



Uganda Humanist Schools Trust (UK)

Report on Humanist Academy Visit on Tuesday 7 July 2009

Introduction

This is a report on a visit to the Humanist Academy on a normal working day. The visit was pre-arranged. Steve Hurd was shown around the school by Tom Oponya, the Director of Studies. The aim was to discuss and see the effects of the £10,660 of financial support that Uganda Humanist Schools Trust has provided to the school in the 6 months January to June 2009 and to discuss the future priorities for fundraising for the school.

School Tour

The Road: Work we had funded to improve the access road was largely completed. The roadway has been widened and graded but the constructors are waiting for some rain so that the tractor-roller can return to roll and harden the surface, also work is needed to lower a short very steep section at the top of the hill.

The Staff: The staff on site when I visited included the following original teachers:

Tom Oponya – Director of Studies, Physics and Mathematics

Irene Atto – History and Christian Religious Education

Jackson Okwera – English

And several new teachers including:

John Lubega – Chemistry and Biology (3 days a week paid by UHST)

Michael Bagenda – Biology (1 day a week also funded by UHST)

Martin Miro Apolo – Computer Studies

Robert Chandiga – Fine Art

The Students: There are now 75 students in the school, and 42 receive full UHST scholarships and some part scholarships. They are in three classes: Senior 1 (30 students), Senior 2 (35), Senior 3 (10). The number of students paying the full school fee of 50,000/= (£15) per term is very low.

Lessons observed: There were three lessons operating during the visit.

Senior 1 were learning about the differences between plants and animals in Biology with Michael Bagenda. When I asked the students whether the key difference was that plants cannot walk, they

quickly corrected me and offered the alternative that “only plants make both their own food, and the food required by animals.”

The Senior 1 classroom was decorated with art work by Robert Chandiga, the Fine Art teacher, and the students. However, they had already used up the art materials which had been provided by Ginette Ashkenazy, the artist who visited the school in February, and they desperately need more materials – especially paper.

Senior 2 were being taught about how to use Powerpoint by Martin Apolo. They were using a newly acquired desktop computer with the Office Suite and a small portable generator to provide power. The core of the Computer Studies syllabus is on how to use the Office suite type of programs.

Senior 3 were being given an excellent lesson by John Lubega. He was demonstrating how the enzyme catalase breaks up the potentially damaging waste product hydrogen peroxide so that it is unable to damage cells. With the help of two students he showed that the reaction to liver, which had more catalase, was higher than that to potato, which had very little. This was indicated by the much greater release of oxygen bubbles in a test tube. The teacher made sure the students understood the purpose of the experiment and the class were taking good notes.

The overall impression was that the Humanist Academy is beginning to function well as a learning establishment and it is clear that the students are engaging with the teachers and the subject content and enjoying the learning experience.

Learning Resources: The students in their personal reports on the school comment favourably on having books, and on the science equipment, which is now beginning to be used. Some of the new science books purchased were available for students on an open book shelf.

The students say they use the books to revise topics they have been taught. This is a positive development. There was no evidence yet that the books were being used as part of the learning process. One reason for this being that there is, as yet, no secure storage at the school premises so the Director of Studies is keeping the new laboratory equipment and some of the new books at his house and bringing them in as needed. This clearly limits their use.

However, within a week or so doors were due to be fitted on a new staffroom block, being built with help from the International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU). Once this has been completed a bookshelf for the new books we have bought for the school will be erected in the secure staff room.

Student Feedback

On arrival at the school I was given some papers on which the students had written what they think about their school. Here are some of the points they made.

How much students like the school

- *I am very happy with this school. We have many things like a computer, textbooks and others.*
- *When I was in primary 7 I looked forward to coming to the Humanist Academy. I was very very happy when my father took me to the school. It is a very good school on the hill.*
- *There is a good standard of education in the school.*
- *The good news is that there are frequent meals like porridge.*
- *There is good news about the school. I came to the Humanist Academy when I do not know how to write and read English but now I can write, read and I can speak it. In the Humanist Academy we eat a balance diet of food every day. In the Humanist Academy they teach us behaviour and discipline. They teach us how to weave baskets from paper or clothes and how to play football and netball.*

- *First of all the good news is that the payments or school fees are not much and we have enough teachers.*
- *I am very happy in our school. We have a big computer. We have library books. We have an art teacher.*
- *I love this school because the teacher is not bad and he/she teaches people in time and he/she gives lunch on time.*
- *The school is very good and I am happy with the teaching, so I love my school, the Humanist Academy.*
- *I love our teachers and our Director of this school. Our teachers taught us very well.*

The above points are representative and they show strong student satisfaction with the school and they are a testament to the energy and dedication of Deo Ssekitooleko, Tom Oponya and their team of teachers and support staff.

Children also report a number of problems they face at the school

The biggest of these is:

Drinking Water and Toilet Facilities

The arrangements that are in place for providing the students (and presumably staff) with drinking water are clearly unsatisfactory, and is an issue about separate toilets for boys and girls.

- *We have faced a problem with water for both drinking and washing hands after visiting toilets. So we kindly request you to construct us a bore hole.*
- *Some days we have no water to drink.*
- *We need a water tank at the school.*
- *It is bad that boys and girls go in one toilet.*

Clean water and sanitation is crucial for the health of the staff and the students. A lack of drinking water will also affect the children's ability to concentrate. Solving this problem is now a top priority for the school. IHEU has approached Water Aid to see if they can provide a solution to the water problems of all three schools. The response has been encouraging but, if they cannot help in a reasonable time, we shall need to help the Humanist schools to find some temporary solution.

So far a toilets are concerned, work on a second latrine is due to begin very soon.

Final Remarks

We have to remember that the Humanist Academy took its first intake of 27 students in February 2008. It has been going for only 18 months. From the start it has been struggling for funds. Yet, despite this, it has attracted 75 students, and students are beginning to choose the school in preference to the next nearest school.

Despite all the financial and other problems that Deo Ssekitooleko and his team have had to cope with they should be proud of their achievements. They have constructed a school with 3 classrooms (though they will need a fourth by February), have an almost finished staff room and a functioning school site in a breathtaking location. Deo has had to face many challenges. He has had to work with the local community to reclaim the site from the forest, create the roadway and maintain access paths. He has had to obtain quotations and commission contractors to undertake building work and the major work on the roadway. He has had to find teachers who will work on a

casual basis and for little pay, juggle the school timetable to fit in with when teachers are available. He helps by facilitating teachers transport and helps 4 teachers to rent rooms locally to the school. He makes arrangements to ensure that food is grown and bought from local farmers for students and teachers and that water is carried up to the school each day for drinking, washing and cooking. He has also had to employ a cook and ground staff, and ensure there is firewood for cooking. Furthermore he moves around the villages to recruit students and to let the community know about the school. He has also recruited local parents and guardians to form a Parent-Teachers Council, which advises on running the school. He has to make requisitions of chalk, paper, books and other learning materials, including a computer and generator. This means shopping around for the items in Kampala and arranging their transport to the school. What is more, Deo lives three hours away from the school and he makes countless journeys between his home and school. All of this is fitted in while conducting a full-time job as the East African representative of IHEU, which is much more than most people could contemplate.

There is still a long way to go in developing the school and there will be many more obstacles to overcome. However, Deo and his staff should be proud of the fact that they are providing an adequate level of education for 70 children who would have had no post-primary education if the school had not existed.

It should also be noted that the school is helping to lift the economy of the local area – albeit in a small way. It employs and provides an income for the cook and 3 other ground staff, and also to some local teachers, who would otherwise be unemployed or underemployed. The school helps to provide work for the young men who provide a motorbike taxi service (boda-boda) for teachers travelling from the main road to the school. Purchases of food and materials and casual labour also put income into the local community. Local welders have benefited from making windows and doors for the school and building materials suppliers. Rural schools, such as the Academy, can be valuable drivers for rural development.

The school needs and deserves a big increase in resources if it is to realise the considerable benefits it can bring for the community of this very impoverished area. It is a worthy challenge for the Uganda Humanist Association and their Humanist friends abroad.

Steve Hurd

Chairperson, UHST
17 July, 2009

Photographs on succeeding pages...

Photographs from the Visit to the Humanist Academy, 7 July 2009

Humanist Academy Site



Road Building



New Staff Room



New Science Books



Science Materials



Catalase Enzyme Demonstration



Computer with PowerPoint



Attentive Computer Class



School Uniform



Taking Notes in Science

