



Uganda Humanist Schools Trust

Update on the Isaac Newton High School, Masaka from the School's Director, Peter Kisirinya

16 April 2012

SCHOOL DEVELOPMENTS

The year 2011 has seen great improvements at Isaac Newton High School in both structural terms and academic progress.

These developments have mainly come as a result of support received from UHST and IHEU.

1. Development of Boarding

The construction of a Girls' dormitory, courtesy of a bequest received through UHST from the Paltiel Family, has attracted the maximum number of girls meant to be accommodated in it.

When we opened up the dormitory it attracted applications from 104 girls, who needed to board in school in order to continue their education.

By using triple bunks we are housing 9 students in each room in the dormitory. This has allowed us to accommodate an extra 24 girls. Another 8 girls are being temporarily housed in the matron's quarters. 24 local girls who were able to stay with their families are staying there until we organise space for them.

The school has 47 boarding boys. They are divided between the school's first building where girls originally stayed and one of the new classrooms, which has become a temporary dormitory. The boys conditions are cramped and it is a priority to improve them.



2. Rain water harvesting

Two 5,000 litre water tanks, paid for by Walsall Rotary Club and Birmingham Humanists through UHST, are enabling us to harvest rain water from the Girls dormitory. This water is used for washing and cleaning and reduces the number of trips that have to be made each day to the spring at the foot of the valley.



3. Fencing the whole school

The introduction of boarding has made it necessary to fence the school and to erect a main gate at the entrance of the school. As funds were limited we used barbed wire and hope to replace this with a natural hedge in future.

4. Construction of a Kitchen House

With a doubling in the number of students we needed to increase our kitchen capacity. A grant from UHST has enabled us to build a new kitchen with two more efficient wood-burning stoves and large cooking pots. The picture on the right shows the kitchen and teachers' block under construction.



5. Teachers' accommodation

We have built two teachers' rooms, which are annexed to the kitchen. This is our first accommodation for teachers on the school site and we shall need more.

6. Textbooks and Laboratory equipment

Grants from UHST have facilitated a large increase in our stock of textbooks and science equipment, which has helped our students and teachers greatly.

POSITIVE OUTCOMES

The investment in facilities and learning materials and the steady improvements we are making in the quality of teachers is having a huge impact on examination results.

Our Senior 4 O-level results showed great improvements in all subjects and especially in the science subjects. Two students gained first grades (the level attained by only 8% of students in Uganda), 12 students were awarded second grades, 4 gained third grades and 4 fourth grades. It was pleasing that not even a single student failed their exams.

In 2011 we had our first students from Senior 6 taking A-level examinations. Given that it was our first year of entry, the results were good with 60% of students scoring at least 2 principal passes, so qualifying them for university entry.

Our boys football team, kitted out in their Stoke City strip, reached the final of the post primary football competition in the District.

The growing reputation of Isaac Newton High School in the Masaka District and more widely across Uganda is leading to a large rise in the demand for places. In 2011 we had 129 students on the school roll. The number on roll increased to 233 in 2012. We had a large first year intake but also many students have transferred from other schools into second, third and fourth year classes. Increased recruitment is a measure of success but it has necessitated the employment of more teachers and more non-teaching staff.

The picture shows the families of the first girls to move into the new dormitory. The availability of boarding has allowed us to attract students from as far afield as Masaka, Kampala, Jinja and Kasese, in the west of Uganda. These students are paying full fees and provide valuable additional funds to subsidise the education of students from the local area and to develop the facilities of the school using local resources. However, the 42 scholarships we received from UHST and 8 from North-east Humanists, have allowed us to provide free places to bright needy students from the local area and the money makes a valuable contribution to the day-to-day expenses of the school.



Solar panels on the girls dormitory in the picture provide lighting for private study in the evenings in the dormitory and the nearby classroom block.



In 2012, with the growth of Senior 5 and 6 numbers, we have been able to recruit more well-qualified graduate teachers and offer a full range of Advanced level options across the sciences and arts. The improvement in science facilities and equipment is allowing us to organise regular practical classes.

The school has been praised by the local school inspectors, who are impressed by our learning resources, books etc. We are also gaining recognition from Government and local leadership. Sadly the reorganisation of the local education district is still holding up the award of our license and formal registration.

CHALLENGES

Following the large increase in the number of students in the school, and especially in those who are on the site 7 days a week as boarders, there is great need for more water. The water harvested from roofs into storage tanks hardly lasts a week if no rain comes, so we are constantly fetching water from the spring in the valley. However, there is only a single water pipe to cater for the village, so there are long queues.

We have teachers who stay at the school to supervise the school all the time. They lack housing and a few have been sleeping on mattresses on the floor of the computer room.

More and more students would like to join the school but we do not have enough accommodation and classrooms. The additional students could bring in more money to put up the buildings but they cannot do so immediately. We need them to be recruited and start to bring in the money, so we are expecting to have a period where we are overcrowded.

Food prices are on the rise again. Posho (maize meal) was 1,250 Uganda shillings last week but it is now 1,800/=. We do not expect a new harvest before the end of next term. So we need to buy maize grain now and keep it in store.

Well qualified science teachers are hard to find. I had offered to transfer from the public school in Mityana to Masaka but the process is not yet through. I could teach science lessons at Isaac Newton High school if I could get permission to transfer.

There is need to increase the instructional Materials such text books, science equipment and computers.

Computer studies and IT have been made compulsory at Advanced Level. Unfortunately, we are finding it very difficult to find trained teachers to teach computer Studies. Our computers are currently out of use. The previous teacher was ignorant of the system which was installed on the computers and without our knowledge he tried to reformat the computers. In the process we lost all of our educational software and the whole system went out. He left the school and we do not know his whereabouts.

Malaria is very common and students are losing time from study. The free bed nets promised us by the Ministry of Health have not arrived – although we are told they are coming.

We are trying to bring the main hall up to the standard necessary for becoming a Centre for National Examinations.

CURRENT AND FUTURE PRIORITIES

The school is facing several challenges including:

- Lack of a permanent water source (we need a borehole and pump)
- Lack of playing fields
- Lack of a school medical facility(sick bay)
- Insufficient farm land to grow school food
- Lack of accommodation for students and teachers
- Meeting the requirements to become an examination centre
- Lack of electricity from the National Grid

If you feel you or your group would like to contribute to meeting any of these needs then please contact us at info@uhst.org or download a supporter form from our website: www.ugandahumanistschoolstrust.org.