

# Renu Kochhar

Chairperson,  
Viraj Shri Ram Centennial School

*Renu Kochhar is not a name you'd be unfamiliar with. Declared the Businesswoman of the Year in 2010, she's just as active on the educational front, working tirelessly as the Chairperson of the Viraj Shri Ram Centennial School.*

**Q. When did you start your journey as an educator and how many years have you dedicated to this industry?**

I started my journey as an educator in the year 2011. To me, this experience has been more like following my heart rather than being one of the job responsibilities. I make it a point to visit the school at least once a

week, because the innocent and beautiful faces of all these kids bring immense joy to me. The more I interact with them, the more passionate I feel towards promoting education in India.

**Q. How would you describe your journey as an educator and a visionary?**

Our vision has always been to provide a wonderful learning opportunity to the students and help them grow inside as well as outside the classroom. To that end, the journey has been quite interesting and full of pleasant experiences. Having said that, we've had our own share of problems and difficulties, too, especially during the initial phase when we'd just started our school.



Initially we had to meet all the parents and help them understand the teaching methodologies being adopted by Viraj School, which was quite a new concept to them. But soon when the parents saw the changes being brought into their kids and saw them doing well in studies and extra-curricular activities, they came around. Today, our school has carved a niche for itself in the industry and is fast becoming a name to be reckoned with.

**Q. What was your vision & motivation behind starting your educational institute?**

I have always believed that the future of our youth lies in good education, not just in terms of academic performance, but also in developing a comprehensive world view, of being exposed to various cultures, the Arts, Public Speaking, Theatre etc. along with a proficiency in sports. This kind of education is generally available in our schools in the big cities but is lacking in the smaller towns. Being one of the major employers in this area, it is of deep interest to me to provide modern education at affordable costs.

**Q. Who has been your inspiration during this journey?**

Dr APJ Abdul Kalam, India's "Missile Man" and the former President of India, has always been my inspiration during this journey as an educator. He always wanted to be remembered as a good teacher. Teaching was his passion and even during his last breaths, he was teaching at IIM, Shillong. He used to connect with children easily and instantly and many of his followers call him Guru Kalam or Kalam Sir.

Even after assuming the post of India's 11th president, Dr Kalam used to take time for his penchant of teaching and used to interact with students on as many occasions as possible. Belonging to a humble background, he was very hardworking as a student and understood the value of a good education.

He always used to stress on the fact that education can do wonders for the curious mind, and at VSRCS this is the key philosophy which we follow. We only ignite the curiosity in the minds of our students and aid them in exploring the answers themselves. In fact, we have almost all the books written by him in our school library.

**Q. What are the greatest challenges you faced during your journey? How did you overcome these obstacles?**

Our biggest challenge in achieving the Mission of the school has been the deep rooted perception of education within the community. The emphasis on marks and rote learning

has not allowed children to really blossom. Lack of creativity and critical thinking are also apparent. It is convincing the parents and the larger community that has been our biggest challenge.

Since the teachers too are from the region, getting them on board with our mission too was also difficult. Constant counselling and the very positive response from the children helped overcome this obstacle.

**Q. Describe one instance that led you to step into the education sector.**

One summer afternoon in 2011, I was casually interacting with a team of Managers. They were talking about our employees who were staying in Boisar with their families. Some of them had come from various cities like Delhi, Pune, Vadodara etc. to work in our company.

While talking to them, I realized that the new employees with school going kids were very concerned about the lack of a good school in and around Boisar. It was not just a few employees who were worried. This was a pressing issue for a majority of our working population, which was around 8,000 people then.

Sensing their concern, I realized the need of a world class school in Boisar. That was when I promised to myself that I would surely a world class school in Boisar. With the support of my husband, Mr Neeraj Kochhar, I was able to fulfil this dream.







**Q. What are the ways in which your school has reached out and connected with its neighbouring community?**

**W**e provide liberal scholarships to the community. This has encouraged even those earning lower salaries (under Rs @20,000 per month) to enrol their children in our school. Additionally, our children regularly perform at various events in the district and beyond. This is done through street plays, dance-dramas, debates etc., and a social message is strongly delivered. Additionally, we invite leaders of the community to visit and be a part of the numerous events hosted in our school.

**Q. What are the values you wish to inculcate in your students?**

**O**ur Mission Statement clearly articulates the following: "aim to develop 'Creative Minds' which in turn will address student's 'Unique Learning Styles' and will strive to guide its students towards building a courageous and compassionate character that will contribute to communities in positive ways."

Through this, we expect the students to be creative, have critical thinking, be compassionate, be collaborative, be communicative and above all be great citizens of our country and of the world.

**Q. What is your opinion about the present-day educational system in our country?**

**T**he bulk of the education in our country today is languishing in colonial times. Rote learning and the dumbing down of the meritorious are common practices in schools. Individual skills and talent are not encouraged. Only a "One size fits all" (Marks!) policy.

**Q. As an educational institute, what kind of help do you expect from the Government of India that will help you improve the status of education in the country.**

**I**would like the government to accept that the needs of today are vastly different to what they provide. They should literally force the transformation in their own schools, the change that I am recommending. Most importantly, they should not interfere in the running of private schools. Rather they should focus on improving their own.

**Q. If you could bring a change in India's education system, what would that be?**

**I**would encourage the setting up of many schools such as ours in every district and if possible transform government schools into the kind of school that we have.

