



VMS NEWSLETTER

2021

As we celebrate our 120th Founders Day on 14th February, 2022, we are pleased to present our Newsletter to you all - dear students, parents, patrons and well-wishers. 2021 has gone by, another year, when people the world over continued to struggle with Covid-19 and its variants. Vaccination is the key. However, all children still have no protection against this contagious virus. Our children continue to be at home, learning online, with parents having to provide the right environment for this medium of instruction. Being a residential school for the visually impaired, children are living with their parents for the first time for such a long duration. They are longing to return to school, be with their teachers and classmates, enjoy playing in our gardens and also enjoy the nutritious food prepared in our kitchen. Our special needs children too are missing school. Adjusting to school life once again will require patience and understanding. However, until such time that they can return to these facilities we continue to live by Our Mission, *"to provide quality education and rehabilitation opportunities to the differently abled"* to the best of our ability under the prevailing circumstances.

Victoria Memorial School for the Blind – Brief History

The school was established in 1902 by a group of prominent citizens of Mumbai to commemorate the memory of Queen Victoria, the object being "to ameliorate the condition of the blind and to make them useful citizens". Until then, there was no school in Mumbai for blind children. Thus, VMS came into being as a boarding school for blind boys with free education, boarding and lodging, with the Chief Justice of Bombay High Court as its Ex-Officio Chairperson and this continues to be so even now.

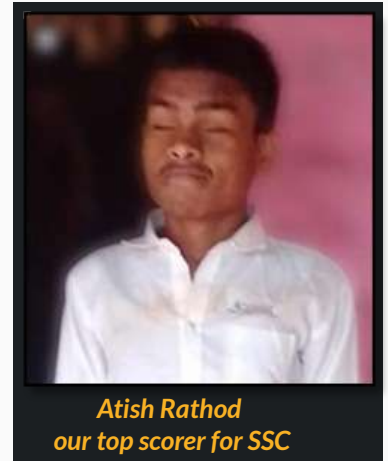




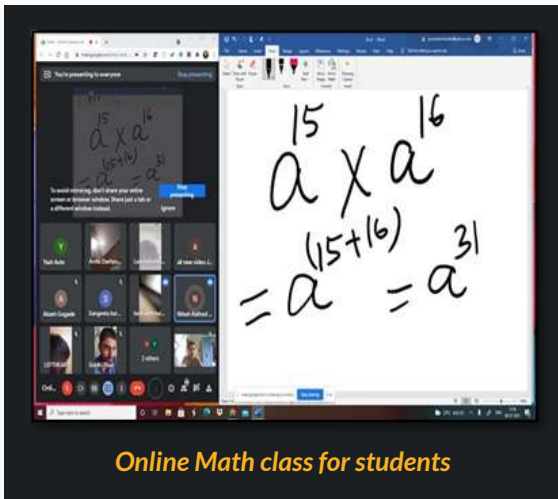
ACADEMICS

There are currently 95 visually impaired students studying with us. 8 students will be appearing for the SSC examination during the year 2021-22. Class 9 and 10 students, who continue to stay with us, study at the nearby Bhausaheb Hiray Municipal School where also classes are being conducted online. **Our SSC results** for the year 2020-21 were 100%. Our congratulations to Atish Rathod for achieving the highest score of 73.60%.

School begins daily online with Assembly and all academic classes are between 9.30 a.m. and 4.00 p.m. Students attend four classes in a day. Over a period of time, students and parents have become familiar with the online platform. Providing Android Phones and monthly recharge facility to needy students has enabled all students to participate regularly in online classes. Teachers are using the DIKSHA App of the National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) which offers teachers, students and parents engaging learning material relevant to the prescribed school curriculum. An Annual Licensed version of the Kibo Application has been purchased for teachers. **The Kibo Application** provides an end-to-end content accessibility platform and makes reading and learning inclusive for all, including the visually impaired. It supports more than 60 international languages and several file formats



Atish Rathod
our top scorer for SSC

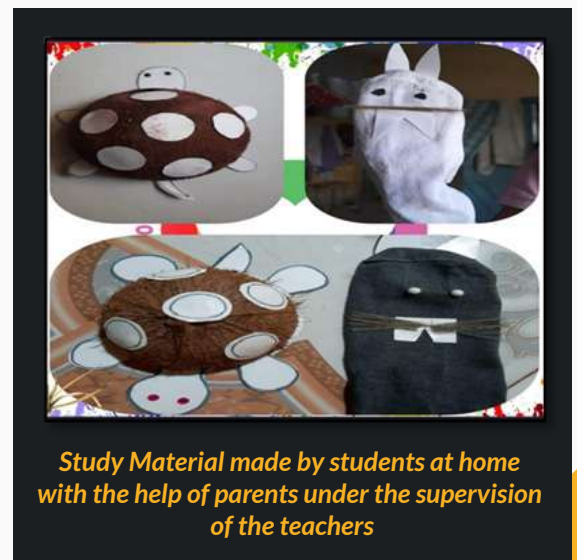


Online Math class for students

Following a *Final Academic Assessment* using Google Forms teachers are continuing with regular online classes to revise and clarify concepts to students. IEP (*Individual Education Plan*) Evaluation and discussion is carried out by teachers and therapists who then explain the IEP Goals to parents taking into consideration the aptitude of each child. Exams as well as Parent-Teacher meetings are held online periodically. Test Series were conducted for the 9th and 10th standard students by the Education Board.

Study content is shared with students by Power Point presentations, PDF and Audio Files using WhatsApp.

Students have been trained to access the Digital Library for study material as well as refer to the **Bookshare Library** that has a collection of more than 3,00,000 books. Children are encouraged to read non-academic books to enhance their vocabulary, knowledge and communication skills. "Bookshare", an offshoot of Benetech, a non-profit organisation in the U.S. makes reading easier for persons with dyslexia, blindness, cerebral palsy, and for persons with other reading barriers. They can customize their experience to suit their learning style and find virtually any book they need for school, work, or just for the joy of reading. It is an online platform for persons with vision impairment.



Study Material made by students at home
with the help of parents under the supervision
of the teachers

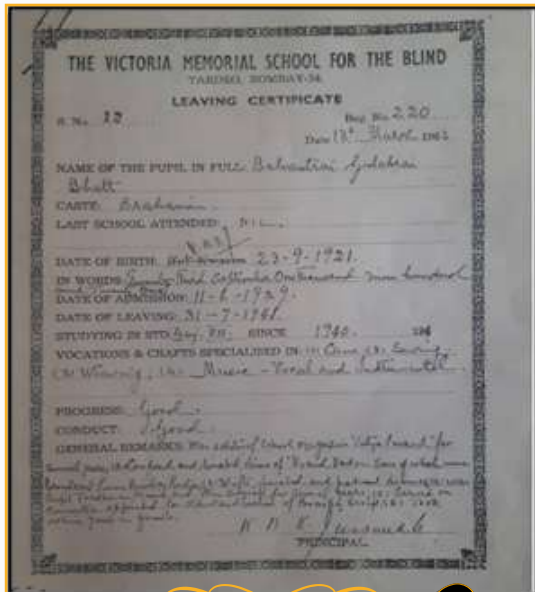
Parents are being trained to make simple study material at home for their children. The necessary educational stationery like braille paper, stylus, arithmetic tiles and therapy kits is provided to them. Yoga mats have also been provided to students for exercises that are taught online.



SUCCESS STORY

We have several success stories to boast of over the years, with our students having gone far in life, in India and overseas, becoming successful and self-reliant. Many come back to visit us in recognition of the foundation that the school laid down for them.

School (VMSB) Leaving Certificate of Padmashri Balwantrai Bhatt



One such story is truly interesting as it is inspiring. Mrs. Vasundhara Bhatt's letter arrived recently informing us that her late husband, **Padmashri Pt. Balwantrai Bhatt**, a musician, was a student of our school from 1929 to 1941. His talent in music was recognised by the then manager who took him to Pt. Omkarnath Thakur, the great doyen of classical music. Pt. Balwantrai went on to become a teacher and performer of repute, was awarded the Padmashri and as expressed by his wife, it was all due to the encouragement he received from VMS. 2021 was his centenary year and his family has very kindly shared with us some memorabilia of his days in school.



Padmashri Pt. Balwantrai Bhatt receiving award from former Indian President A. P. J. Abdul Kalam



Multiple Disabilities with Visual Impairment (MDVI) Section

This section was started recently with 16 students. Here, we prepare students having multiple disabilities along with visual impairment, with disability specific skills, skills to help them socialize, become independent and focus on academics as per their ability. These classes currently being conducted online follow the Pratham Open Basic Education (OBE).



VMS RADHA SUBRAHAMANIAN COMPUTER CENTRE

Our full-fledged Computer Centre for the visually impaired trains our students from classes 5 to 10 and those from the MDVI section. The computer syllabus is tailor made for each child. This Centre provides computer education to our students and others from the city with the help of JAWS (Job Access with Speech) as well as NVDA (Non Visual Desktop Access) software designed for the visually challenged. It is an Authorised Learning Centre (ALC) for conducting Maharashtra State Certificate in Information Technology (MS-CIT) course that facilitates students to get Government jobs. Typing classes are being held and ours was the first organisation to get the authorisation to conduct these in English, Hindi and Marathi for the visually impaired. Computer Classes are conducted online since the lockdown. Our Computer Centre has been a source of great guidance to all our staff too especially since the lockdown when distance learning/teaching had to be done online.



NAVNIT SHAH LIBRARY & RESOURCE CENTRE

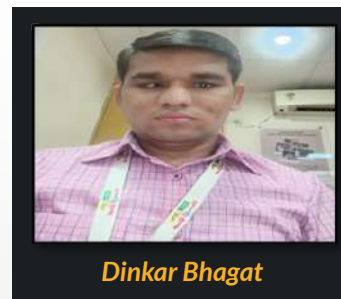
Online Competitive Coaching Classes - Visually Impaired Students enrolled in these classes are being trained free of cost to appear for Banking, Public Service Exams and MPSC exams. The pandemic has given us the opportunity to run these online PAN India. These classes provide guidance, study materials and training to succeed in these exams and secure government jobs reserved for them. Our students from classes 8 to 10 are also encouraged to attend these classes. 24 students have secured government jobs in 2021.

Library staff teach members how to access books through the Bookshare application so that they can access a large variety of reading material. They have also played a major role in mobilising resources like food grains, medical aid and financial support to needy library members.

TESTIMONY FROM COMPETITIVE COACHING STUDENTS



I have been attending classes for competitive exams for many years but unfortunately could not get through. I had often thought of giving up but VMSB always acted as my guardian that kept motivating me and guiding me...compelled me to follow my dreams...Finally I cleared my exams in 2021 and now I have a job in a nationalised bank. Words are inadequate to thank VMSB for all the support.



VMSB has given me the wings to fly and reach for the stars. The competitive coaching class has helped me to clear the banking exams and now I am working as a clerk in a Nationalised Bank. Thank you VMSB.



EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES AND THERAPEUTIC INTERVENTION

Physical Education, dance, music, art and craft classes are being conducted regularly on a virtual platform. Nine students of Class VI who showed promise in singing were enrolled in renowned singer **Shri Suresh Wadkarji's** classes. Home based **therapies** such as counselling, occupational and speech therapy continue. Therapists regularly observe children during classes to ensure that the right therapeutic intervention is being provided. Motivational and awareness sessions are being conducted for some students.

Mother of Kamran and Shadab has this to say – “With the prevailing pandemic, classes are conducted online which require a mobile phone. It was not feasible for us to afford mobile phones for both our children...We are thankful to the school who turned out to be life saver by providing us with a tablet. Now my children are able to attend online classes.”



Kamran (left) with Shadab (right) with the Tablet from school



Students exhibiting Rakhis made by them for Rakhi Competition

Vocational Services

Unfortunately, our massage training programme could not be continued due to the pandemic.

Activities & Events

Festivals such as Janmashtami, Rakshabandhan, Teachers Day, Navratri, Diwali, and Christmas were celebrated virtually with a lot of enthusiasm, song and dance.

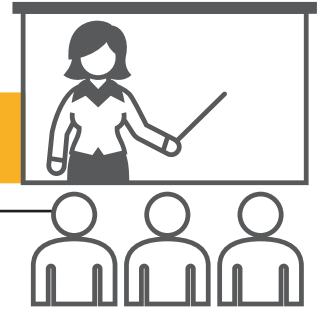
Music Classes

Tushar, an ex-student has been taking flute lessons twice a week for five children. Keyboard and guitar classes are also being conducted twice a week.

Founders' Day, presented by both schools

and celebrated annually on 14th February, is a much awaited event when teachers and students alike look forward to a day of celebration with great fervour and joy. An hour long pre-recorded programme was presented on the occasion when students presented songs, dances and science experiments. Teachers and Parents too worked hard to prepare their children to participate. This celebration would not have been possible without the help and guidance of our Computer Centre in presenting this celebration virtually!

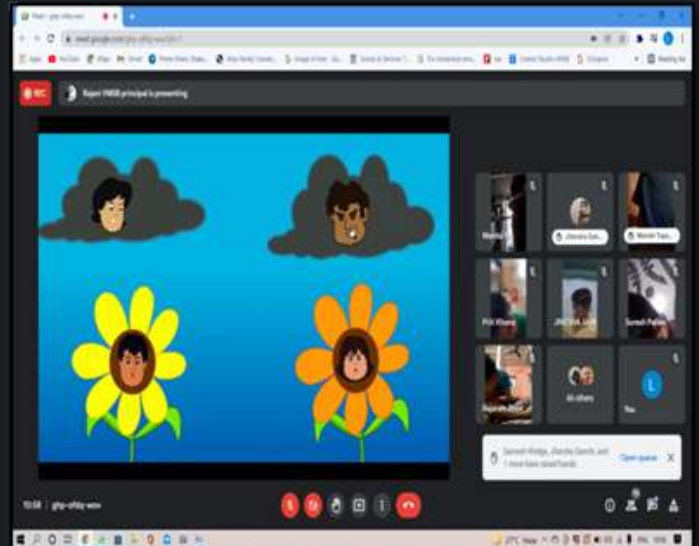
WORKSHOPS FOR STUDENTS, PARENTS & TEACHERS OF BOTH SCHOOLS



- Capacity Building Workshops - Here counselling and motivation is imparted to Parents. During online mode of education, the parents become the primary caregiver, looking after all the needs of the child. This has a tremendous impact on the parent and the child physically and emotionally and that is a challenge to them both depending on the severity of the child's impairment and extent of assistance needed. These workshops are conducted regularly on a one to one or in group sessions by special educators, therapists, counsellors or invited professionals.
- Workshop on Covid, Webinar on Accessibility of Technology for the Blind, Refresher Training for Bookshare Online Reading Platform, One Day Training on Excel and PowerPoint, sessions for Online Teaching Practices and a webinar entitled "Empowering Educators to Understand Legislation for Disability Rights" were some of the sessions organised.



Teachers attending Capacity Building Workshop



Students attending session on Sex Education

- Training Session for Teachers on Universal Design for Learning and Differentiated Instructions was held by Dr. Preeti Verma, our Education Advisor and former HOD, Dept. of Special Education, SNTD.
- Continuing Rehabilitation Education Webinar was conducted online for teachers. The topic was "Empowering Educators to Understand Legislation for Disability Rights."
- Teachers are trained in house by Dr. Preeti Verma on Assessment and preparing Assessment Tools.
- A talk on sex education was conducted for students during the month of December 2021.

Activities for both Schools

Physical Education, Dance, Music and Paper Bag making classes are conducted for both schools. Home based therapeutic intervention such as counselling, occupational therapy and speech therapy services are being provided along with Motivational and Informative sessions.



EYE WAY HELPDESK IN COOPERATION WITH CIPLA & SCORE FOUNDATION



The goal of this project is to enrich the lives of the visually impaired by providing them vital information as regards education, employment, health, assistive devices, and government schemes and to give them an opportunity to interact with our counsellors and discuss their problems ranging from daily living issues and professional issues.

As part of our outreach program for the Eye Way Helpdesk we have been organising webinars every month called “Eyeway Encounters” for the visually challenged of Maharashtra and Goa. These webinars are an opportunity for the visually challenged to interact with experts from various spheres which may provide them with information on a profession they could pursue, technology they could use to enhance their lives, learn the importance of effective communication or gather information on Government Schemes for the disabled.

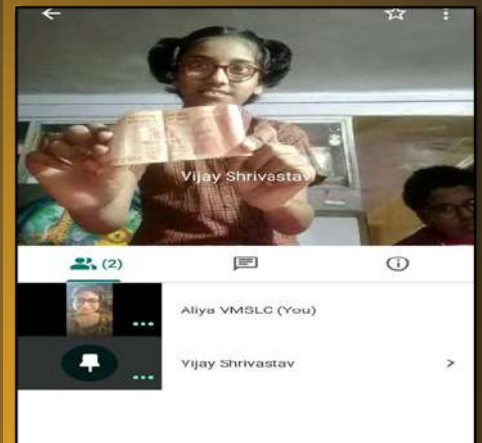
Standard Chartered Conference Centre had no bookings for any of the rooms due to the pandemic.

VMS LEARNING CENTRE

This Centre set up in 1999 as a day school provides services to boys and girls with Special Needs such as Autism, ADHD, Cerebral Palsy, Intellectual Disability, Slow Learners and Muscular Dystrophy, between the ages of 5 and 18 years. These children are provided individually conceptualised education – Functional and Pre- Vocational Training that focuses on the abilities of each child in order to prepare them with a suitable vocation. Online classes are being held with the help of parents since the pandemic began. The biggest challenge has been to get Special Children to focus as they get distracted very easily by a screen in front of them. However, with time, children and parents have learnt to adapt. Teachers employed various techniques such as game based learning to improve attention spans and to empower students to express their creativity. We currently have 65 students in this Centre.



Student preparing chart for Earth Day



Student attending Online Class on currency notes



ACADEMICS

Individual Education Plans (IEP) are prepared for each child as per his/her ability after discussions with parents.

Open House is held at the end of every academic year, when the principal, along with the Head Teacher, teachers and therapists discuss with parents the progress of each child.

Parents review meetings are held every month and after every exam or assessment when the academic progress or otherwise of each child is discussed. Parents give their feedback on the online sessions. Therapeutic intervention, the student's behavior related and mental health issues are also addressed on a one to one basis. Our in-house counsellor advises parents on issues relating to self and family.

This year, three students are appearing for class 10 exams through the NIOS. They will be appearing for 5 subjects, namely, English, Home Science, Data Entry, Business Studies and Painting. 19 students are registered under Pratham Basic Education Programme. These students follow the open bridge course syllabus which is grade equivalent to class 1 till class 8. The Pratham Mumbai Education Initiative has developed modified curriculum based on the Maharashtra State Board syllabus.

Early Intervention Unit

This is a new initiative to cater to children from the age of 0 to 6 where the child is observed, assessed and issues related to disabilities are addressed at an early stage. The child is prepared for functional development skills, activities of daily living, communication and basic academic concept development. Individualised Education Plans (IEP) are made with the parents' participation who are then taught to train the child. Quarterly evaluation is done to track the progress of the child and accordingly future goals are planned. As of now, 8 students are enrolled in this programme. This intervention done at an early stage enables the child to progress better.

Success stories - Krutesh Diwadkar is helping his brother in the field of interior designing after their father passed away. Hussain Khan is working with his father in his business designing boxes. Both are studying for class 12 exams privately.

Computer Education - 35 students are attending computer classes at the Centre where the curriculum is tailor-made as per the aptitude of each child. Students from the Pratham OBE programme (1st to 8th grade) and NIOS (National Institute of Open Schooling i.e. 9th and 10th grade) are following the grade level computer syllabus.

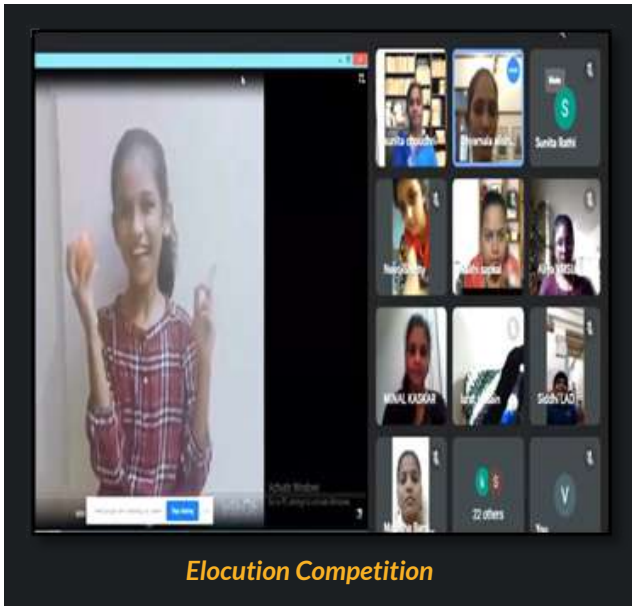
Congratulations to our student Pratham Shetty for scoring 85% in his NIOS Board Exams.



Pratham Shetty our top scorer for NIOS Exam



EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES



During the year, students participated in various activities such as an Elocution Competition, Rakhi making contest for RakshaBandhan, Story-telling for Gokulashtami and Independence Day. Navratri was celebrated with children showing their talent in decorating the thali, pot or dandiyas, thus channelising the creativity of each child. A virtual field visit was organized by the teachers to Raigad Fort, Vijaydurg Fort and Ajanta Caves which the children enjoyed immensely. Diwali as well as Children's Day was celebrated with great enjoyment jointly by both schools virtual on platform. A Christmas party was celebrated with carol singing. School had organized to send gifts for the children in advance which they opened at the time of the online party. A teacher dressed up as Santa Claus asked the children to open their gifts to the great excitement of all!

TESTIMONIALS

Mahi with her mother



Aarush with his mother



Parent of Mahi Shrivastav, a student at the Learning Centre says - "The VMS Learning Centre is very supportive. The teachers and the whole school puts a lot of efforts in the progress of my child. The school is also giving my child online therapy services and necessary therapy kits. We are very lucky that our child Mahi Shrivastav has got a chance of studying at the VMS Learning Centre."

Aarush Dalvadi's mother has this to say about the Learning Centre - "Schools play an essential role in shaping the future of the students. We are grateful to the school for supporting us and developing the mental, physical and social aspects of our child especially during the pandemic."

Redevelopment of The Learning Centre is nearing completion through the munificent support of Mr.Noshir Cawasji Gotla. It has taken a lot more time than anticipated due to the pandemic as an adequate labour force was not available. However, the civil work and the exterior work is complete and so is the interior. The specialised furniture for special needs children is currently being executed

VMS-Vijay Merchant Centre for Life-Skills & Development

This Therapy Centre was set up to provide speech therapy, occupational therapy and psychological counselling to the visually impaired as well as the intellectually challenged children of our schools and from the city. Therapies are being given regularly even more so during the pandemic as it has been a trying time for both parents and students. Having to learn online from home has been no easy task.



Online Occupational Therapy under the guidance of Therapist

Upgradation of Our Solar Power Generation Facility

With the kind support of the Australian Consulate we were able to upgrade our existing solar plant. This will help us save on electricity bills additionally by 25-30%.

FUTURE GOALS & PLANS



- To complete redevelopment of the VMS Learning Centre that is in progress.
- To develop our tactile lab with the latest and the best equipment.
- To start new skill development training programs for students after Class 10 and for adult visually impaired library members.
- Continue organizing Continuing Rehabilitation Education (CRE) programmes for in-house teachers as well as for teachers from other special schools, parents, siblings, and for the society at large.
- To build up our school corpus.

A BIG THANK YOU TO OUR CURRENT MAJOR DONORS AND SUPPORTERS



- | | |
|--|---|
| UTI Asset Management Co. Ltd. | Dayaben Girija Shankar Sheth Trust |
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...AND to our devoted Teaching and Non-Teaching Staff and our dear parents without whom our achievements would not have been possible.

OUR STALWARTS

Dr. Preeti Varma - Academic Consultant
Dr. Salil Jandyal - Executive Officer

Ms. Shampa Roy – Principal, Learning Centre
Ms. Rajani Hiremath – Principal, School for the Blind

MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE/TRUSTEES

The Hon'ble Chief Justice of the High Court of Bombay – Ex-officio Chairperson

Mr. Ramesh D. Chandak	Vice Chairperson/Trustee	Mr. Sanjiv Navangul	Member
Mrs. Mala Goenka	Hon. Secretary/Trustee	Mrs. Janhavi Apte-Kothari	Member
Mrs. Anjali Laud	Jt. Hon. Secretary/Trustee	Mr. Jagdish Thackersey	Member
Mrs. Meena Deshpande	Member/Trustee	Mr. Anami Roy	Member
Mr. K. Ramkrishna	Member		

SAD LOSS

In the recent past we have sadly lost some of our Trustees and Management Committee Members.



Mrs. Kamaliniben Bhansali



Mrs. Kalloliniben Hazarat



Mr. Madhav L. Apte



Mr. C. V. Kothari



MISSION

To provide quality education and rehabilitation opportunities to the differently abled.



VALUE STATEMENT

To strive for a better quality of life for every visually impaired and intellectually impaired individual by providing education, training and rehabilitation opportunities, thereby making them self-reliant individuals.



VISION

To encourage, nurture and develop differently abled individuals; to empower them to take their place in the world and society, as confident and productive.

We thank you for your interest in our activities for the welfare of the challenged and take this opportunity to wish you a safe, healthy and happy 2022

The Victoria Memorial School for the Blind

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