

ANNUAL REPORT

2025-26

Viswa Bharati Vidyodaya Trust

At a Glance

Viswa Bharati Vidyodaya Trust (VBVT) is a community-led education organisation working with the Bettakurumba, Kattunayakan, Mullakurumba and Paniya communities in the Nilgiris since 1995, reimagining education as a path to dignity, identity and possibility.

During 2025-26, VBVT's work continued to be rooted in cultural relevance, community ownership and lived experience across all programmes:

- **Vidyodaya Adivasi School:** 125 children from 32 villages, taught by 14 teachers
- **Teacher Education:** 12 young Adivasis undergoing hands-on teacher training and strengthening pedagogic knowledge in Mathematics, Science, English and Tamil
- **Community Education:** 27 Learning Centres reaching 215 children; 1,292 Camp Attendances; 297 Scholarships awarded across 71 villages; 13 staff
- **Hostel:** 19 girls and 2 boys, supported by 4 facilitators (part-time)
- **Cornerstone**: New campus building permissions received and contractor finalised

Beyond these, VBVT works with 3,500+ Adivasi children across 320 villages, supporting families, village sangams and schools to keep children in school. This includes emotional support for children and support for parents to access essential documents such as Aadhaar, birth certificates and community certificates.

From an organisation standpoint, all key roles across VBVT's Trustees, Coordination Team and Advisors are now filled. The Chief Functionary, the Managing Trustee and over 80% of VBVT's team and board are now Adivasi.

Why: VBVT works to change the way education relates to Adivasi children, placing identity, culture and community ownership at the heart of learning, so their languages, values and ways of life are respected while they build the skills to navigate the wider world.

How: The approach blends formal and informal learning through schools, hostels, village centres, camps and teacher education, led by Adivasi teachers and youth trained as facilitators.

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Our Roots

The Viswa Bharati Vidyodaya Trust (VBVT) is a community-based organisation working with the Bettakurumba, Kattunayakan, Mullakurumba and Paniya Adivasi communities of the Gudalur valley in the Nilgiris, Tamil Nadu, recognised by the Government of India as Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs).

VBVT was registered in 1993, reoriented in 1995 when two hundred Adivasi leaders held a five-day Mahasabha to ask for a school the community itself would own. This was part of the Adivasi Munnetra Sangam's (AMS) wider movement for self-determination and dignity.

Forest access was narrowing, and schools ignored Adivasi children's languages, cultures and rhythms of life. VBVT set out to build an education rooted in community ownership, honouring identity, upholding dignity and answering to people's lived realities.

Three decades on, that work has grown into engagement with schools, hostels, learning centres and teacher education, weaving Adivasi leadership into teaching, governance and decision-making.





Our Vision

Adivasi communities shaping their own futures through education that is rooted in their culture, responsive to their context, and grounded in their collective aspirations.

Our Mission

To co-design an education directed by Adivasi communities, one that reflects children's realities and aspirations. Engaging through schools, hostels, village learning centres and teacher education, we hold education as a practice of freedom: strengthening identity, deepening connection, and enabling communities to shape their own futures.

Adivasi School

Shaping Futures, Staying Rooted

The Vidyodaya Adivasi School is a nursery and primary school that has been working for over thirty years to create a culturally rooted and contextually relevant learning environment for Adivasi children. It emerged from a demand within the community to build an educational space that values their identity, language and lived experience.



KEY FEATURES

Context-driven Curriculum

The school's curriculum blends foundational academic learning with traditional Adivasi knowledge and culture, including the geography, history and oral traditions of the Adivasi communities.

Grounded in Community, Guided by Care

Trained Adivasi teachers lead through collaborative and democratic practices, shaping learning spaces grounded in trust and mutual respect.

Balanced and Holistic Daily Routine

Children engage in a rich flow of academics, craft, play and cultural expression each day, making learning both joyful and meaningful.

Connected Spaces of Learning and Growing

The school actively engages with parents and elders to build a shared educational journey between home and school.

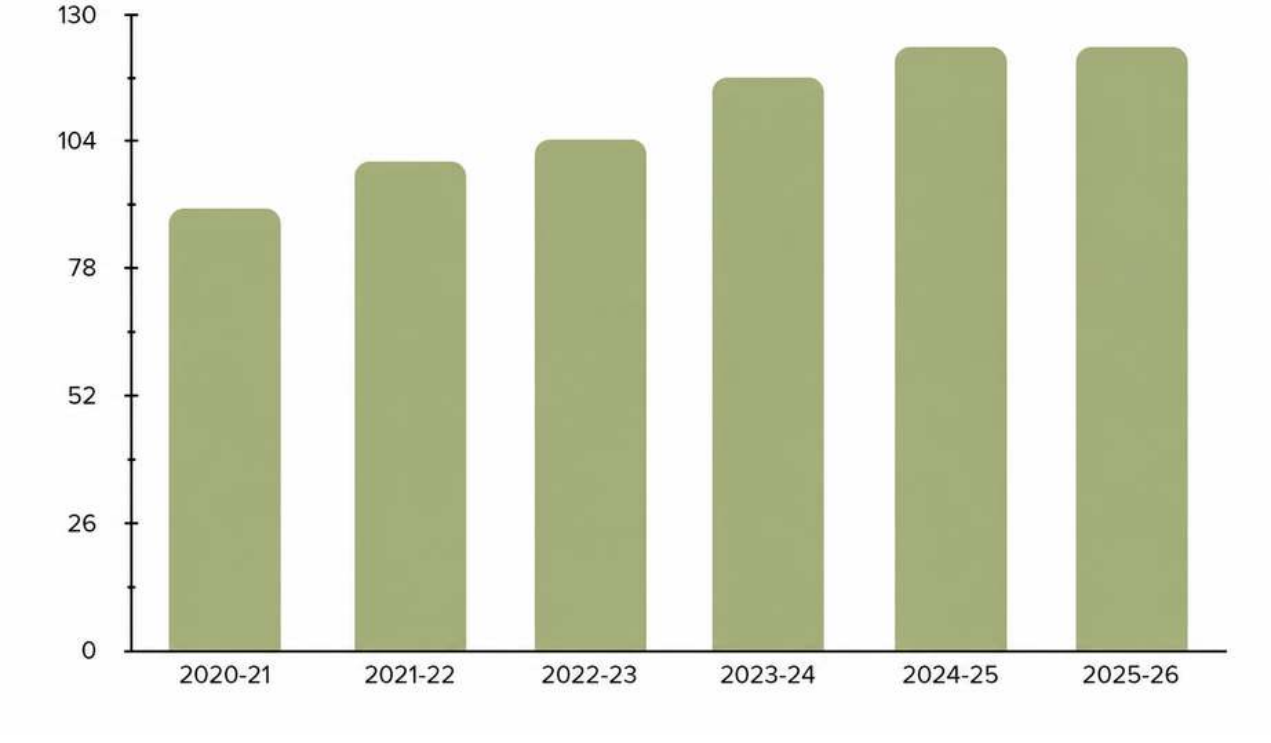
The Year in Numbers

125
Children

32
Villages

14
Teachers

Admissions over the Years (2020-26)

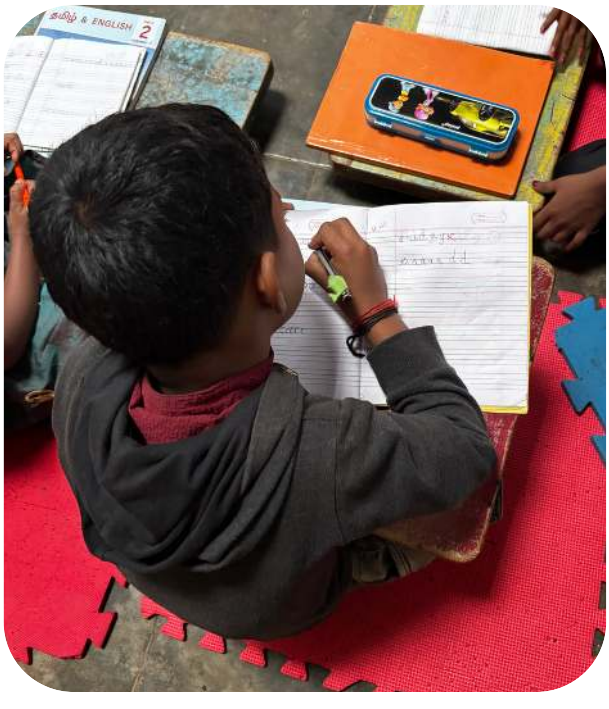


The 2025-26 academic year saw enrolment hold at the school's full capacity of 125 children, affirming the belief the community places in it. The government's recognition of the school has also been renewed until June 2027.

Highlights of the Year

Strengthening Curriculum and Craft

The Social Studies curriculum was strengthened this year through observation, analysis, reflection and expression, using field trips, model-making, technology and contextual classroom discussions. Work also began on revamping the Science, Mathematics and Craft curricula. Mixed-age Craft sessions continued, with children exploring beadwork, string art and macramé, and the carpentry batch restarted after a few years, with children making wooden spatulas and boxes.







Learning Beyond the Classroom

Experiential learning continued through visits to local spaces, including a paper bag manufacturing unit, the market, the post office and the fire station. In planning these experiences, teachers also develop assessments that look at the holistic development of each child.



The Library Keeps Growing

Last year's partnership with Bookworm Goa took a further step this year: a second facilitator completed its library mentorship programme and joined the library team, expanding activities beyond the traditional library hour to build children's confidence in reading and expression.



Partnership with Parents

Teachers continued regular village visits to understand more about children's lives at home, and parents and elders came to school throughout the year to teach traditional dance, song and crafts such as chains and pot holders, and to lead walks helping children identify local medicinal plants. Parents further supported the school by contributing to their children's stationery, helping them build savings habits through post office accounts, and joining in building and campus maintenance during workcamps that brought the community together with a shared sense of ownership. Children's health and nutrition remained an ongoing focus alongside academic progress.





Nishanth's Story: When the school becomes an extension of home, learning moves at the rhythm of the child. Two years ago, Nishanth came to Vidyodaya wanting only to play with his friends; with a short attention span, it was hard for him to stay focused on tasks.

With patient, gentle nudging from his teachers and a school ethos that blends learning routines with care, he has now made the transition to being inside the classroom, able to complete tasks with focus.

Teacher Education

Growing Change-makers from within the Community

VBVT's Teacher Education programme enables culturally responsive classrooms, where children see their lives and cultures reflected in learning, speak with confidence and shape their learning journeys.

This effort makes VBVT's other work possible: the same teachers and facilitators it trains go on to work across the organisation, as teachers, hostel staff, community education coordinators, accountants and administrators, and on the Cornerstone Project, carrying the same grounding in community and care into whatever they take on.



Since 1997, VBVT has trained 71 Adivasi youth as teachers and facilitators across six cohorts, the most recent in 2025. Of these, 31 work within VBVT today, and seven within the wider AMS network; the remainder have gone on to build their own livelihoods elsewhere.

The Year in Numbers

12

in training this year

This year, twelve VBVT-trained facilitators began an eighteen-month in-depth teacher-training course, built around three strands: understanding one's own culture and identity, strengthening core teaching skills, particularly in Mathematics, English, Science and Tamil, and gaining hands-on experience across VBVT's classrooms, hostels and village learning centres.

Highlights of the Year

Learning Beyond Vidyodaya

Trainees completed month-long immersion placements at four partner schools in the network: Centre For Learning, Marudam, Vidyavanam and Thulir, covering hostel and library work, crafts, mathematics and Tamil. Trainees held sharing circles, reflecting on what they'd seen and discussing how to adapt these practices to their own context.

Content and Pedagogy

Back at Vidyodaya School, trainees had classes on content knowledge and pedagogy, and senior teachers supported them through weekly reviews, classroom observations and lesson plan feedback, reviewing progress to map strengths and areas to work on. Trainee views were sought too, to shape future cohorts, alongside ongoing reflection circles among teachers informing everyday practice.

> **Our confidence has grown as we learn in depth how to teach English, Tamil, Maths and Environmental Studies, without losing touch with our own culture and identity, and practise with many children**

ONE OF THE TRAINEES





The Maths and Science Resource Centre

Vidyodaya's Maths and Science Resource Centre works as a living lab, connecting the knowledge children already carry from the forest with the science and mathematics of the classroom. This year, the team began building a repository of low-cost, locally meaningful teaching-learning materials, helping teachers approach their subjects with a spirit of inquiry.



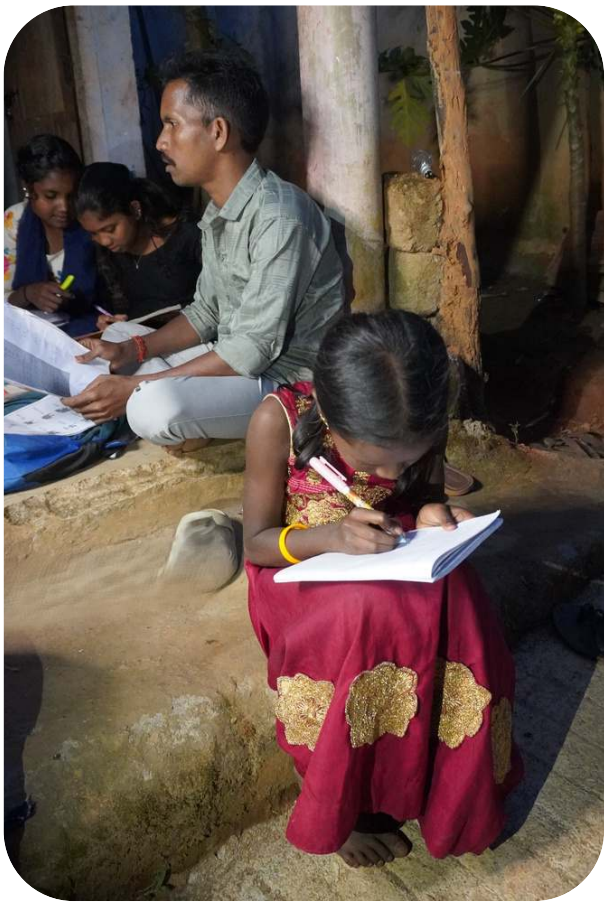


Community Education

Reclaiming the Villages as Sites of Learning

This programme works with Adivasi communities to create village-based systems of learning, led by local youth volunteers and coordinators. It is grounded in the belief that strong, community-led support can transform children's education and strengthen community ownership over learning.

Coordinators regularly follow up with school-going children across the wider community, identifying and supporting those at risk of discontinuing their education. The programme also engages parents and community members to plan for children's learning, address challenges and build shared responsibility for education.



KEY FEATURES

Community-Led and Volunteer-Driven

Led by young people from Adivasi villages who serve as coordinators and volunteers.

Safe and Supportive Learning Spaces

Learning Centres are welcoming spaces where children feel free to ask questions, share ideas and learn at their own pace.

Consistent, Community-Responsive Support

Steady, village-based guidance and mentoring, paired with scholarship support and problem-solving on priorities like transport and early childhood education.

Camps as Spaces for Exploration and Growth

Camps bring together adolescents from different villages for collaborative learning and cross-community connection.

The Year in Numbers

27

Learning Centres

1,292

Camp Attendances

297

Scholarships Granted

Beyond these three areas of work, VBVT's 13 coordinators, working with village teachers, track 3,500+ Adivasi children across 320 villages. Where a child is at risk of discontinuing school, coordinators offer emotional support and bridge conversations between parents, children and school, help families access documents like Aadhaar and birth certificates, organise college and Industrial Training Institute (ITI) counselling, and partner with sister organisations in health and livelihood.

Highlights of the Year

Strengthening Learning Centres

This year, Learning Centres were equipped with proper storage, including a "Trunk Petti" sturdy enough to withstand heavy weather and termites, alongside stationery, story books and games material to support creative and cognitive-skill-building sessions.

Sumithra and Sindhu's Story: Sumithra and Sindhu had both left school after Class 10. Visits to their village's Learning Centre changed their path: as they watched coordinators teach patiently, something in them shifted and they found new purpose, training as community volunteer teachers, known as Keeches.

Once teaching at their own Learning Centre, they asked themselves: how could they not go to school themselves, while teaching other children? Both re-enrolled, completed their schooling and became role models for their village.

Exposure Visits

Team members travelled to Bengaluru, visiting IMTMA's campus to learn about its skill-development work, Gubbachi's learning centres, a discussion with OBLF on women's empowerment and English curriculum, and a session on traditional games with Ima Recreations.

Thirty-seven Keeches travelled to Mysuru with seven coordinators and two support staff, visiting the zoo and palace in a compact one-day trip to build confidence without overburdening the group. Coordinators led the planning themselves.



Camps Through the Year

Camps brought children together for relationship-building across villages, with sessions ranging from nutrition awareness led by our sister organisation ASHWINI to financial-literacy skits, a telescope introduction and a closing drama. As students approached exams, camps in January and February eased exam-related anxiety through guidance and mentoring, while coordinators made village visits to follow up individually with children in Classes 10, 11 and 12. Over the year, camps drew 1,292 attendances from children across 63 villages.



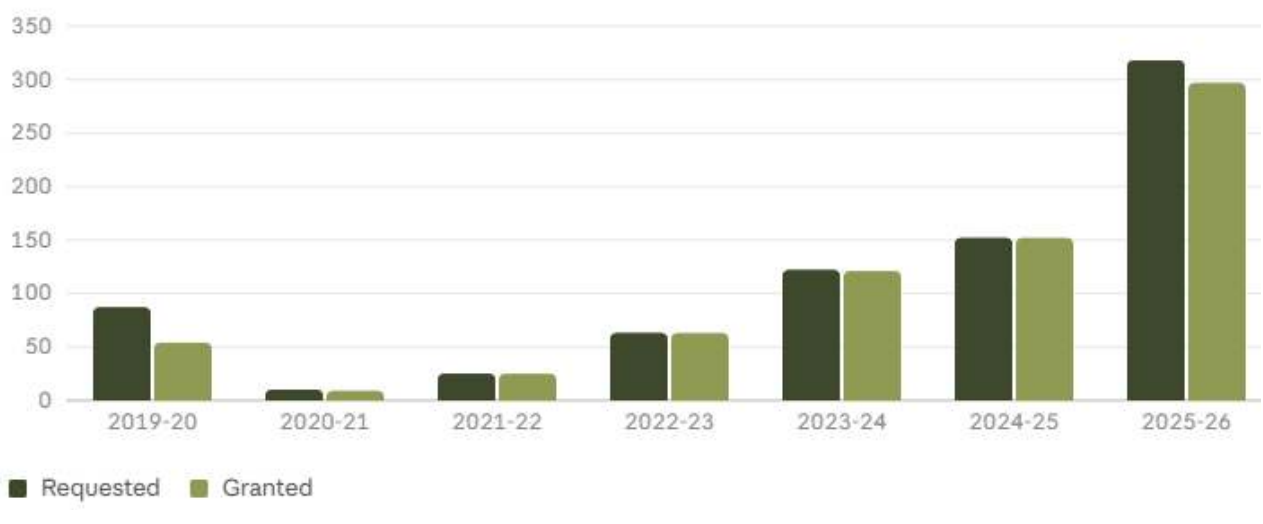
Scholarships

This year, 318 children from 78 villages requested support: 192 girls, 126 boys.

The most common need was an umbrella: 209 asked for one. With heavy rain common here, a child without an umbrella can miss enough school to fall behind. Requests were also made for items like bags, uniforms and notebooks. Since forest access was restricted, families now depend on uneven daily-wage labour, making it hard to cover school needs. Local village sangams identify children who need support, and a Scholarships Committee reviews requests. Most requests are for children from Classes 6 to 12.

Of the 318 requests, 32 young people (20 women and 12 men) from 20 villages pursued college, nursing or postgraduate study across institutions in Gudalur, Ooty, Chennai, Kerala and elsewhere in the Nilgiris. Thirteen of them attend Gudalur's only government arts and science college, which is also the nearest affordable option to home.

Scholarships: Number Requested vs Granted (2019-26)



Building a Shared Vision

With some members leaving this year, the team spent time in reflection and self-evaluation, building shared understanding of the programme's vision. Role plays, debates and discussions helped coordinators and educators consider their roles as agents of change, while regular meetings strengthened decision-making, revisiting the goals of Learning Centres and camps and weighing budget, feasibility and staffing before deciding.

Hostel

A Residential Initiative Rooted in Care

The hostel programme was established in 2021 to support Adivasi adolescents, from Class 6 to Class 12, who often face significant barriers in continuing their education beyond primary school.

The girls attended Fathima Girls Higher Secondary School and stayed at the boarding provided there, while the boys stayed with their relatives.

Transcending a traditional hostel, the programme is a nurturing, community-rooted residential space guiding adolescents to grow into confident, competent and compassionate individuals.



KEY FEATURES

Academic Support

Structured study sessions build foundational literacy and numeracy to help children navigate mainstream schooling.

Learning Beyond Academics

Weekend life skills workshops build practical abilities, emotional resilience and confidence through joyful, self-directed learning.

Culture and Family

Children stay connected to their culture and values through structured activities, while facilitators build strong relationships with their families and their home villages.

Facilitator-led Mentorship

Each child is supported by a facilitator providing consistent academic and emotional mentorship, in a responsive, trusting environment.

The Year in Numbers

19	2	4
Girls	Boys	Facilitators (Part-time)

Highlights of the Year

Learning English

This year, an alumna of Fathima School, now supporting the programme as a volunteer, began English language sessions with the students, building their confidence in a language central to their continued education.

Taking Responsibility for Their Lives

Students came together for a camp to identify their needs and priorities, and build a shared timetable balancing academics, recreation and responsibilities. Students said they valued room to try things without fear of getting it wrong. This encouraged a shift from adult-set routines to greater ownership of their own lives.



Learning and Reflecting on Culture

Alongside cultural songs, dances, stories, riddles and crafts, structured discussions this year encouraged students to think critically about their practices, weighing which changes felt necessary. Students said learning Adivasi languages, singing, dancing and reading stories were among the most valuable experiences. A visit to En Ooru Tribal Village grounded this thinking, followed by village visits where students learned from elders and, in turn, taught village children. Food became another thread: inspired by Adivasi festivals, students sourced ingredients, prepared and shared a meal together.

Evening Classes and Camps

Evening classes offered more than academic support: students reflected on their day and received emotional support alongside help with schoolwork. Students said sharing difficulties with facilitators, and getting clarity in return, was among the things they valued most. A daily thirty-minute period, along with circle time, lets students recollect and assess what they've learned. Camps extended this further, with library sessions, life skills sessions and craft sessions in cross-stitch, wire bags and bead chains.



Finding Her Footing: One of the girls in the programme found mathematics out of reach at her previous school; no matter how hard she tried, she couldn't score well. Since joining the hostel programme, that has begun to change: with steady support and encouragement, she is now scoring better in the subject that once felt hardest.

Focusing on the Next Steps

Senior students were encouraged to think beyond academics. This year, six students appeared for public exams: five from Class 12 and one from Class 10. Everyone cleared the exams; three twelfth-graders enrolled in college and two are exploring other paths. One result stood out: scoring 490 out of 600, one student secured admission to B.Com at Madras Christian College, Chennai, one of India's most respected colleges.

Cornerstone

Laying the Foundations for a Shared Future

For over thirty years, VBVT has shown that culturally relevant learning spaces transform Adivasi children's education, despite limited infrastructure. The Cornerstone Project answers that limitation: an expansion of space and imagination.

More than a campus, it mirrors the village's ethos: open, rooted, collaborative and aspirational, shaped together by children, educators and community alike.

Serving children aged 4 to 18, the campus brings together:

- A residential school from Kindergarten to Class 12, with a library, computer and science lab, hall, hostels and vocational pathways for Classes 11–12
- On-site teacher education
- An Adivasi Resource Centre serving 320 villages and over 95 local schools

Phase 1 covers Kindergarten to Class 7, teacher education, the Resource Centre and the hall, with the rest following in later phases. Over the next 20 years, it aims to reach more than 9,000 Adivasi children and youth.

KEY FEATURES

Connection

Spaces that connect, visually and physically, right from the entrance.

Green and Outdoors

Learning in the lap of nature with lots of outdoor space and green everywhere.

Shared and Multi-use

Spaces that are usable, multifunctional and communal, opening onto outdoor learning.



Highlights of the Year

The updates below carry the project's status through September 2026.

Building Permission Secured

VBVT received Directorate of Town and Country Planning (DTCP) and Gudalur Municipality building permission in March 2026 after more than three iterations. This was among the first commercial approvals granted in Gudalur in quite some time, especially given the restrictions on ecologically sensitive hill areas.



TAMILNADU
SINGLE WINDOW PORTAL
FOR PLANNING PERMISSION

Tamilnadu State Wide Single Window Portal

AUTOMATED BUILDING PERMIT APPROVAL SYSTEM

PLAN DOCUMENT SCRUTINY REPORT

STATUS : Verified

APPLICATION DETAILS

1	APPLICANT NAME	VISWA BHARATHI VIDYODAYA TRUST	2	APPLICATION DATE	26/06/2025
3	APPLICATION NUMBER	369194-2025-EM	4	APPLICATION TYPE	Permit
5	OCCUPANCY TYPE	Institutional	6	DCR NUMBER	DCR620258YRXL
7	REGISTERED ARCHITECT/ENGINEER	-	8	DEVELOPMENT TYPE	New Construction

PLOT DETAILS

1	SURVEY NO				
2	PLOT NO	NIL	3	PATTA NO	NIL
4	TALUK	Gudalur	5	DISTRICT	The Nilgiris
6	PLOT AREA (As per declaration) in m²	7760.0	7	PLOT AREA (As per measurement) in m²	7760.00

Building Contract Decided

VBVT has appointed a Project Management Consultant (PMC) who will work with a labour contractor. Compared with a full contract model, this approach was found to be considerably more efficient, with better quality assurance and flexibility on schedule and procurement. VBVT ran a tender process and received more than eight quotations overall for different options. A reputed structural engineering firm has also been appointed.

Preparing the Land

The latest land survey is complete, buildings marked out, and excavation planned to level the land within its natural contours, keeping costs manageable. Permission for the excavator required for this work is ready to be issued. An electricity connection is about to be received, and borewell work is expected to start soon.

Timeline for Phase 1

VBVT is targeting a construction start in October 2026, with Phase 1 opening by June 2028 and some finishing work continuing until September 2028.

Keeping Decisions Accountable

All decisions go through the appropriate levels of review across the Cornerstone Committee, Auditors, Advisors and Trustees, ensuring clear accountability at every stage.

Land Blessing

Elders from Kothervayal village blessed the land, marking its readiness for construction and the continuation of the community's journey in education.





Organisational Updates

Nurturing a Community-led Educational Institution

All key roles across VBVT's Trustees and Coordination Team are now filled, and Advisors were formally instituted this year. Over 80% of VBVT's team and board are now Adivasi, including the Chief Functionary and the Managing Trustee.

Strengthening Our Systems

VBVT renewed its focus on resource mobilisation, launching a new version of the website, building an active presence on LinkedIn and Instagram, and restarting the VBVT journal alongside the annual report. SASHA (Support Against Sexual Harassment), a Bengaluru-based organisation, trained all team members, including village volunteer teachers, on protecting themselves against sexual harassment and on compliance with the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act. VBVT also revived its All-Education-Team Meetings this year, bringing together colleagues from all programmes to reflect on the work.



Visitors and Volunteers

Three interns from the Tata Institute of Social Sciences spent four weeks with VBVT across School, Hostel and Community Education, while an Azim Premji University volunteer focused four weeks on Community Education. VBVT hosted children from Centre For Learning and Ohana, Bengaluru, for a week-long excursion each, with Centre For Learning also visiting sister organisations for a fuller picture.

Dr M. P. Vijayakumar IAS, Vice-Chairman of the State Council for Higher Education, spent more than half a day with VBVT, along with his team and Prof. Padma M. Sarangapani, Chairperson of the Centre of Excellence in Teacher Education at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, and an advisor to VBVT, discussing the challenges of VBVT and how they could help address them.



Members of ARUN Seed, an NPO from Japan whose mission is helping people shine, spent time with VBVT learning about its work.

VBVT also welcomed a family visiting Gudalur from Zurich, Switzerland. The family taught the children a song, playing saxophone and guitar together as they did.



Kalaivizha: Celebrating Adivasi Culture

Kalaivizha returned this year after a long gap, bringing Adivasi communities, villages and sister organisations together through traditional dances, songs, stories, games and rituals, alongside an exhibition of participating organisations' work. With around 300–400 people attending, the event created an opportunity for communities to share, connect and recognise their collective identity.

More than a cultural gathering, Kalaivizha is a space to deepen unity among Adivasi communities, uphold cultural traditions and ancestral knowledge, and build stronger connections across villages and organisations. It reflects the shared belief that collective participation and solidarity can amplify community voices and create greater visibility for their work, culture and aspirations.

Adivasi Day

Adivasi Day, held on December 5, was celebrated this year around the theme of Adivasi Knowledge. Classrooms became themed learning spaces featuring medicinal herbs, traditional crafts and cultural artefacts such as tools and jewellery. Children put up an exhibition and performed dances and dramas showcasing their communities' practices, values and lived traditions.







Financials

Our Detailed Financial Report can be found here.

Our accounts are audited by J. Mathew & Co, Ooty, with A.Raghunathan & Co LLP, Chennai, continuing to conduct internal audits and training for our staff.

VBVT's work is funded by individuals, trusts and foundations, corporate CSR contributions, and international organisations.

VBVT is listed on Benevity, and holds tax-deductible giving partnerships with The Friends of H.O.P.E. (UK), Spring Foundation (US) and Friends of Payir (US).

CSR-1 Registered · FCRA Compliant
80G Tax Exemption · 12A Registered

Our Partners

Apart from strong community ownership, a big part of our work is possible because of the support of our many partners and donors. We thank them for their continued contributions, which have made it possible for our work to sustain and grow.

- Adivasi Kooperations Projekt
- Alok Kalia
- Anju Teresa Joseph
- Anshumitha Ethiraj
- Anu Mammen
- ARTMA Foundation
- Asha For Education (Beyond Borders)
- Asha For Education (Zurich)
- Association For India's Development
- Bala Arjun R
- Centre for Human Development and Social Change
- Chinmayi J
- Dasra
- Dr Ashok Anant
- Dr P Shylaja Devi
- Dr PG Premila
- Dr Premala Anthony Singh
- Dr Uma Nair
- Durga Nandini
- Elizabeth Pushpa Eapen
- Friends of Payir
- Gayathiri Mani
- Geetha R
- Gomatheswaran K
- Indian Machine Tool Manufacturers Association
- Isabella Giulia Bernasconi
- J Paul Getty Jr Charitable Trust
- Jacob K John
- JSK Trust
- K T Subramanian
- Kamalachi
- Lahari
- Madhuri Kurup
- Moly Mathew
- Monika Christ
- Monish
- Nandan P. Kumar & Maya Kumar
- Nicholas Barber
- Niveditha Ram
- Parvathy
- Patrick Paul
- Prajula Dangol Sudhakaran
- R Arivazhagan
- Ramakrishnan AP
- Ramesh Chandran Bhaskaran Nair
- Ravikumar S
- Rema Devi Purushothaman
- Rema Menon
- Shanker Krishnamurthy
- Shanthini Daniel
- Sita P Nilekani
- Spende Direkt
- Spring Foundation
- Sri Kumar Tadimalla
- Srinivasan Sundaram
- Subhash Gautam
- Suman
- Susanne Elisabeth Bernasconi
- TaeguTec India Pvt. Ltd.
- Tamilmani S
- Tara Trust
- The Charities Aid Foundation
- The Friends of H.O.P.E.
- The Hilton International Development Trust
- The UK Online Give Foundation
- Umadevi Nair
- Unnikrishnan Ittiampurath
- Val Hawkin
- Vidhya G
- Vijay Tanks & Vessels Private Limited
- Vishnu C
- Welton Foundation
- Werner Dobelin
- Zarir Cama

And to all those whose names don't appear here: friends, neighbours, well-wishers, supporters and past colleagues who have given in so many ways, with time, materials, quiet encouragement and trust. Our deepest thanks: they are as much a part of this journey as anyone else.