

# A school with a vision

QUAMRUL ISLAM RUBAIYAT with ANDREW EAGLE

Dowel school in Lohagara village of Thakurgaon's Pirganj upazila is making genuine efforts to bring qualitative education outcomes to a rural environment. Along with pursuing an engaging and innovative teaching methodology the school aims to promote a wholesome Bangladeshi identity in its students by giving particular emphasis to the nation's history and culture.

The school, which began in a rented house in 2010 and currently caters to about 200 students from nursery to class five, has already earned a good reputation locally, according to villagers. Dowel recently held its first primary terminal exam. "We hope all the students will obtain a satisfactory result," says head teacher Tareq Hossain.

"We follow the style of teaching advocated by Brac's non-formal education programme," says assistant teacher at the school, Shimul Das. "It relies on educative games and songs that students find engaging."

"Our classes are very interesting," says class-three student Tanjila Akhtar. "We play and sing often." The school has a teaching panel dedicated to effective methodology and teachers are enlisted to provide additional tuition to individual students who are weak in any subject.

In addition the school makes special arrangements for national events like International Mother Language Day, Independence Day and Victory Day celebrations; activities that make Dowel stand out among rural schools.

"We organise different programmes to mark national days," says Tareq, "including colourful processions, discussions, competitions like story-telling, painting, reciting and essay writing. Our aim is to enrich the children's understand-

ing of themselves and the nation by drawing from the spirit of the Liberation War and celebrating Bengali culture."

The school authority also observes other Bengali occasions including Choitra Shankranti, Pohela Boishakh, Nobanno Utshab and more.

"The month of December is victory month," notes Tareq, "so, as we do every year, we started to recall the victory from the first day. We made a procession called the 'Bijoy Rally' from our school grounds that wound through village streets. After the rally we explained to the children the importance of victory month to our history. Since then we have held various competitions right through until Victory Day on 16 December."

On the final day, art, recitation and athletic competitions were held, with another procession and discussion about the war.

"These kinds of programmes not only help the children understand the significance of each national day but also serve to remind their guardians and villagers in general as well, so that we can all better understand our roots," says Tareq. "We are fortunate because the school's managing committee encourages us a lot."

"My son Sadman attends Dowel school," says local Ekramul Hoque who works as an assistant teacher at a nearby high school. "The teaching technique at Dowel is excellent; and the extra-curricular activities are invaluable. Not only do the children come to know our heritage but their young minds are being guided towards good. In this age of social menaces like drug addiction and militancy, it can really help them."

School management committee president Mohammad Iqbal expressed hopes the school will be expanded up to class eight, adding that they are thinking to purchase more land for the school but are finding it difficult to raise the money locally.