



Uganda Humanist Schools Trust

# Mbute Campus of Isaac Newton High School

February 2013



## Background

Mbute Campus of Isaac Newton High School was originally opened in February 2008 as the Humanist Academy. Co-founders of the school were the International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU) and the Uganda Humanist Association (UHASSO). The school was licensed immediately and given two years to reach the prescribed national standards that would allow it to become an officially registered school. Unfortunately the flow of funds proved insufficient to develop an adequate infrastructure in the allotted time and inspectors forced the school to close in 2010.

After considerable heart searching, IHEU and UHASSO decided to try again. The school was renamed Fair View Senior Secondary School and a new license was taken out, allowing a further two years to lift the school to the required standard. Work, funded through IHEU, on a school library and science lab started in 2011. However, after a few months, it became evident that building work was not proceeding to plan and the school in general was struggling. IHEU suspended further funding for the school in August 2012 and it was then inevitable that the school would not meet the development targets set by the Local Education Authority and would be forced to close for a second time at the end of the year. At this point various alternative plans were considered short of giving up and selling the site, but none offered an acceptable way forward. Deo Ssekitooleko, who had been the inspiration for the school, had found it necessary to divert his energies from the school to other activities – including his wider work throughout East Africa for IHEU. This left the school without effective day-to-day management and, while the Headmistress did her best to hold the school together as a learning community, institutional failure was inevitable.

At Uganda Humanist Schools Trust we had continued to support students who were on scholarships after the Humanist Academy failed, and we felt we had a moral commitment to the remaining students following the second failure. We gave consideration to offering the remaining 8 scholarship students funded places at another Humanist School; Isaac Newton would have been the nearest. However, with IHEU's agreement, we decided to work on an alternative rescue plan for the school. UHST had detailed discussions with IHEU, Deo Ssekitooleko (the Fair View Director), Aloysius Wasswa (representing UHASSO) and Peter Kisirinya, the Chairman of Uganda Humanist Schools Association and Director of Isaac Newton High School. Peter, in particular, believed the school could be made to work and he agreed to talk with key members of the local community served by the school. They offered to support the school by continuing to send their children there if a way could be found to keep it open. Eventually, the following rescue plan was worked out.

## Rescue plan

1. The Director and Board of Fair View agreed to step aside and the not-for-profit company running the school was dissolved.
2. The assets have been transferred to Isaac Newton High School, which will run the school as the Mbute Campus of Isaac Newton High School. Mbute is the name of the hill on which the school was built. This keeps the school within the Humanist Schools community and still running on a not-for-profit basis. The alternatives had been to close the school, sell the assets and use them for the other Humanist Schools or, even, to transfer the site and assets to the Ministry of Education so it could be run as a government school (this was a theoretical option with no evidence that the government would be interested).
3. The new school will provide day-school education up to O-level to the local community around Mbute. This means that it is likely to remain a small school that will require support from the international Humanist community for some time. Successful students will be offered places at Isaac Newton High School, which is in the village of Katera near Masaka, for their A-level studies. This will enable Isaac Newton to strengthen its A-level provision.
4. Staffing is the largest single cost in running any school. Tom Mutebi, the experienced Director of Studies from Isaac Newton School, has been appointed full-time School Manager at Mbute. Annet Kisakye has been reappointed as Headteacher. Tom Oponya, the former Director of Studies and teacher of Maths and Physics at Fair View has also been reappointed to a full-time contract, following strong representations on his behalf from students at the school and their parents. Lilian Babirye is the new full-time bursar. Joseph Kakooza has been appointed full-time librarian. Ashraf Bukenya, a former A-level student from Isaac Newton, is to work full-time at the school until September, when he is expected to go to university. He will teach lower school Biology and Physics. Other teachers who were on part-time contracts at Isaac Newton School have agreed to offer the necessary additional classes at Mbute. The school has rented a house close to the school, which it is refurbishing and will use to provide accommodation to three members of staff,

including the site Manager and bursar.

5. Community support for the rescue is strong. A new Parent Teachers' Association has been formed. The first action of the PTA was to mobilise people from the two nearest villages to work on clearing pathways to the school. Those parents who were in arrears with their school fees have been coming to the school to pay them, so that their children can return to the new school.
6. Funds have been forthcoming through IHEU to settle the arrears of pay owed to teaching and ancillary staff from 2012. This has encouraged the school's cook to return to her post.
7. IHEU has also release the previously allocated, but frozen, funds to complete the school library building and the new science lab. Funds have also been made available for other necessary refurbishment. The floor of the main classroom block was breaking up due to an inferior concrete mix. This has now been replaced. The bases of the water tanks were disintegrating and 3 of the 4 were no longer collecting rain water from the roofs. These have also been repaired.

## **Early Progress on the School Infrastructure**

Immediately the rescue plan was agreed Peter Kisirinya and some young teachers from Isaac Newton School started work on clearing grass and tidying up the site. During this period they slept on a classroom floor.

After mobilising the local community to help they joined the working parties clearing pathways to the school and refurbishing the building to be used for teachers' accommodation.

Once the first money arrived from IHEU in early January Peter brought the builders onto the site. They started work immediately on repairs to existing buildings and the water storage system. Work on windows, shelving and furniture for the library is underway. The concrete floor of the science lab has been put in, walls completed up to roof level, plastering and painting of walls and work on windows, and work on furniture and shelving is already under way. More money will be needed to complete the restoration of the original buildings.

The school reopened in February 2013. Almost all Senior 1, 2 and 3 students from 2012 have returned to the school and some extra students, not previously in the school have enrolled – making a total of 70 students in years 2 to 4. First year enrolment starts a little later but, already, 15 have pre-enrolled. Already, the numbers of students are higher than the school has attracted in previous years. So the new school is making a promising start.

## Challenges facing Mbuta

Covering the basic running costs of teachers, school food and other consumables will continue to be a major challenge at Mbuta. 26 supporters of UHST have so far agreed to provide scholarships to enable bright but needy students to attend the school. This will give the school £3,120, which will go towards its basic annual running costs and will supplement fee income from other local children in the school. However, total income from the two sources will still fall short of day-to-day running costs. The following cash flow forecast (converted into UK £s) for a representative term shows a projected termly loss of £1,131 (£3,393 annually), at the current enrolment level.

### Receipts & Expenditure Forecast for Term 1 1013

RECEIPTS	UK £s
26 Scholarships from UHST	£1,040
Student fees	£750
<b>Total Receipts</b>	<b>£1,790</b>
<b>EXPENDITURE</b>	
Teachers' Salaries	£1,400
Non-teaching staff salaries	£144
Internal Exams	£110
Students' Reports	£38
Stationery	£250
School meals	£525
Firewood	£88
Generator fuel	£30
Soap(bar and liquid)	£20
Teachers' Rent	£80
Transport of staff and materials	£188
Students' medical treatment	£50
<b>Total expenditure</b>	<b>£2,921</b>
<b>PROJECTED TERMLY LOSS</b>	<b>£1,131</b>

If the school is to be kept going then we will need to raise additional funds to cover this shortfall.

Since the school opened as the Humanist Academy in 2008 it has never attracted more than 80 students in any one year. The failure to provide an adequate infrastructure and to recruit and retain suitably qualified and reliable teachers has undoubtedly discouraged local families from sending their children to the school. School fees have been set at very low levels but this is little help when cash earning opportunities for local farmers are few and far between. Most local people live a subsistence existence with a small amount of money coming from the sale of surplus food, livestock or a meagre harvest of cash crops such as coffee, vanilla and ginger. This means that many quickly fall into arrears with school fees.

The failure to attract sufficient good teachers and high achieving students has meant that O-level results have been poor – this created a vicious circle which kept recruitment to the school at a low level. Many families have faced a difficult decision between two alternatives to sending their children to the school. The first, for the better off families, has been to send their children a long distance from home for schooling. Many poorer families have been choosing not to send their children to school at all. For the future of Mbute it is necessary to persuade both sets of parents that their children will in future receive a good education at the local school on Mbute Hill.

The new rescue plan is designed to change perceptions. IHEU is already funding work on the site to complete the library and science lab, and to repair the rooftop water collection system. We now need, as a priority, to raise funds to provide decent toilets at the school. Existing toilets were constructed on the side of the hill, where access is poor and earth movement is causing the pit latrines to crack and leak. Quotations have been obtained for the construction on VIP toilets, like those at Isaac Newton and Mustard Seed Schools, but we need to find the money to pay for these.

The existing kitchen is a makeshift wooden shack, which is falling down. The school urgently needs a new structure with efficient, externally vented, wood-burning stoves to reduce expenditure on firewood and to protect the cook from breathing in smoke.

The original buildings, though less than 4 years old, were built with a poor mix of sand and cement, so the floors and walls are breaking up. These are in need of urgent repair, re-plastering and painting. The school needs two more classrooms. This will allow teaching to be moved out of the block intended for staff use, and give the teachers their own staff work room.

The school playing field has never been properly levelled and contains pot holes, which have caused injuries to students playing team games. With a relatively small amount of money the school can rectify this problem.

The school was built by clearing land on part of a forest reserve. It is a splendid site with good views in all directions but it has resulted in to loss of natural vegetation from the top of Mbute Hill. The Local Authority has asked the school to construct a surrounding fence of shrubs and to engage in tree planting to contribute to the restoration of the original landscape.

A final requirement is to find a way of getting electricity to the school site. The best option here is to connect to the mains supply, which is less than 1 kilometre from the school. Once we have managed to fund this, then we will be able to put in a computer network and software using the same system as the other two schools.

If we can secure these improvements, meetings that have been held with the local community suggest that they are ready to send their children to the school. In the meantime relatively modest subsidies are needed to ensure that the school can continue to provide educational opportunities to children in this very deprived area.

## Urgent Priorities

One year has been allowed by the local education department to get the school up to the standard that will allow it to be registered. This will require resources to be raised in the next few months to provide:

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| ▪ 1 VIP latrine for girl students and Staff   | £5,375 |
| ▪ A new kitchen with two efficient wood burning stoves  | £2,750 |
| ▪ Repairs on the existing buildings   | £2,000 |
| ▪ Extension of electricity/solar power to the site  | £4,000 |
| ▪ Two additional classrooms   | £7,500 |
| ▪ Levelling of the school playing field   | £1,000 |
| ▪ A perimeter security fence and tree planting  | £2,000 |
| ▪ Building the computer Laboratory with 10 stations<br>(This is not a requirement but highly desirable) | £7,500 |

If you would like to help us to raise the money for these urgent needs please contact:

Steve Hurd 01782 750338 [stevehurd@uhst.org](mailto:stevehurd@uhst.org)

Donation and standing order forms can be found at:  
<http://www.ugandahumanistschoolstrust.org/donate/>

Photographs of the school on the next page...

Below are some pictures showing progress on the site.

Carpenter at work



Re-sited water tank



Work on science prep room



Work on shelving and seats in library



Painting library building



Reconnecting gutter pipe to water tank



Science lab work in progress



Peter Kisirinya beside new chalk board



Old kitchen shack (left) which needs replacing



View from Mbutte Hill to farms below

