

# A school that set on a new course

BY SUSHMITA CHATTERJEE

BENGALURU,

July 13: "I wish I could come to school on Sunday because I get bored at home," says 10-year-old Sugandha. When she speaks fluent English, her teachers feel proud of her achievements. She is from the slums and had joined Shishu Mandir when she couldn't even hold a pen properly or understand a single word of English. But the school has managed to groom her and give a better life.

Like Sugandha, there are nearly 150 students presently studying in the school, which has been a home for underprivileged children since 1983. Every

facility is provided free of cost till these children grow up and find jobs. This year the school celebrated its 25th year. And it is the founder, Dr Hella Mundhra aka *mama* as these children fondly call her, who's behind it.

A doctor by profession, Dr Mundhra came to Bengaluru from Germany in the 70s. She recalls how disillusioned she was with the Indian education system and opened her own school to help children from the slums.

"In Indian schools there were 60 students in each class. All that was taught was to mug the lessons and vomit it during examinations. My children came from backgrounds where they were exposed to

aggression, insecurity and thus needed special care. So we decided to open our own school, Shishu Mandir," she said.

The school, situated in Hella Nagar, has preparatory to class X, with 10 students in each batch and a group of 18 teachers. It follows Oxford books, has adopted innovative teaching techniques, and has regular teacher training programmes by German volunteers.

Jarina P.A. who has been teaching in the school for the last eight years said, "We take teaching tools to classroom and have lively discussions and enactments. Homework given motivates children to think and write rather than just copying."



Students in a classroom with Dr Hella Mundhra at Shishu Mandir in Bengaluru. Around 150 students study at the school for underprivileged children. — DC PHOTO