This report of activities and programs at Udavi School includes only those programs that have been introduced for the first time this year. The regular programmes of the school including the sports program, all the activities like dance, clay work, singing, tailoring, field trips, trip to Sikkim for the 9th grade and stem land carried on as usual and are described in the school brochure.
GROWING VEGETABLES

The program of growing vegetables took a leap forward this year with a large field that was fenced in for this purpose. The students participated fully in preparing the new field by bringing granite pillars from the old beds to create new beds. Priya monitored the program closely and ensured that the program was a learning activity for the children. Here is what she says:

During the last year it had been noticed that for some students the food growing session was perceived as a time when they didn’t have to focus or bother about learning anything. They seemed to find it difficult to engage their minds with practical work and at the same time reflect on what they were doing. For some the garden work was no more than a series of activities that didn’t require any thought and just had to be completed in the allotted time.

We had tried a number of things to counter these expectations; worksheets were given out but were rarely completed, discussions and question and answer sessions were not very successful as students seemed to use it as an opportunity to mess around rather than engage in serious discussion and listening to each other. It was clear that another approach was needed if the goal of getting students to think about what they were doing was to be achieved.

During the Summer holiday Priya created a book which combined a textbook about how to grow your own food and a diary to be written up of what had been completed and what they felt about their work during the practical session.

The practical classes were then rearranged to include a short time at the beginning to talk about what they were going to do and a time at the end when they reflected on what they had achieved. They sat down and spent some time reading the text book, writing the diary and discussing any questions that anyone had. This seemed to work very well. Most students could remember to bring the book and a pen and writing in the book soon became established part of the whole session. At the beginning some students had great difficulty in writing about what they did, but gradually everyone learnt to do this. The practical classes were then rearranged to include a short time at the beginning to talk about what they were going to do and a time at the end when they reflected on what they had achieved. They sat down and spent some time reading the text book, writing the diary and discussing any questions that anyone had.

HEALTH AND NUTRITION PROGRAM

Anyone who has tried to change dietary habits knows how difficult that is. At Udavi we made a second attempt to introduce healthy food during our snack and lunch breaks. One of the Weltwaert volunteers, Joshua, took up the challenge to introduce healthy food. Here is an extract from his report:

The last weeks I have started to introduce some additional nutritious food and information through a few experiential activities. The first Saturday morning in assembly I presented a few ideas about vegetarian whole food nutrition and asked if the students might be open to trying whole grains and a few additional fruits vegetables nuts and seeds with their lunches. Most students seemed to have a positive response so I began Making Varagu on Thursdays with a mix of Peanut Tahini Cashew butter on different days which had the greatest appeal for all the students. I added carrots which seemed to be the most popular vegetable. I made Banana Papaya Chicken Spinach Lime smoothies which many students enjoyed in moderation. I also made slightly more elaborate salads which some students had several portions of (200grams). But most students were not used to raw beets, lettuce and radish mixed with the carrots. The most successful meals seemed to be made by the professionals at Solitude and Sadhana where we had field trips to experience where the food comes from, how it gets to our plate and how to support the indigenous environment around.

At Solitude we arrived at 8am on foot to join the silent meeting. Then we broke up into groups to help harvest 24 types of fruit and vegetables which we also helped to process and learned simple preparations for juice and food. Then we enjoyed excellent thali which most children finished short of the raw salad.
Our Odissi dance teacher, Kanchana, took up a big project of creating a Dance-drama of the epic Ramayana. Here are extracts from her report:

The students were divided into a few small groups and each group got a scene to work out (choreographing) themselves. After they had practiced their part they showed it to the whole group. The group suggested how to make improvements and changes. This is how the scenes were choreographed.

As a dance teacher I thought that Dance Drama meant to express everything using only our body movements. But the students proposed to add some props so that the audience would understand the story better as there was no dialogue. There were one or two students who had many ideas- like how to form a boat or how to cross the river using the dancers as big rocks for forming a bridge, how to show Hanuman jumping from the tree and so on.

We also had to see about the suitable costumes and colours for each and every character. For all these I mostly included the student’s ideas.

The show was presented at the annual function of the school at the end of April 2018. It lasted for more than an hour and was a huge success. The children were proud of their achievement and learnt many things like:

- How to work with a bigger group.
- How to create the needed props.
- How to choose the costumes.
- How to choreograph.
- How to do the make ups.

Dr Nirima Oza, member Governing Board, Auroville Foundation had this to say, "Thank you for inviting me for the annual cultural programme. I had a wonderful time."
PROJECTS

Payal from the Sri Aurobindo Ashram who meets children once a week at Udavi created a number of projects involving the children in diverse learning using resource persons from Auroville. She invited Francesca to work on theatre with the children, Lalit was invited to explore beauty in various areas such as architecture and art, Anita Pathak was invited for the Ganga project and Deoyani to learn about water and soil. All the projects were a great success and a happy learning experience for the students.

THE INTERNET CLASS

Some of our students expressed an interest in going deeper into the use of the Internet. A timeslot was found after sports and our new English teacher Vidhya offered to guide the students. Her objective was to use the Internet to enhance the understanding of mainstream subjects and she invited each student to research a topic of their choice. Here is an extract from her report:

The main challenge was making the children understand the scope of their research. For example, 8th grade students did a project on “Outer Space”. One can imagine the vastness of such a topic. The Internet has tons of information on the topic. It is up to the students to decide what is needed and how much of it is needed without compromising the relative completeness of their project work. The worst-case scenario is their project turning into a copy-paste work! It was a challenge to make them understand this, get them to decide their project goals, break down their topic into sub topics, and most importantly, make them set limits in terms of research. The students, in their enthusiasm, wanted to do so much and it was a little disheartening to clip their ‘wings’ and keep them ‘grounded’. But this taught them a valuable skill—prioritization. Another challenge was breaking down the information into bullet points. This has much to do with language skills and it comes with practice. We are working on it. The class is helping them in language comprehension and concise writing. After completion, the students present their projects in the school assembly. So far, students have done projects on “Outer Space”, “Endangered Species of India”, “Deforestation”, “Global Warming”, “French Revolution” and “Stephen Hawking”.

MORNING ASSEMBLY

Once a week during the morning assembly the children were shown either a slideshow or some video clips with some interesting theme taken from the world around, nature, the sky, sports et cetera. One of our teachers took up the task of finding these photographs or video clips from the Internet. It was a good exposure to the children of the beauty and wonder of the world around them which they normally miss in the narrow confines of their village life.

TEACHER TRAINING

A number of our teachers do not have the formal degree required to teach. As a result we are always harassed by the inspectors who come from the Govt. school board. A training scheme has been floated by the Central government to take care of the situation as this is quite common all over the country. Our teachers have taken advantage of this scheme and enrolled themselves for a two-year training program which will be followed by a diploma that will enable them to work as teachers. Our teachers have completed one year of the program successfully. They have taken this opportunity to meet together and discuss as well as practice some of their learning in this course.
Our physical demonstration program is conducted once in 2 years. This year again we held a physical demonstration in which the whole school participated. The program was designed and guided by Bithidi who has been a captain in the ashram sports program and is well versed with such events. The program consisted of movements with music, drills and making formations with properties. The program was a great success.