

Ankita Thakur is a class XII student in a private English-medium school in the Pussore Tehsil of Raigarh district in Chhattisgarh. She is a second-generation school-goer. Her mother, whose parents were daily wage labourers, went on to complete her B Ed in Special Education and is now a Block Resource Person for Special Education. Her father is a graduate and works as a daily wager in a private company.

Ankita's interest is in Biology and although earlier, the family had thought she would opt for teaching, on meeting a woman doctor acquaintance, Ankita decided to appear for the medical entrance exam National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET) for admission to MBBS and BDS courses. Ankita is a good student and scored 80 percent in the class X board exams. This is her crucial final year of school with the added pressure of clearing the medical entrance. We asked her about her preparation and changes in her routine before and since the onset of this pandemic.

Working very hard, this year Ankita had been following a strict schedule of study. She would attend school from 7:30 am to 1:30 pm; study for three hours on her own at home and take physics and chemistry tuitions for two hours.

In the first week of April, the school informed the students via a *WhatsApp* message that they would begin online classes for two hours every day from 10 am to 12 noon. The family had one smartphone that the mother used for her work in the field and she needed it to continue her work from home. So, they bought another smartphone. Ankita also has a younger brother in class VIII who too had to attend online classes. However, among the three of them, they were able to manage with two smartphones.

Ankita also needs the smartphone to prepare for the NEET exam, for which she has joined online

coaching classes that are held for two-hours every day. The coaching institute teachers are more professional in their use of the online medium, she says. For the rest of the teachers in her school, it was a steep learning curve. The online classes were very erratic in the beginning, but the teachers tried working out the problems each child was having and now they are not only more comfortable with the medium, the classes go on more smoothly.

She says she misses her friends and teachers, especially the Physics teacher who taught very well and explained concepts by doing experiments in the lab. Now there are no experiments. It was easier to get doubts cleared in class, she says, although many teachers now have a 'doubts session' on Sundays, in which students can specifically ask for clarifications on topics discussed during the week.

In school, Ankita tells us she was more aware of her progress because of the frequent tests. Now it is impossible for her to know how she is doing, even as teachers try their best to give them tests by sending papers and reviewing their answers online. It just does not give her the full picture of how she is doing, says Ankita.

Are all the students in her class able to join the online classes? No, one girl who did not have a smartphone and could not buy one, dropped out; she could not attend a single class. But the teachers were very forthcoming and after the lockdown was lifted, asked the girl to come to school every day and learn from them directly. But Ankita feels for this child and has decided to ask her mother to give her friend one of the two phones they have. What will you do? we ask. There is an old Tab (Tablet) lying disused in the house, that she says, she will get repaired and use for herself.

*As told to Learning Curve*