



## **Westridge Primary School History**

Early in 1991 a group of young Hindu parents with children at the Society's Nursery school were finding difficulty in securing primary school places for their children at private schools such as Gateway and St. Johns. These schools were charging very high desk fees in order to secure a place in their schools, and many young parents could not afford this fee. Hindu children were denied places in these other private schools even though they were academically qualified to go to such schools.

Thus the idea of starting our own primary school was mooted and the core group of parents began exploring the feasibility of this. Coincidentally at the same time a few parents from the Moslem community were also thinking of starting a primary school. They discussed the idea with their Hindu friends and proposed working together to establish a school for Hindus and Moslems. Towards the latter half of 1991 both these groups had gained support of other young parents. The second group went on to found Twin Rivers School.

The group of only Hindu parents strongly felt that the proposed primary school should operate under the auspices of the Hindu Society and maintain control over its curriculum (which had Gujarati classes and cultural activities as part of its school calendar). They proposed using the existing Gujarati classrooms at Anson Road, Ridgeview, which were then underutilised.

The Executive Committee at the time was supportive of the idea and the proposal was tabled at the Society's AGM in March 1992. There was intense debate among members about the pros and cons of operating a primary school on Society premises. Many elder members were against the idea because of their fear of Society losing control of the school (and assets) in future years when the Hindu population became a minority. A few of these elder members felt that starting a primary school would be prohibitively expensive and would lead the Society to financial ruin.

However the younger members were vociferous in their concerns to have our own primary school established; one where Hindu children would be able to have exposure to our culture and traditions whilst getting first rate education in the English medium. The proposal was voted upon and the majority of members voted to start a primary school under the auspices and control of the Hindu Society. Furthermore the school board of Governors would operate as a sub-committee of the Executive Committee of the Society.

The Steering Committee, chaired by Bharat C. Jogi (later by Professor Dinesh P. Giga), began meeting weekly from 13<sup>th</sup> March 1992. The Committee members were tasked to prepare the school registration, policies and ethos, and logistics of finding a Headmaster and recruiting staff. The goal was to open doors for five classes by January 1993. The founding Headmaster was Manubhai S. Patel (formerly of Louis Mountbatten School). Together with the various committee members, he played a key role in formulating the school policies and curriculum, guiding ethos as well as identifying suitable teaching staff to join the school.

Westridge Primary School opened its doors of learning on time on 12<sup>th</sup> January 1993. There were five classes, Grade I-V with a total of 95 students, and two nursery classes with a total of 54 children. Afternoon sports activities took place at Sunrise Sports Club and the classrooms were used by Gujarati School during the afternoons and on Saturdays.

Over the next eight years the school steadily grew in size and reputation. Various building projects were completed during this time. The new Nursery Block (1995), development of the sports fields (1993-1995) the E Block of classrooms for Grade 6 & 7 (1997-98), the swimming pool (1998), and tennis courts (1999). By this period the school was fully functional with seven primary classes (grade 1 to 7) and had an annual enrolment of over 300 pupils.

**Dineshkumar N. Bhagat**

**(Secretary, Steering Committee & School Board of Governors 1992-2000)**