On 23 July the Premier of Victoria, Hon Daniel Andrews MP, visited the Hampton Park Centre of the Victoria School of Languages. He was accompanied by Ms Judith Couacaud Graley, the Member for Narre Warren South, who organised the visit.

The visitors were welcomed at the door by student representatives of the eight languages taught at the Centre. The Principal, Frank Merlino, provided a brief introduction to the Victorian School of Languages and the Hampton Park Centre and the range of services that the school provides to the Victorian education community.

Mr Andrews and Ms Graley were then given a tour of the school by Area Manager Holger Nord and Supervisors Shannon Keane and Amanda Windsor. They visited a number of classes to see the teaching and learning in action and they discussed student progress, motivation and the value of language learning. The Premier was impressed by the commitment of teachers and students alike and took the opportunity to step into several classes to talk to the students and teachers, and even learn a few phrases in several languages.

“It was fantastic to see so many keen students and their hard-working teachers on a Saturday morning”, the Premier said. “Given the ever-increasing importance of languages, this school is doing much to prepare students for the wider world.”

The eight languages taught at the Hampton Park Centre are Arabic, Chinese (Mandarin), French, Khmer, Japanese, Malayalam (Indian language), Punjabi and Sinhala. The Hampton Park Centre has been operating for ten years in the local community and this year is running classes for over 600 students. The classes range from Foundation (Prep) to Year 12 (VCE).

The teachers prepare the students to learn to read and write in their target language and motivate them to achieve a high score for their University studies (ATAR score). They provide a great teaching/learning environment for the very keen and ambitious students.

Ms Graley commented: “I was delighted to be joined by the Premier to see firsthand the extraordinary contribution this great school makes to our diverse and
Premier Visits VSL Classes (Continued)

ever growing local community.
“We saw students of all ages and differing skill levels learning languages such as Punjabi, French, Arabic and Japanese.
“It’s a wonderful snapshot of the diversity of our local community and how as a multicultural society we are always stronger together."

The teachers that the Premier spoke to were appreciative of the visit. According to Ms Yi Li (Chinese), “It was great to have the Premier visit our classes as he showed genuine interest in language learning and he spoke some Chinese to the students. He was very warm and down-to-earth and was particularly impressed by the teachers and their work.”

Mrs Shally Khanna (VCE Punjabi) commented: “The students were really excited to meet the Premier. In our culture it means a lot that the head of government acknowledges community efforts and achievements. They were impressed that the Premier was well informed about the Punjabi community in Casey and that he shared with them the value of family and community in young people’s lives.”

Another teacher, Ms Arlette Ramnuth (French VCE) said, “The French class felt really excited that the Premier visited our class which also highlights that Hampton Park is a growing multicultural suburb with young people who are enthusiastic about learning French as a second language.”

According to VSL Centre Manager, Dr Holger Nord, “What makes the classes special is the strong volunteer spirit that inspires our teachers. As well as continuously refining their language and teaching skills, they put in extraordinary extra efforts in motivating their students and organising a range of cultural activities, which are appreciated by the students, and of course we couldn’t do without the assistance and encouragement provided by the parents,” he said.

Principal Frank Merlino expressed his appreciation of the visit: “The teachers, students and parents greatly appreciated Mr Andrews and Ms Graley dropping in to say hello and getting a first-hand view of the classes,” he said.

“Victoria has the highest number of students studying a language at the VCE level and this is due to the leadership shown by the Education Department and the Government.”

“Our school makes a great contribution by teaching 48 languages in 40 campuses around Victoria and we appreciated the opportunity to showcase our service.”

Mr Merlino congratulated Holger Nord, and the Supervisory staff, teacher and students of the Hampton Park Centre for the smooth organisation of the visit which commenced and finished on time.
Visit by President of Malta - Her Excellency Marie-Lousie Coleiro Preca

“...It is clear that the Victorian School of Languages and the Maltese Language Teachers Association of Victoria are working closely together and this puts them at the forefront when it comes to Maltese Language teaching in Australia. I have visited other States and I have seen Maltese classes but they are not as organised as this. I congratulate you and I hope you will continue to work in this manner together to keep Maltese as a language option in Victoria.”

This was the key message delivered by Her Excellency Marie-Lousie Coleiro Preca, the President of Malta on 23 July 2016 at the Taylors Lakes VSL Centre.

Over the years the VSL has hosted visits by people from numerous overseas schools, universities, consulates, etc. We are used to these and have developed a process for informing the visitors about what the school does and discussing ways to network and strengthen our language programs. Sometimes visits lead to positive and practical outcomes, such as new curriculum resources or sister school arrangements.

So there was no surprise when Mr Victor Grech, the Maltese Consul-General for Victoria, informed us that a delegation from Malta wanted to visit the VSL Centre at Taylors Lakes to meet with the teachers and parents. However, to our surprise, we found that this was a delegation of 16 people and included a government Minister, and the President of Malta herself.

Our senior teacher, Ms Emma Navarro, opened the proceedings with an introduction and the national anthems of Australia and Malta were played. The VSL Assistant Principal, Mr Joe Tosic, welcomed the guests which also included VSL School Council President, Dr Bruno Mascitelli, and provided a brief overview of the challenges faced by smaller candidature languages.

Mr Mark Bonello, the President of the MLTAV, then discussed the work that had gone into establishing classes under the banner of the Victorian School of Languages. These initiatives have helped to keep the VCE accredited Maltese language alive in Victoria.

Mr Victor Grech acknowledged and thanked the VSL for all its support and guidance over the years. He also acknowledged and thanked the hard work of the teachers and showed a genuine desire to support our school initiatives in strengthening the Maltese language program in Victoria.

The President of Malta was the next key speaker. Her Excellency praised our students on their willingness to take on the study of the Maltese language. She discussed the advantages of being bilingual and that students with parents of Maltese origin were eligible for dual citizenship. During the President’s speech, she congratulated both the VSL and the MLTAV.

The teachers organised several activities which included questions to the President from the senior students and a song from the juniors. The MLTAV Committee then presented the President with a gift, followed by a formal cutting of the cake ceremony to celebrate the visit.

According to Dr Bruno Mascitelli, “We also took the opportunity to present the President and the Consul General with a submission to further strengthen the teaching of Maltese in Victoria. Using other existing Department models, we outlined a proposal to establish a Language Assistant program and we hope that it will be considered.”
Study Tour to Salerno, Italy

At the end of the 2015 school year, fourteen students studying Italian at the Victorian School of Languages, both Distance Education and Centre students, and their Italian teachers, left Australia for a three week study tour to Salerno, Italy.

Students attended Italian classes at the L'Accademia Italiana in Salerno in the mornings and were divided into two groups (beginner and intermediate). The Accademia teachers were highly professional and specialized in teaching Italian as a second language. After lunch, students attended site seeing trips or seminars, all arranged by the Accademia. Some of these excursions included Amalfi, Ravello, Paestum, Pompeii, Naples, and a weekend in Rome.

Our students ranged from Years 9 to 11 and they all felt that their Italian speaking, writing and listening skills, as well as their understanding of the cultural and historic aspects of this important region in Italy, had greatly improved after the three weeks. The fact that students were billeted to host families also helped to improve their speaking and comprehension skills, as none of the members of the host families could speak English.

Salerno is a pretty and very safe medium sized town of about 150,000 people near the Amalfi Coast, about 50 kilometres south of Naples in Southern Italy, an ideal town for such a tour, due its mild winters and location.

Mr Vincent Sicari, the father of one of the participating students (a school principal), provided feedback which in part reads: “He (Esdra) speaks of his experience at L’Accademia with great admiration for the teachers (both yourselves and the teachers at the Accademia) and with the view that his time there has supported his ongoing learning of the language.”

“We understand the work that goes into the organisation and running of such a tour and the demands that are placed on you 24 hours a day, but as educators we see the value and importance of this experience and we put our heart and soul into ensuring the best possible outcome for every young person that participates. You have succeeded in all of this.”

The study tour was such a great success that we hope to be able to offer similar tours in the future. The VSL Distance Education Italian faculty is currently planning an Italian study tour for the 2017/2018 holiday period.

Rosa Vitelli

The VSL would like to sincerely thank our sponsor DIVELLA, the major brand distributed by BONFOOD Pty Ltd, for their generous donation towards the cost of our visit to Rome. Visit the link below for more information about this company.

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Hindi Conference - 22 July 2016

The Victorian School of Languages hosted the Second Hindi in Australia National Workshop in Thornbury on 22 July 2016.

According to the VSL Principal, Frank Merlino, “The Indian community in Australia is growing in confidence and trade with India is increasing dramatically. It is therefore an auspicious time to promote and increase the study of Hindi in Australian Schools.”

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To date the Asian languages that have been included in school curricula are Japanese, Chinese, Indonesian and (to a lesser extent) Korean. Some years ago the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) was established to develop a national curriculum for all Australian schools from Kindergarten to year 12. In 2015 it approved the Hindi study.

The first National Workshop was held in 2015 in Canberra at the initiative of Dr Peter Friedlander, the Hindi lecturer at the Australian National University.

The 2016 Workshop was to assess the status of the Hindi language across the Australian States and Territories and to investigate options to teach the language more widely in schools in the face of competition from Asian, European and other languages. The participants were from Hindi schools around Australia, cultural associations and a range of media and other organisations.

The Consul-General of India, Ms Marika Jain, opened the workshop by commending the participants for their contribution to date and wished them the best in their deliberations. She also thanked the Victorian School of Languages for establishing the first Hindi classes in Victoria in 1987 and for hosting the Workshop.

Dr Friedlander then spoke about the link between language and culture and the importance of learning Hindi.

The practical sessions began by teachers talking about teaching Hindi at the primary level. The presenters were VSL teachers Ms Aparna Kumar and Ms Anushree Jain, and Rangebank PS teacher Ms Pooja Verma. Mrs Kunmar spoke about some of her classroom teaching strategies. Mrs Jain spoke about teaching multi-level classes and the teaching resources she had developed. Mrs Verna spoke about teaching students from a non-Indian background.

The secondary section presentations were made by Mr Frank Merlino, Ms Mala Mehta (from NSW), Mrs Kulwinder Kaur (also from NSW), Mrs Amita Malhotra (from South Australia), and Mrs Manjeet Thethi (from Victoria). Mr Merlino spoke on the role the VSL has in teaching and promoting Hindi. Mrs Mehta described the role and activities of her school. Mrs Kaur outlined activity based examples she uses including interactive lessons. Mrs Mulhotra spoke about teaching at the senior secondary level. Mrs Thethi then spoke on teaching at the VCE level.

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Two new participants at the Workshop were Ms Anjana Dwivedi and Ms Renu Gupta, both from The Grange P-12 College, the second Victorian government school to introduce Hindi.
The tertiary section presentations were made by Dr Ian Woolford (La Trobe University), Dr Peter Friedlander (ANU), and Mrs Rekha Rajvanshi (Sydney University). Dr Friedlander and Dr Woolrich spoke about their Hindi university courses while Ms Rajvanshi ran a group workshop on teaching Hindi poetry.

During the morning break a VSL birthday cake was brought out to acknowledge the VSL’s 30 years of teaching Hindi with Dr Dinesh Srivastava blowing out the candles and with Mrs Thethi, Mr Merlino, Dr Friedlander and Mrs Mehta looking on.

The afternoon session covered the media, culture, art and literature. The presenters were: Dr Dinesh Srivastava on print media, Dr Subhash Sharma on the Melbourne literary scene, Mr Ratan Mulchanadnai on Hindi music in Melbourne, Mr Harihar Jha on publishing in Hindi, Dr Nalin Sharda on poetry and cinema, Mr Vipin Gainder on art-theatre and radio, and Mrs Anita Barar on SBS Hindi radio, art-paintings and theatre.

The final session consisted of presentations on research and future plans. Dr Friedlander spoke on global research possibilities in Australia and Singapore and Dr Srivastava spoke on the provision of Hindi around Australia and about the possible role of Hindi organisations in convincing the public and schools to introduce Hindi.

VSL Principal Frank Merlino was pleased that the Victorian School of Languages hosted the 2016 Workshop. He also announced that the VSL was funding the development of a VCE Hindi distance education course.

“Once completed,” Mr Merlino stated, “students of Hindi who live in country Australia or in suburbs where Hindi is not taught, can access the language”.

He also mentioned that the school’s top two VCE students of Hindi from 2015 also received a Premier’s Award.

Congratulations to all teachers, lecturers, parents, members of the media, representatives or organisations, and consular staff who are working to encourage, promote and celebrate the teaching of Hindi in Australia.
Supporting Students with Special Needs

On 10 August language teachers from around Victoria attended a seminar on “Supporting Students with Special Needs” at the VSL head office in Thornbury.

The event was organised by the Modern Language Teachers Association of Victoria and the Victorian School of languages.

The VSL has a growing number of students, both in Centre classes and in Distance Education, who have special needs.

The aim of the seminar was to provide teachers with practical and effective strategies for working with a range of students who experience challenges every day in our classrooms. The presentation had a focus on students with Auditory Processing Disorder (APD), Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), anxiety, and also covered students with social, emotional and academic needs.

According to Heather Rae, one of the participants, “The seminar helped me understand some of the more subtle indicators and consequences of certain disabilities. A student with ASD or ADHD may prefer the distance education mode, but a teacher taking a telephone lesson with a student who struggles with individual communication requires specific skills and innovative teaching tools.”

According to Angela Natoli, Assistant Principal, one of the obstacles that teachers face is that some parents are reluctant to disclose their child’s disability and teachers have to find this out by themselves. The matter is made worse when the student’s home school refuses to disclose what the school has in place on the grounds of maintaining ‘confidentiality’. “What is required is co-operation between the parents, the students’ home school and the VSL teachers to help these special needs students succeed in their school studies and also to ensure they have positive learning experiences.”

A challenge for the school is to identify funding sources or clarify existing funding arrangements for students with a disability. These include, for example, also having an Integration Aide for VSL language classes when there is a demonstrated need.

As from 2017, for renewal of registration with the Victorian Institute of Teaching, teachers will be required to provide evidence that they have improved their capacity to teach students who have a disability by having attended workshops and seminars such as the one described here.

In a separate but related area related to improving a school’s duty of care to students, the Victorian Registrations and Qualifications Authority has put in place a process to have schools comply with child safety standards.

Language teacher, Joanne Lepore stated that, “The roles and responsibilities of teachers continue to increase with each passing year but there is no doubt that priority needs to be given to our duty of care towards all students so that they can reach their full potential at school.”

The seminar was just one of a number of activities that the VSL is planning in order to implement the Education Department Special Needs Plan which requires schools to develop strategies for supporting and managing students with special needs and disabilities.
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Key 2016 Term 3 Dates

12 July - Term 3 Commences
16 July - First session Centre classes
22 July - Second National Hindi Conference, sponsored by VSL
23 July - Visit by Premier to Hampton Park VSL Centre
23 July - Visit by Maltese delegation to Taylors Lakes VSL Centre
10 Aug - Student with Special Needs PD; VSL Head Office
13 Aug - Staff PD; no centre classes
2-4 Sept - "The Education Show", Melbourne Convention & Exhibition Centre
10 Sept - Last session for Prep - Year 10
16 Sept - Government Schools end of Term 3
17 Sept - VCE only Centre classes
3 Oct - Term 4 begins

New VSL Publications/Courses

The following materials development projects are currently underway:
• Italian VCE Units 3 & 4 Online course
• Spanish VCE Units 1 & 2 Online course
• Hindi VELS 3 Textbook
• Turkish Prep – 1 Workbook
• Turkish 1-2 Workbook
• Chin Hakha VCE Units 3 & 4 Textbook
• Classical Greek VCE Units 3 & 4 Distance Ed course
• Hindi VCE Units 3 & 4 Distance Ed course

16 Year old VSL Student Sebastian Pasquali Stars in his First International Football Match against Juventus

On Saturday 23 July, Melbourne Victory took the field in a friendly with Italian Series A Champion, Juventus. Sixteen year old Sebastian Pasquali was called on to play at the 60th minute and he excelled in a 25-minute cameo.

After a 1-1 draw there was a penalty shootout and it was Sebastian who stole the limelight by kicking the decisive fifth penalty and therefore winning the match!

Sebastian studied Italian through the VSL Distance Education in 2014 and 2015. One of his reasons for learning Italian is to pursue his soccer career in Italy. International soccer (football) players understand that it is essential to speak other languages if they wish to play on the international stage, and be interviewed on television. There is no doubt that we will hear a lot more about Sebastian in the future.

Languages and Life

When Natalia Kalinowski and Philip Gruszka first met in the VSL Polish classes at the Dandenong Centre at the age of 13 little did they know that years later they would complete Polish VCE together, complete a university degree, and ... get married!

Natalia completed a Bachelor of Business Economics at ACU and Philip completed his Masters in Occupational Health & Safety at the same university. Natalia is now well known as an Australian fashion model. She has appeared as the face of Crown Casino Resorts, Chandon Worldwide and Melbourne Spring Racing Carnival and as well as worked for a range of different brands like Myer, Louis Vuitton and French Connection.

Both of them agree that having studied a language has assisted them in their respective careers. Natalia says “As well as speaking in Polish to my friends and relatives both in Australia and overseas, I find that my knowledge of how language functions helps me to pick up phrases in other languages. All of the major models that I have met have a good grasp of several languages.”

The school has no idea of how many married couples first met at a VSL language class!