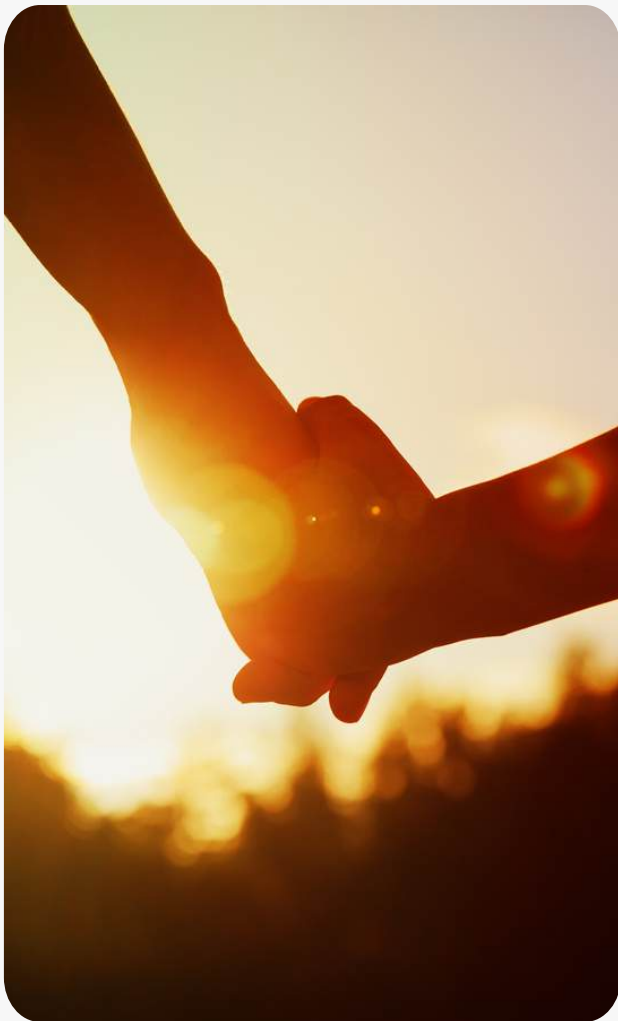


How Piramal Foundation Cultivates Compassion Through Systemic Education Reform

| | | | | |
|-----------------------------|--------------|------------------|--------------|----------------------------------|
| Operating Foundation | India | 2011 | India | Hinduism / Sanatan Dharma |
| Type of Funder | Country | Year Established | Active in | Faith |



Piramal Foundation, the philanthropic arm of the Piramal Group, founded in 2011, is dedicated to addressing critical barriers to India's development through innovative, scalable solutions.¹ Guided by the value of *sewa bhaav* (selfless service), the Foundation focuses on education, health, climate, and economic empowerment, with a significant portion of its resources directed toward enhancing educational outcomes.² Its education initiatives prioritise compassion and Social, Emotional, and Ethical (SEE) Learning, moving beyond traditional literacy and numeracy to cultivate empathy and leadership as core competencies. Through leadership development, curriculum innovation, and strategic partnerships, the Piramal Foundation fosters systemic reform, demonstrating how compassion-driven approaches can create sustainable, long-term change in India's education landscape.

¹ Piramal, n.d., [Foundation](#)

² The CSR Universe, 2022, [Piramal spends Rs 7 Cr on CSR projects including Healthcare & Education; Exceeds budget by Rs 79 lakh](#)

Unpacking the Values that Guide the Piramal Foundation's Approach

Piramal Foundation's work is guided by a core principle: values shape action, and action drives change. Under the guidance of Chairman Ajay Piramal, the Foundation upholds *sewa bhaav* (selfless service), humility, and trusteeship as its guiding values.

- ***Sewa bhaav*** embodies the Foundation's commitment to selflessly serving society and finding fulfilment in service.
- **Humility** fosters a collaborative spirit by recognising that no individual or institution has all the answers, paving the way for partnerships that amplify impact.
- **Trusteeship** emphasises the belief that resources belong to the community, promoting transparency and responsible management for collective benefit.

These values, deeply ingrained in Hindu tradition, reflect the Piramal family's legacy of ethical entrepreneurship and philanthropy. For the Piramal family, giving transcends transactional charity and becomes a moral responsibility, ensuring their resources benefit society as a whole.



These core values are not merely abstract principles; they are demonstrated in the Piramal family's history of action. The Foundation's mission stems from the family's pioneering commitment to inclusive education. This legacy began with Piramal Chatrabhuj, Chairman Ajay Piramal's grandfather, who established Rajasthan's first school for Dalits in 1932—members of the most marginalised and oppressed communities in India's caste system. This opened doors to a group historically excluded from education and set a lasting precedent, shaping the Foundation's efforts to ensure transformative, accessible, and equitable education.

Building upon this historical foundation, the Piramal Foundation continues to apply these values to its present-day educational initiatives. Recognising education as a powerful catalyst for societal transformation, the Foundation focuses on improving the quality of government schools in India, which serve 54% of the country's students but face significant challenges like high dropout rates and low learning outcomes.³ By targeting the often-overlooked middle-management tier of the public education system—district-level officers, cluster coordinators, and teacher facilitators—the Foundation builds leadership skills and operational capacities to empower these individuals. Guided by *sewa bhaav*, this approach equips education leaders with practical tools to instil values-driven principles in classrooms and communities, driving lasting change across the education system.

The idea isn't to solve the problem for them (middle management) — we seek to develop frameworks and programmes rooted in empathy and compassion that help officials connect with each other and work together to solve problems and implement change in the education domain.

Aditya Natraj,
CEO, Piramal Foundation

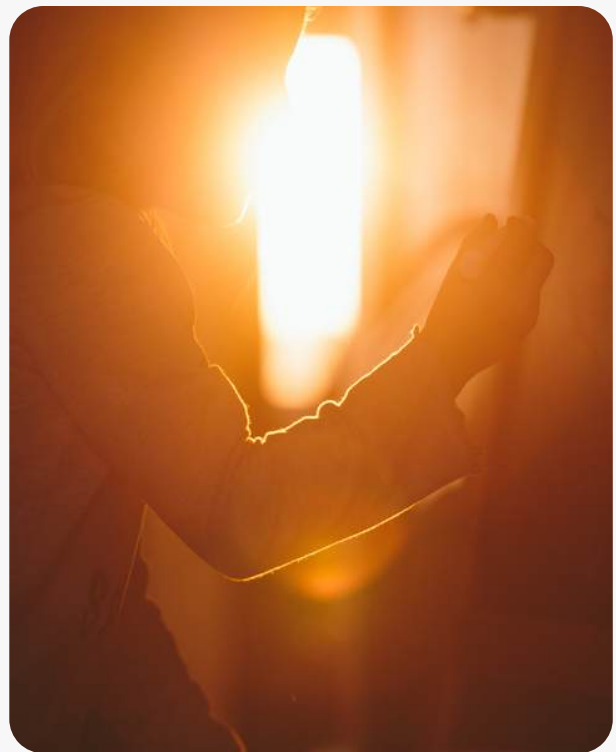
³ India Development Review, 2022, [Government vs private schools: What works better?](#)

Integrating Social, Emotional, and Ethical Learning into Education

The journey to embedding compassion in education began seven years ago for Piramal Foundation⁴ with a simple, yet profound, question: *What is worth learning?* For the Foundation, the answer was clear—compassion. While often assumed to be innate, the Foundation believes that compassion, like literacy or numeracy, must be intentionally nurtured and expanded. This belief has guided the Foundation's efforts to redefine Indian education by breaking down compassion into age-appropriate competencies to create a roadmap for compassion-based education that spans early childhood through adolescence.

Consequently, when Emory University's Centre for Contemplative Science and Compassion-Based Ethics (CCSCBE) launched its Social, Emotional, and Ethical Learning (SEE Learning) curriculum in 2019, the Piramal Foundation partnered with the university to deliver the curriculum in India, curating its approach for effective adoption in India. The SEE Learning curriculum blends Eastern philosophies of mindfulness and self-regulation with Western behavioural science, including trauma-informed pedagogy and research on empathy and resilience. Through this collaboration, the Piramal Foundation introduced SEE Learning to India and ensured its practical application in schools across the country.

The implementation of SEE Learning has transformed India's education ecosystem, positively impacting various stakeholders. It establishes a compassionate environment, empowers facilitators, equips students with holistic skills, and fosters community engagement.⁵ By 2024, over 100,000 schools had integrated SEE Learning into their programming. In the early grades, children learn basic socio-emotional competencies like active listening, kindness, and self-regulation, progressing to advanced skills such as conflict resolution and ethical decision-making. This implementation has resulted in up to an 11% improvement in children's SEE Learning outcomes,⁶ among other positive results, particularly in deep-dive intervention schools in Jhunjhunu district, Rajasthan, India.



⁴ Piramal Foundation, 2024, [Piramal Foundation partners with Emory University to advance Social, Emotional, and Ethical Learning](#)

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Piramal Foundation, 2024, [New Paths of Learning: SOFSC's Centers Transforming Education](#)

SEE Learning intervention with our students is proving immensely beneficial. We have witnessed noticeable academic improvement, ranging between 9% and 10%, especially in Classes 7 and 8. Beyond academic scores, students are more confident, collaborative, and resilient. This program is not just shaping better learners but also more compassionate individuals.

Ms. Durga,
Principal, GSSS Hamiri Kalan, Alsisar, Jhunjhunu, Rajasthan

A key success element was the Foundation's recognition that adults are a core component of the success of SEE Learning. As such, it employed a multi-level approach to drive statewide adoption of the curriculum. This comprised embedding SEE Learning in synchronous and asynchronous learning and co-creating state education agendas to integrate SEE Learning into both curriculum and educator professional development.

Creating Systems-Level Change: Overcoming Challenges in Transforming Indian Education

Implementing SEE Learning in India's education system requires capacity building beyond curriculum design, spanning the entire educator and administrator ecosystem. To scale this transformation, the Foundation empowers middle-management personnel in public education, having engaged over 15,000 district officers, cluster coordinators, and teacher facilitators⁷ through leadership initiatives. These managers are crucial in bridging policy and classroom implementation. By equipping them, the Foundation embeds compassion and empathy in leadership practices, cascading to teachers and students.

Through Piramal School of Leadership's School of Education and Systems Change (SoESC), the Foundation cultivates a culture of service (*sewa*) and public good among educational leaders. This leadership-driven approach ensures the sustained implementation of SEE Learning, driving lasting impact across India's educational landscape. The Foundation's continued efforts are improving both the teaching environment and learning outcomes, fostering a more compassionate, inclusive educational ecosystem for children.

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⁷ Piramal Foundation, n.d., [Piramal School of Leadership](#)

Initiative: The School of Education and Systems Change (SoESC), Piramal School of Leadership

The School of Education and Systems Change (SoESC), under the Piramal School of Leadership,⁸ strengthens India's education system by fostering *sewa bhaav* among public system leaders. The Foundation builds middle-manager capacity through extensive workshops, reaching over 15,000 leaders in 10 states.

The school is home to six SoESC centres, each uniquely demonstrating innovative approaches to transforming education, with a focus on unleashing the agency of children by building education leaders and institutions through systemic interventions. From bridging classroom learning with real-world application at the Centre for Project-Based Learning, to drawing from India's rich artistic heritage for art-based interventions at the Centre for Aesthetic Literacy, these centres foster service, empathy, sustainability, and creativity, empowering learners and rewriting India's educational narrative.

The outcomes of these efforts are already evident. A study by NITI Aayog found that four of the ten districts showing the greatest improvements in educational outcomes were areas where the Piramal Foundation's programmes were active. Additionally, the leadership training model has shown cross-sectoral impact, improving outcomes in health, water sustainability, and governance in other districts.⁹

⁸ Piramal Foundation, 2024, *New Paths of Learning: SOESC's Centers Transforming Education*

⁹ Piramal Foundation, 2022, [Big Bet Aspirational Districts Collaborative](#)

Key Lessons for Faith-Aligned Giving in Asia

This commitment to compassion and leadership development in the field of education reflects how faith-aligned philanthropy can go beyond mere grant-making to address deep-rooted structural challenges within India's education system and offers several key insights for the broader philanthropic ecosystem:

- 1. Leadership Matters in Systems Transformation:** Addressing educational challenges cannot start or stop at the classroom level. The Foundation's success underscores the importance of engaging every layer of the system—from policymakers to mid-level administrators to educators—to create a cohesive framework for incorporating SEE Learning. The SoESC and other initiatives under the larger Piramal School of Leadership demonstrate how investing in leadership development at the middle-management level can have cascading effects across entire systems, leading to improvements in not only education but also health and governance outcomes.
- 2. Compassion as a Core Learning Outcome:** By breaking down compassion into teachable components and embedding it into structured curricula, the Foundation has demonstrated that even abstract values can be systematically cultivated at scale. This approach goes beyond just fostering compassion; it focuses on empowering students and administrators with a broad set of holistic skills that enhance their well-being and help them become integrated, purpose-driven members of society. By embedding these core values into the educational ecosystem, the Foundation has demonstrated that the impact of such initiatives can extend far beyond academic results, equipping individuals to thrive both personally and socially. This model has the potential to be adapted and replicated across other social sectors, helping shape a more empathetic and purpose-led society.
- 3. Partnerships as Catalysts for Innovation:** Collaborations have been integral to the Foundation's efforts, whether with academic institutions like the Compassion Centre at Emory University,¹⁰ the Global Educational Initiative Consortium at Harvard,¹¹ or local organisations embedded in India's diverse communities. These partnerships bring together complementary strengths, enabling the Foundation to balance scientific rigour with contextual relevance.

The Piramal Foundation's journey underscores a powerful lesson: systemic change is ultimately human. By anchoring its work in compassion, collaboration, and selfless service, the Foundation has not only transformed education systems but also inspired a broader rethinking of what philanthropy can achieve. For organisations seeking to create a lasting impact, their experience offers a clear message: start with values, invest in people, and let the change unfold from within.


Explore the full brief on *How Values and Beliefs Shape Education in Asia*.

10 ITDC INDIA, n.d., [HP Government, Piramal Foundation Launch Ethical Learning Initiative](#)
11 Harvard Graduate School of Education, n.d., [Global Education Innovation Initiative \(GEII\)](#)



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