

## Founders Message

### VNP Raj Managing Director

My philosophy of education is deeply grounded in humanity. Who are we; what do we have to offer the world and why do we need education? The answer to these most fundamental of questions is precisely why there must be an Athena in the world.

Humanity is inherently value-based. However, we do not simply live according to a system of values because we have to. We do so because it allows us to live our lives with pleasure and purpose; we are free to create, innovate and express ourselves in such a way that adds to greater happiness, harmony and peace of human society.

This understanding inspires the guiding principles of Athena, namely ~~that of~~ social grace. Social grace represents the ideal balance between the optimal development of the individual and the building of an innovative, healthy and peaceful society. The happiness we pursue individually through creating, competing and succeeding occurs in the context of a society based on the happiness we pursue collectively through kindness, empathy and caring.

Athena's concept of social grace is formed by the confluence of three interconnected rivers of pedagogical philosophy.

The first is the principle of '*individual uniqueness*'. I have learned from my own scholastic experience that a rigid, impersonal system that stresses uniformity and conformity over individuality is detrimental to both the individual and to the society and thus does not allow social grace to be achieved. Every type of talent needs to be accepted, appreciated, celebrated and rewarded in order for the individual and society to thrive. Forcing every child into the same mold fosters confusion and division instead of confidence and unity.

As a founder of Athena, it is therefore my strong belief that this is why social grace is of such great importance. In order to achieve peace and happiness in society, we must give *learning independence* to the child. Every child is a pool of talent. Every child is an individual. When we understand these talents and work with these talents then social grace will come to the classroom.

The second river of Athena's vision of education is that of '*freedom of thought*'. I believe that the freedom to express opinions and ask questions is the oxygen for the growing, learning mind. It is imperative that students discover truth for themselves instead of having it foisted upon them. Only this way will they understand the value of reward and fulfilment that comes from putting your heart and soul into work you believe in.

We always ask the questions: 'What is right? What is wrong? What is moral?' Students must be allowed to figure out the answers to these questions for themselves instead of being made to blindly believe in something they are told. At Athena we call this '*the inner sense of discipline*'. In order to grow into a productive member of society the child must acquire the discipline required to set their own moral

compass. At Athena we say: *'The value of social grace is allowing the child the inner sense of discipline to determine for themselves what is right and wrong.'*

The third river that makes up the concept of social grace in the context of education is the most spiritual one of all. We call it *'excitement'* and we see it as a blend of energy, character and destiny. Excitement is the driving force of every human mind. Excitement makes you the person and personality you are: it forges your uniqueness. Excitement is the freedom to discover who you are and this is what Athena gives to every child in the classroom.

At Athena the rivers of individual uniqueness, freedom of thought and excitement intertwine to create social grace. In this way we create a stimulating, challenging and rewarding learning environment to allow the kind of individual growth that contributes to an innovative, thriving and peaceful modern society.

