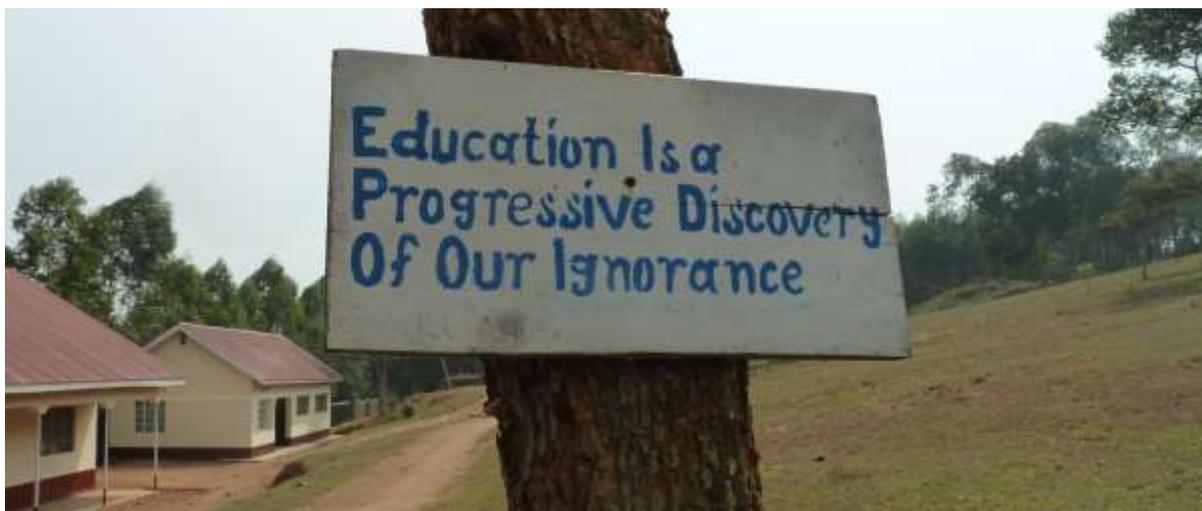




Uganda Humanist Schools Trust

Isaac Newton High School, Kateera, Masaka

February 2015



School clinic and one of the many inspirational messages around the school

Moving towards sustainability

This report is based on my visit to Uganda between Friday 23rd January and 7th February, 2015. I arrived at the end of the long inter-school-year vacation and was there during enrolment of students for the start of the new school year. I left before all students had returned to school. Families will often delay sending students to school if they are short of money or if there is work to do at home or on the land. As a result of the ragged start the student number figures quoted below relate to those at the end of the previous school year in November 2014.

In my last report I suggested that Isaac Newton High School at Kateera was in sight of take-off towards self-reliance. In 2014, for the first time since it was founded, the school covered its basic running costs from local fees

and scholarship income, without the need for any emergency supplementary funding from UHST. In fact, for the first time in its short history, the school has started to generate a surplus. This is giving the school options it has not had before.

True to form Peter Kisirinya, the School Director, and his fellow school administrators have chosen to adopt an open form of decision-making. Information about the overall school accounts are shared with the entire school staff. Use of the first surplus has been discussed collectively with school staff and a decision made as to how much of the surplus should be used for expenditure on school improvement and how much should go to improving the pay of school staff (both teaching and non-teaching).

Better examination grades have led to a clamour for places at the school from local families. Student numbers have increased substantially from 120 in 2012 to very close to 400 in 2014. We identified the figure of 400, some years ago, as the minimum student roll to achieve sustainability and it seems to be working out. In 2014 the distribution of students by year is:

YEAR	STUDENTS
Senior 1	93
Senior 2	110
Senior 3	65
Senior 4 (O-level)	50
Senior 5	35
Senior 6 (A-level)	41
TOTAL	394

The rise in the first year intake over the last two years demonstrates growing confidence in the school within the local community. The boarding hostel for girls has swelled the proportion of girls, such that in 2014 the school educated more girls than boys (a 60:40 ratio of girls to boys). Balance between the sexes is likely to be more even in 2015 as the new boys hostel is brought into commission.

Focus on quality

The school is wedded to a policy of improving financial viability by raising quality. UHST is trying to help by providing resources to support the teachers and to aid independent learning. Each year we replenish the schools account at Aristoc Bookshop in Kampala. This enables the school to buy books to help teachers in their preparation of lessons, textbooks for students and general reference books.

The school shares our belief that a high standard of English is the key to student success in later life. Towards this aim the

school is introducing in 2015 English Literature as an examination subject. Much of this year's book allowance will be used to buy a range of reading books – both syllabus related ones and others to encourage reading for pleasure – believe it or not Roald Dahl stories and the Harry Potter books are very popular here.

In the English Literature syllabus in Uganda there is a strong emphasis on modern African writers such as Chinua Achebe and Ngugi wa Thiongo (James Ngugi) as well as new Ugandan writers.

Three years ago the school started to use scholarships provided by UHST supporters to attract some of the brightest primary school leavers. This policy has improved the standard of students recruited by the school and they are hoping that this will be reflected in a positive shift in school results at the end of the current year. However, even before the school sees the impact of this more selective policy, there has been a steady and sustained improvement in student performance in National Examinations at O level of the School Certificate and at A-level in the Higher School Certificate. In the 2014 examination results at O-level all students passed and three gained an aggregate grade 1, which fewer than 8% of students in Uganda achieve.

The school also tries to excel in other fields too. The picture below shows a proud headteacher, Ezra Mulwana, with the District cup won by the boys' football team in 2014.



Capacity to raise fees to sustainable levels

Like the vast majority of schools in Uganda, the Humanist Schools are all private. So they have to concern themselves with achieving financial viability if they are to become self-reliant and sustainable in the longer term. Improving educational outcomes for students helps to raise the popularity of the schools and make them schools of choice for families. Naturally we all hope that in time the liberal, inclusive and caring ethos of Humanist schools will also be a major attractant. Certainly for the moment a rising demand for places is enabling the schools to steadily increase the fees they charge and this creates a virtuous circle by allowing them to improve pay and conditions for teachers, improve resources and facilities and so produce further improvements in standards, which attract still more students.

Current school fees and staff pensions

The figures in the table are Uganda Shillings per term.

Boarding students

O-level	300,000 (£80)
A-level	350,000 (£87.50)

Boarding students also pay 15,000 Uganda Shillings (£3.75) per term to cover the costs of drugs and dressings dispensed by the school clinic (further details later).

Day students

O-level	100,000 (£25)
A-level	120,000 (£30)

Students' families are also required to make a number of other payments (though these are all covered for students on scholarships provided by UHST supporters).

First year registration fee (to discourage families from making multiple registrations in different schools):

O-level	5,000 (£1.25)
A-level	10,000 (£2.50)

Examination entry fees:

O-level (paid in S4)	130,000 (£32.50)
A-level (paid in S6)	120,000 (£30.00)

Students at Isaac Newton, unlike many other schools, are provided with school food (breakfast and lunch) and school uniform at no extra cost.

The rise in student numbers and in school fees has enabled the school to cover the cost of enrolling staff in the state pension scheme (the National Social Security Fund, NSSF). Apart from casual staff brought in from other schools to fill gaps, all other salaried teachers and non-teaching staff are now in the NSSF scheme. Each staff member contributes 5% of their salary and the school adds a further 10%. In previous years the school would not have been able to meet these costs. It is another demonstration of the improvement in finances over the past year which have brought further increases in pay rates and bonuses determined by collective discussion.

Infrastructure improvements

It should be remembered that Peter Kisirinya started Isaac Newton High School without any external finance. The local community helped him to make and fire bricks for the first building and he paid for the corrugated iron roof from his savings as a teacher in a government school. In a similar way, the school built the foundations and walls of the school hall before it attracted its first external funding from IHEU to pay for the roof. Since then most, but not all, of the infrastructure developments have been paid for by grants from either IHEU or UHST. The school has

always had a clear vision of how it wanted to be and when funding gaps have occurred they started necessary improvements on a stage-by-stage basis from what little money was left over.

During the course of 2014 there have been a number of improvements in school infrastructure and some of these have been all or partly self-financed.

A large girls' hostel was completed in 2013 using money from a large bequest. To achieve parity between girls and boys, the school wanted a similar hostel for boys. UHST explained that we might be able to raise the money from individual donations for a smaller hostel, but it would take a long time to raise funds to match the size of the girls' hostel. We launched an infrastructure appeal that grew slowly at first but eventually reached its target thanks to the generosity of an individual donor. Eventually we were able to award the school a grant of £15,000 to construct a smaller boys' hostel, to provide sleeping accommodation for 48 boys, sharing 8 to a room on double bunk beds.

Knowing that it needed a larger hostel, the school negotiated an arrangement with the builder to construct a larger hostel for 96 boys, in rooms of 8, with live in, but separate, rooms for the head teacher and a wash block for the boys. The builders agreed to accept the UHST money in three instalments related to progress, and to allow the school to pay, from its income, the balance of the cost in three termly interest-free payments of 4.2 million Shillings (£1000). This money will be paid from school income over the course of 2015.

The road from the gate into the school compound was very poor and positively dangerous. In wet weather, vehicles found it difficult to negotiate the hill to the school gate and some, including our own vehicle, got stuck in the mud and had to be pushed out by students – but with much difficulty. There was also the ever present possibility of a vehicle sliding off the road and down the hill into a school classroom.

Boys' hostel nearing completion



Fixing this was a priority as supplies, such as foodstuffs, firewood, building materials, are continually being brought into the school. In the end it became such a problem that the school did something about it itself. The school road has been widened and the surface improved. The school brought in and paid for the local government road-grader to help with this work. The road is still far from perfect, but much better than before.

Access road from main gate



Another significant school initiative has been the construction of a school tuck shop and café where students can relax and chat. The building has been built in stages of two years and it was expected to be completed for the start of term. The pictures below show the building when I saw it a week before the start of term.

School tuck shop and café – near completion



The tuck shop will sell snacks, fruit, stationery items and other things that students might need.

Repair of the water pumping house has become an urgent priority. The constant pounding of the diesel pump has caused the concrete base to break up and cracks have appeared in the pump house walls. We have provided funds to demolish the existing structure, lay a new foundation for a reinforced concrete raft, refurbish and reposition the pump and construct a larger new pump house building. This work will be completed by the second week of term so, in the meantime, the school will have to manage with the water that has already been pumped into the header tank.

The latest idea of the Headteacher, Ezra Mulwana, is to construct an exhibition gallery at the school where school art and craft work can be displayed to visitors. The work has already begun on a mpola-mpola (little-by-little) basis. The school has constructed one side wall and is building out the foundations with hard core.

Impact of Clinic

The school clinic was completed in January 2015. The newly qualified nurse first appointed to run the facility did not demonstrate sufficient knowledge and experience to deal with the range of problems being presented to her. She left last Easter and has been replaced by a nurse with 6 years' experience, called Sarah Naigaga.

I spent a good time with Sarah as she explained the wide range of things she does for the students. Her work is exclusively with students. She has no spare time to deal with the medical problems of staff members or members of the community.

Nurse Sarah Naigaga at the school clinic



Here is a list of some of the things Sarah has had to deal with in her first two terms at the school:

- Malaria identification and treatment. Identification is with a blood test and dip stick. The blood is put in solution and if two bars show on the dip-stick it is positive for malaria. Treatment is with a cure dose of an artemisinin-based drug.
- Distribution of analgesics for headaches, period pains, coughs, colds and flu – she has a stock of paracetamol and the antibiotic metronidazole.
- Dressing wounds with antiseptic, bandages, Elastoplast.
- Treatment of rashes, ring worm, watery eyes and identification of glaucoma.
- Identification of possible cardiovascular problems linked to chest pains. In this case students are referred to the doctor, who supervises the clinic, and then on to

the local hospital if necessary.

- Students in the school are routinely de-wormed at the start of every term.
- Training in the use of mosquito nets and the importance of using them for all students in school hostel accommodation.
- Students in the dormitories are given first aid training including CPR.
- She has dealt with two pregnancies involving S1 and S3 students – in each case the girls came back after holidays pregnant. Both girls returned to school after giving birth, and family members are looking after the babies during the day and the girls breast feed in the evening.
- There is a national health campaign to persuade young men to get circumcised as this reduces the spread of HIV. The circumcisions are carried out at a local hospital and so far over a hundred boys have volunteered for this.
- The nurse also liaises with the local health department to ensure that all students are up-to-date with their immunisations.
- Over 100 students gave blood when the National Blood Transfusion Service visited the school. The blood is automatically tested for HIV and no students have so far tested positive. As the area was the epicentre of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, this demonstrates the success of Uganda's open debate and public campaigns to combat the infection.
- The nurse attended the Afri-pads training provided for the girls on re-useable sanitary pads. She supervises the students to ensure the pads are washed properly and ironed.

On the issue of the sanitary pads, the supply we bought for all the schools have lasted to the end of the school year and they have had a remarkable effect. They have brought about a huge fall in girls' absence from class during times of periods. They have also brought a noticeable improvement in girls' concentration in lessons. Given this level of success we propose, with the help of Central London Humanists, to buy newly designed pads for girls in all the Humanist Secondary Schools.

Sarah Naigaga says she loves her job. She has her own room at the clinic, where she sleeps. This enables her to take care of students in the two twin-bedded isolation wards – one for male and the other for female students. Peter believes the clinic has made a huge difference to the school by boosting student health and confidence. It has also reduced the schools' total health bill. Before the clinic was in operation the school was responsible for finding the money for treatment at, often not very good, private clinics in neighbouring villages. As noted earlier the basic costs of the clinic are covered by each boarding student making a contribution of 15,000 Ug Sh (£3.75) each term.

The main problem she faces is that piped water has not yet been extended to the clinic. So the flush toilet has not been fitted and nor has the sink. She has to use water from a jerry can for hand washing. Peter Kisirinya says that he hopes he will be able to bring in a plumber in the next few months to rectify these problems. There is an electric power point ready for a socket to power a fridge, in which to keep medicines. But the school is short of the money it needs to fit these at the moment.

Power

Isaac Newton High School is a long way from the nearest mains electricity. For this reason we have helped the school by funding solar installations for the computer laboratory, the girls' hostel and now for the boys' hostel. The cost of solar electricity is high although the price of electro-voltaic panels is progressively

falling.

The Uganda Ministry of Power is working with a German NGO on a rural electrification “Green Power” program, where they cover 70% of the costs of solar installations – particularly for rural schools and clinics. Peter has been to the Ministry, which has agreed to include the school in the scheme. With the money we have already given to the school for solar panels on the boys’ hostel, Peter has negotiated the construction of a large solar array on the roof of the hostel which would be big enough to power 200 lights –and could be used to energise an electric pump which will take water to the header tank and bring savings on the cost of diesel fuel which is currently being used for the purpose.

Over the next two or three years there is a real prospect of the school getting mains Hydro-Electric Power. A large new HEP Scheme on the River Nile at Bujagali Falls is now operating and the national grid is being extended to take the clean electricity to more rural parts of Uganda. Work has already started on a power line that will come within a mile of the school. This will make it feasible for the school to link in to mains power. Even when this comes about, however, the solar panels will still be needed as, once installed, they provide the school with free electricity, whereas the mains power will be metered.

Future priorities

The current requirements to complete the school by 2016 are:

Work on site drainage, paths and flower gardens	£2,500
Levelling of land for school sports field	£8,500
Construction of new library and e-learning area with study desks	£12,000
Books for English Literature, including African Writers, and for reading for pleasure	£800
Other resources for: science, art, music, sport etc.	£500

The school are also looking for ways, within their means, to improve conditions for their staff. Permanent staff are now all enrolled in the National Social Security Funds (NSSF), which will eventually provide them with pensions. They are now examining the feasibility of introducing health and life insurance for staff.

Ezra Mulwana, the Headteacher and Head of Geography, would like to start meeting the syllabus requirements for students to go on field trips, so they can study different aspects of the Geography syllabus by travelling out into the environment. He has planned and would like us to find funding of 5 million shillings (£1,250) to enable them to travel to South-West Uganda where there is a field study centre at Mweya in Queen Elizabeth National Park. They would like to take a coach load of 70 students from classes S3, S4 and S6 who are preparing for O and A-levels. The trip would last 4 days.

The trip will allow students to study lake and mountain topography, volcanic landscapes, crater lakes, lake fisheries, production of salt by evaporating water from salt lakes, local farming patterns, semi-nomadic cattle herding and the costs and benefits of tourism. He believes that students’ families will now start to contribute to shorter local trips from school. When these involve coach hire the cost is 30,000/= (£7.50 per student). This is a lot of money in Uganda. Once the current emphasis on bringing the infrastructure up to scratch comes to an end it would be nice if UHST were able to provide a field work fund to each school.

If you feel you or your group would like to contribute to meeting any of these needs then please contact stevehurd@uhst.org (01782 750338).

Donation and standing order forms can be found at:

<http://www.ugandahumanistschoolstrust.org/donate/>