and family/community support. The intention has been to work alongside teachers and school leaders rather than function as an external service provider, thereby ensuring that interventions complement the schools' own efforts.

Sarsuna School demonstrated a particularly visible interest in innovation, environmental awareness and holistic student development. Its murals, rooftop gardening, composting initiatives and learning spaces reflected an existing culture of experimentation and engagement. At Haltu School, discussions with the leadership identified scope for collaboration in academic support, counselling, vocational guidance and student engagement. These early interactions helped refine priorities and establish a basis for continued collaboration.

Building Partnerships with Teachers and Schools

Teacher orientation and consultation meetings were among the first steps in the programme. These interactions created an opportunity for DSS personnel and teachers to understand one another's expectations, discuss practical classroom realities and identify areas where additional support could be useful.

Teachers shared observations relating to learning difficulties, student behaviour, participation and individual needs. Feedback from these discussions, together with information gathered through surveys, helped shape subsequent interventions. The willingness of principals and teachers to cooperate with the programme has been a significant enabling factor, allowing activities to be integrated into the school calendar with greater ease and creating a sense of shared ownership.

Sarsuna Teachers' Survey:

A survey to map the teachers' pedagogical approach, motivation, planning, delivery, learner agency, etc. was conducted at the Sarsuna School. From the responses, we found several indicators:

The Positives:

1. Strong openness to pedagogical change. The most encouraging finding is the willingness to learn. All teachers appear to be at least somewhat interested in newer approaches such as activity-based learning and competency-based assessment; most are very interested.

2. Good instinct towards thinking and contextual learning. Teachers report substantial use of: "why/how" questions, real-life examples, questioning and interaction, oral questioning and classroom observation as assessment tools.

3. Teachers genuinely care about student response and success. The handwritten responses are particularly heartening. Teachers repeatedly describe their greatest satisfaction in terms of students: responding actively, overcoming difficulties, participating, applying learning, and succeeding. One teacher specifically describes active student response and application of learning in life as a source of happiness; others identify students overcoming challenges and participating actively as rewarding.

The Challenges:

1. Student agency is still limited. Students do not appear to routinely: ask their own questions, initiate inquiry, or take ownership of classroom discussion.

2. Collaborative/active learning is occasional rather than embedded. Group work is used, but predominantly sometimes rather than often.

3. Pedagogical planning needs to become more outcome-oriented. Lesson planning and identification of learning goals are present, but not uniformly strong. Some teachers clearly define learning goals; others work with a general idea or largely follow the textbook sequence.

The survey indicates a teaching staff that is receptive to contemporary pedagogy and already demonstrates several positive practices, particularly the use of thinking-oriented questions, real-life connections, interactive questioning and varied assessment.

The Principal of Sarsuna School has requested a more detailed teachers' audit where rooms for upskilling can be identified, and this will be done shortly.

Infrastructural Support

DSS has extended the hand to help create a better infrastructure at school, so that children and staff feel motivated to attend. Several areas of improvement have been identified, contractors and suppliers contacted and job orders created.

Among the notable ones, a vendor installed a finger print sensing attendance recorder at the Haltu School, which is linked with the office workstation and quality data can be collected.

A contractor deployed a team of cleaners at the Haltu School to clean the premises thoroughly, including dusting, removal of cobwebs and moss, cleaning of classrooms, corridors, school ground and roof, office spaces, etc., removal of garbage and litter and disinfection of bathrooms. More such works are in the pipeline for either school.

Educational Enrichment and Learning Beyond the Classroom

Educational enrichment remained a central component of the programme. The emphasis was on creating learning experiences that supplement classroom teaching while encouraging curiosity, questioning and critical thinking.

Science sessions encouraged students to look at science as something connected with everyday life rather than simply as an examination subject. Interactive presentations and discussions explored familiar phenomena, while the 'Science Around Us' session for Class VII used audiovisual resources and documentary material on marine ecosystems. Student participation was enthusiastic, with learners displaying considerable curiosity and interest.

Environmental awareness was reinforced through activities around World Environment Day. Discussions focused on nature, sustainability and individual responsibility, encouraging students to think about their relationship with the environment and the practical actions through which ecological wellbeing can be supported.

English communication sessions addressed another important need identified by the schools. Although many students possess basic knowledge of English, confidence in using the language orally remains a challenge. Conversation practice, introductions, role-play and peer interaction provided low-pressure opportunities for students to speak, listen and respond. Teachers also linked stronger communication skills with future employability and wider educational opportunities.

The distribution of welcome kits containing stationery, dictionaries, notebooks and educational reference material provided students with useful learning resources while also serving as a tangible introduction to the DSS programme.

Career Guidance, Counselling and Employability

Career guidance emerged as an important area of student need and one of the more significant components of the programme. Students often expressed aspirations for the future but had limited information about the educational routes, skills and training required to turn those aspirations into realistic pathways.

Vocational awareness sessions introduced students to possible opportunities in areas including personal care, food and beverage services, computer operations and technical trades. Interactive exercises helped learners reflect on their interests, strengths and abilities and consider how these might relate to different career choices.

Specialised inputs from career counsellors addressed employability skills, vocational training options and future planning. Individual counselling was also provided to selected students identified by school authorities as needing additional guidance, allowing discussions to take account of individual aptitude, interests and circumstances.

The association with organisations such as Magic Bus India Foundation further strengthened the employability component. Students received exposure to employment-linked training pathways, life skills, workplace readiness and professional behaviour. Feedback from these sessions indicated that they helped broaden students' awareness of possibilities and contributed to greater confidence about the future.

Creativity, Art, Craft and Life Skills Development

Creative activities consistently generated strong student participation and enjoyment. Workshops included butterfly making, paper flowers, handmade notebooks, newspaper-bag decoration and paper-house construction.

While these activities are simple in format, they support a range of developmental skills. Students practise attention, sequencing, fine-motor coordination, planning and problem-solving while also being given space for experimentation and self-expression.

Several activities made use of discarded or everyday materials, thereby linking creativity with environmental awareness and demonstrating how materials can be reused in practical ways. Students showed pride in their work and often helped one another. The sessions created a positive, inclusive and collaborative atmosphere and contributed not only to creativity but also to confidence and social-emotional development.

Nutrition Support and Student Wellbeing

Nutrition emerged as an important practical dimension of student wellbeing. Teachers and programme staff observed that food insecurity can influence attendance, concentration, energy levels and the ability of students to participate fully in school activities.

DSS therefore supported periodic dry-ration distribution programmes covering essential food items. The distribution process was organised systematically and, where possible, accompanied by interaction with parents and guardians. In addition to providing immediate assistance, these activities created opportunities for continued engagement with families.

The community meal programmes conducted at Sarsuna and Haltu were among the most visible and memorable initiatives of the period. At Sarsuna, a large meal of rice and chicken curry, along with vegetarian options, was organised for students and members of the school community, serving more than a hundred children. The event generated considerable excitement and participation.

The significance of these meals extended beyond nutrition. They created an atmosphere of inclusion, dignity and community. Students queued patiently, shared food, interacted happily and responded positively to the care shown by teachers and volunteers. Similar positive responses were seen at Haltu. Increased attendance around the meal programme also underlined the close relationship between nutritional support and student participation.

Educational Excursions and Exposure Visits

Exposure to places beyond the immediate school environment is particularly valuable for students who may have limited opportunities to visit museums, science centres and other cultural or educational institutions.

During the reporting period, the programme facilitated multiple visits to the Birla Planetarium. The visits were conducted in phases so that larger numbers of students could participate. Students responded with enthusiasm and curiosity, while teachers observed sustained engagement throughout the visits.

These excursions demonstrated the value of experiential learning by enabling students to connect concepts encountered in the classroom with scientific exhibits, presentations and experiences in the wider world. Such exposure can contribute to curiosity, aspiration and a broader sense of what is possible.

Teacher Wellbeing and Capacity Building

Teachers continued to be key partners in implementing the programme. Their flexibility, cooperation and willingness to accommodate activities within existing schedules made it possible to conduct interventions without losing sight of the schools' regular academic responsibilities.

A notable initiative was the Dance Movement Therapy workshop conducted in collaboration with Kolkata Sanved. Designed specifically for teachers, the session used movement, creativity and emotional expression as avenues for relaxation and reflection. Participants described the experience as refreshing and energising and found it useful in relation to stress management.

The initiative also reinforced a broader programme principle: supporting students effectively requires attention to the wellbeing of the adults who work with them every day.

Parent Engagement, Surveys and Community Understanding

Baseline surveys and direct interactions with guardians have helped DSS develop a clearer picture of the circumstances that influence student participation, learning and wellbeing. The information gathered provides an important context for interpreting school-level observations and planning future interventions.

Parent participation was sometimes lower than anticipated, largely because of work commitments and logistical constraints. Nevertheless, the interactions that did take place were useful and highlighted the need for a more sustained approach to family engagement. Long-term educational impact is likely to be stronger when students' families and the wider community are able to participate in and support the process.

Consolidated Survey Findings

The household survey across the two partner schools covering 309 respondents indicates a strong underlying aspiration for children's education, despite significant economic and social constraints. Around 91% of respondents who expressed a preference definitely want their children to pursue higher education, while support for equal educational opportunities for boys and girls is exceptionally high.
At the same time, the survey reveals that financial circumstances and the home learning environment remain important barriers. A substantial proportion of households fall within the lower-income brackets, and financial/work-related stress affects the family environment at least sometimes for about 61% of households. Private tuition is the predominant source of academic support, with around 60–61% of children depending on tutors, suggesting both a reliance on external academic support and a potential financial burden on families.

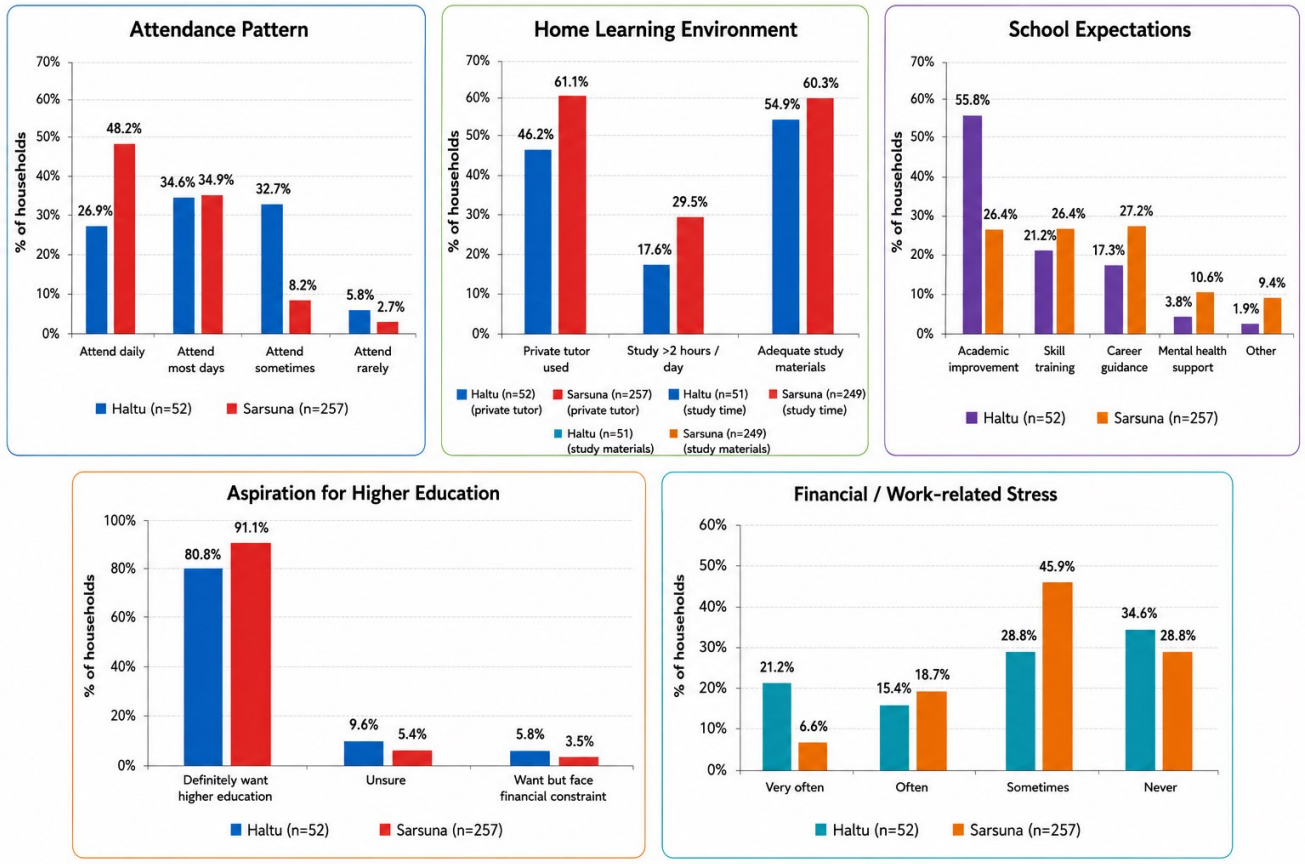
School attendance emerges as an area requiring attention. While 80% of respondents reported that children attend school daily or most days, about one-fifth reported only occasional or rare attendance. There is also a noticeable difference between the two schools, with reported daily attendance substantially higher at Sarsuna than at Haltu.

The survey also points to positive family-level foundations, including reasonably good access to study materials, regular meals for most children, frequent parent-child communication, and high support for girls continuing education. However, emotional wellbeing deserves greater attention: many guardians reported noticing signs of worry, fear or sadness, while a significant minority of children reportedly do not readily share their problems with guardians.

Finally, guardians' expectations from the schools are quite clearly moving beyond conventional academic instruction. Academic improvement remains important, but career guidance and skill development emerge almost equally strongly, indicating a useful opportunity for the programme to integrate academic support with employability, life skills and career exposure.

Questions / Survey Parameters	Haltu (%) (n=52)	Sarsuna (%) (n=257)
A. Family & Economic Background		
1. Low-income household (≤ ₹10,000 per month)*	48.1%	47.9%*
2. Financial / work-related stress – at least sometimes	65.4%	59.9%
3. Financial / work-related stress – very often	21.2%	12.5%
B. Child's Education & Learning Environment		
4. Attend school daily	26.9%	48.2%
5. Attend school most days	34.6%	34.9%
6. Attend school daily or most days	61.5%	83.1%
7. Attend school sometimes / rarely	38.5%	16.5%
8. Private tutor used	46.2%	63.4%
9. Study > 2 hours per day	17.6%	49.0%
10. Adequate study materials available	54.9%	87.9%
C. Nutrition		
11. Child gets 3 or more full meals per day	62.7%	78.5%
D. Parent–Child Communication & Emotional Wellbeing		
12. Talk about school / problems every day	42.3%	53.3%
13. Talk a few times a week	28.8%	31.9%
14. Talk every day or a few times a week	71.2%	85.2%
15. Rarely / almost never talk	28.8%	14.0%
16. Child shares problems openly	53.8%	42.4%
17. Child shares problems at least sometimes	80.8%	72.2%
18. Child rarely / never shares problems	26.9%	27.1%
19. Guardian has noticed worry / fear / sadness at least sometimes	46.2%	53.7%
20. Guardian has never noticed such signs	42.3%	23.5%
E. Aspirations for Higher Education		
21. Definitely want higher education	80.8%	93.3%
22. Unsure about higher education	9.6%	2.4%
23. Want higher education but face financial constraints	5.8%	2.0%
F. Expectations from School (Top Priority)		
24. Academic improvement	55.8%	26.4%
25. Skill training	21.2%	26.4%
26. Career guidance	17.3%	27.2%
27. Mental health support	3.8%	10.6%
28. Other	1.9%	9.4%

* For Sarsuna: 47.9% refers to households that disclosed their monthly income (≤ ₹10,000 among income responders). Among all income respondents including "prefer not to say", 35.0% are ≤ ₹10,000 per month.



Major Trends gleaned from the Survey

Strengths

- Very high educational aspiration among families, including aspiration for higher education.
- Strong gender-equality attitudes and support for girls' continued education.
- Most children have basic learning resources and reasonably regular meals.
- Reasonably strong parent-child communication in many households.
- Families demonstrate willingness to engage with schools and seek support.

Areas of Concern

- High dependence on private tuition for academic support.
- Irregular school attendance among a significant minority of students.
- Low household income and limited economic security constrain educational opportunities.
- Financial/work-related stress is affecting family environments.
- Emotional concerns may remain under-reported or insufficiently communicated by children.

Opportunities

- Develop school-based academic support/homework clubs to reduce dependence on costly private tuition.
- Expand career guidance, vocational exposure and skill-development programmes.
- Introduce light-touch counselling, wellbeing and peer-support mechanisms.
- Target scholarship/financial-support information towards lower-income households.

- Strengthen parent orientation, particularly around child protection, adolescent wellbeing and supporting learning at home.

External Risks

- Economic vulnerability may translate into dropout, irregular attendance or curtailed higher education.
- Continued financial stress and unstable employment may undermine children's educational continuity.
- Students who do not communicate emotional difficulties may remain invisible to existing support systems.
- Persistent reliance on private tuition may reinforce inequality between children who can and cannot afford it.
- Attendance differences between schools suggest local contextual factors—transport, work, family circumstances etc.—may require school-specific interventions.

Emerging Outcomes, Challenges and Future Directions

A number of encouraging changes were visible during the first six months. Students appeared increasingly comfortable interacting with DSS facilitators, participating in discussions and expressing themselves during activities. Teachers reported growing enthusiasm among learners and valued the additional opportunities for learning, exposure and engagement.

At the same time, several challenges continue to influence implementation. Attendance fluctuations, nutritional insecurity, learning gaps and limited parental participation remain significant concerns. These factors reinforce the importance of sustained engagement rather than isolated or short-duration interventions.

The next phase of the programme can build on the foundations established during this period by strengthening academic and communication support, expanding counselling and employability inputs, continuing nutrition-related interventions, and creating more opportunities for experiential and activity-based learning. Greater emphasis will also be placed on monitoring outcomes so that programme activities can increasingly be linked to measurable changes in student participation, confidence, learning and future readiness.

Indicative Programme SWOT

Area	Key observations
Strengths	Strong cooperation from school leadership and teachers; wide-ranging, holistic interventions; enthusiastic student participation; growing trust and familiarity with DSS; practical combination of learning, wellbeing, nutrition and exposure.
Opportunities	Further strengthen parent engagement; deepen communication and academic support; use baseline data for measurable outcome tracking; expand career and vocational exposure; build on experiential and creative learning.
Challenges	Attendance variability; nutritional vulnerability among some students; learning gaps; limited parent availability; need for sustained rather than one-off engagement.
Way Forward	Consolidate partnerships, continue high-

	engagement activities, strengthen counselling and employability support, complete and analyse baseline data, and introduce clearer indicators for monitoring longer-term student outcomes.

Conclusion

The January–June 2026 period established a strong platform for continued collaboration between Divine Script Society and its partner schools. The programme has addressed several interconnected dimensions of student development—educational enrichment, communication, career awareness, nutrition, creativity, counselling, environmental learning and exposure.

The enthusiasm of students, the commitment of teachers, the cooperation of school leadership and the involvement of volunteers have together created favourable conditions for meaningful progress. At the same time, the experience of the first six months has made clear that the challenges faced by students require continuity, patience and sustained support.

The next phase will therefore focus not only on expanding activities but also on strengthening follow-through, monitoring outcomes and using evidence from the baseline survey to guide priorities. The overall objective remains to help students become healthier, more confident, more informed and better prepared to navigate their educational and future life choices.

Gallery:














M. P. Birla Planetarium









