

mini

# resident

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# INDIAN INSPIRATION

High flying business woman **Faiza Seth** tells Laura Johnston about setting up a school to educate children living in extreme poverty in India

**A**t just 33 years of age, Faiza Seth has reached the dizzy heights of success that many can only ever dream of achieving.

The beautiful and confident Mayfair resident could easily be mistaken for a model or actress, but in fact she is CEO of her luxury interior design business and last year founded a school for underprivileged children near Hyderabad in India where she was born.

Seth, who moved to Chicago when she was two, was inspired to set up Soham for Kids following the numerous visits she made to India with her mother when she was younger.

She says: “I used to visit schools and different charitable organisations and give them things like hygiene kits, shoes, food or books for their library,

I wanted to have my own school so I could be sure that every pound spent was used effectively and efficiently.”

It is Seth’s success as a top city business woman that has enabled her to achieve her vision and fund the first year of the school. After gaining a Bachelor of Arts degree in Economics from Northwestern University in America, Seth began her career in the Equity Capital Markets group at Lehman Brothers in Hong Kong before going on to obtain an MBA from Stanford University in California. She resigned from Lehman Brothers after two years because “it wasn’t where I felt my talents and interests were” and she is now CEO of Casa Forma, a high-end luxury interior design business based in South Kensington.

She says: “I learnt a great

Lehman I used to stay up until 3am and be up at 6am and pull all nighters. But I have much more fulfilment and enjoyment now and work doesn’t feel like work.”

Seth also shunned the opportunity to join her husband Pallak Seth’s family business, House of Pearl Fashions, so she could prove her own business abilities.

And that determination is now being channelled towards helping others. Seth began working towards her dream three and a half years ago and she has partnered with the Hope Foundation, who help run the school. The multi-cultural and multi-religious school in Mallapur, Hyderabad, now teaches 100 children aged three to seven-years-old and is going from strength to strength. It is



poorest children in the community are not excluded and the students receive three nutritious meals a day, a school uniform which Seth designed herself, and free healthcare.

“I like to be involved with everything, from designing the uniforms, to looking at the curriculum and adding to that, and organising the school field trips,” says Seth. “I speak with the school every other day and visit every two months.”

The curriculum has been inspired by her education in the US and uses the Montessori teaching method and Seth says: “I believe in making education fun and want to instil confidence in them with education and make

lives so they enjoy and embrace learning.”

*“I want to try and challenge the cycle of poverty by giving these children an education”*

At the moment there are five teachers, including Seth’s cousin Nusrat Abbasi who is her ‘eyes and ears’ when she is not there, and Seth employs students’ parents as the school.

On 24 September she held her first fundraiser at the home of family friend George Davies, the fashion designer and retail

the school by one grade every year up until grade 12 and for the school to teach 300 children.

She also wants to offer vocational courses from eighth grade for those not wanting to continue with academic studies so that they can learn a trade, and the school has begun English and sewing classes for mothers on an evening. Seth also hopes that one day the school will move from the rented four classroom building to a permanent school with room for a cafeteria, library, gym and playground.

“I want to try and challenge the cycle of poverty by giving these children an education,” she enthuses.