



Uganda Humanist Schools Trust (UK)

Report on International Friendship Week Visit to the Humanist Academy, Kamengo, Mpigi

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Introduction

This is an account of a short half-day visit to the Humanist Academy which took place at the end of the annual International Friendship Week activities, which involve all three Humanist schools in Uganda. The school played a smaller part in the activities on this occasion, in part because the school Director, Deo Ssekitooleko, was busy with other commitments at this time – including preparing for attending the IHEU annual general meeting in Belgium.

However, our visiting group was warmly welcomed by Annet Kisakye, who was appointed headteacher at the school this year – thanks to support from the Italian Humanists. It was immediately clear that Annet has settled into her role well and she is providing very efficient and caring day-to-day management of the school. Below is a picture of Annet with her students and Jackson Okwero, the English teacher, who has been with the school since it opened.



The party of visitors to the school included Steve and Hilary Hurd, Paul Gubbins and his daughter Jill, Andrew West, Katie Darley and Sam Iles. The picture on the next page shows Sam, Steve, Paul (with Jill hidden) and Katie behind the main classrooms.



Below is a picture of Humanist Academy students outside the main classroom block. The school does not discriminate among students on the basis of religion so, although education is secular, they welcome students from all traditions.



The school is on a very attractive and cool hill top location and students walk up to 5 miles each way to attend classes. In 2010 the school attracted a new first year intake of 25, but there is quite a high drop out. The area is one of predominantly subsistence farming with small amounts of cash coming from sales of surplus produce. Inevitably, therefore, some families are unable to keep up with even the very low fees (about £12 a term) that the school charges. If a family breadwinner moves away or dies then children are withdrawn from school to help at home. The process of migration also leads to students coming and going. Remarkably, since the start of this year only a few students have left the school and the schools records show high levels of attendance. On the following page are some general shots which Andrew took to give an impression of the stunning location of the site:



Hilary, who runs a Malaria research programme at Keele University, gave the students an illustrated talk about mosquitoes and how to prevent malaria. Unfortunately she could not show all the video materials due to problems with the petrol generator and the projection system. However it left plenty of time to talk with the teachers and students. On the following page we show some more of the pictures taken by Andrew within the class..



Progress since the visit in November 2009

1. IHEU has set up a forum to enable the different Humanist groups supporting the schools to coordinate their actions. In November 2009 the group felt that no major new support should be given to any of the schools until they were established as "Not for Profit" (i.e. charitable) companies. This proved relatively straightforward for the Isaac Newton and Mustard Seed schools. However, due to the tie in with UHASSO (the Uganda Humanist Association) it has taken until July for the Humanist Academy to be reconstituted as an independent charity. As a result the school received no infrastructure funding for 8 months, and no further funds from IHEU, which had been instrumental in setting up the school.
2. UHST supporters have kept the school running during 2010 by providing money for 42 scholarships (£5040) to enable bright but needy children to attend the school. This money has covered almost the entire running costs of the school this year. A tiny amount has come from fees paid by students, which reflects the deep level of poverty in Kamengo District. Below are three of the new scholarship holders...



3. By managing carefully the money they have received from scholarships this year, the school has been able to add a separate stand of 3 long-drop toilets for girls.

However, the school inspector insisted that an additional toilet block be built for teachers as a condition of the school staying open. The extra money required for this has been provided by two of our supporters.

4. In 2010 UHST put a further £1200 in the Humanist Academy's bookshop account. This has enabled the school to provide every student in Senior 4 with a textbook in each of their subjects. This is part of an effort to help the students in their final year to prepare for their O-level examinations.



As the school site is deserted once the children go home each day and, as there is no secure storage place for books and materials the school has a serious problem with security. During the course of the year the school's bee hives were stolen. So, while S4 students have been issued with a few books, most of the books and science equipment that we have bought for the school are still being kept off site, and are unavailable for study use. Providing a secure store is an urgent requirement.