



Uganda Humanist Schools Trust

Mustard Seed School, Busota, Kamuli July, 2016



Girls relaxing in the shade of the hostel veranda

Around the School

On our previous two visits to Mustard Seed School visitors have expressed disappointment about the scruffiness of the school site – which they have taken to indicate a lack of pride in the school by the staff and students. Grass had been long and piles of bricks and logs have been left spread around the site. This time we were delighted to find that the site had had a major spring clean. The entrance gate and buildings had



been painted. All the clutter had gone, the grass was short and the site looked the best we had ever seen it (see new school sign above and tidy site below).



The playing field, which had taken a long time to grass over due to the particularly dry weather over the past two years, was now in full use. We were pleased to see that Mustard Seed is allowing the local primary school to use the field, and a match was in progress when we arrived (below).



We had been looking forward to seeing the new school health clinic and were not disappointed. The building is now completely finished and painted. It has a water closet, washbasin and shower – though there was currently a problem with the school water supply, which I will explain later. The rooms are furnished, with a bed and furniture in the nurse's room, two beds in each of the two rooms set aside for boy and girl patients; and a desk and medicine storage cupboard in the consultation and treatment room.

Most important of all, the school nurse, Lydia Namabiro, had started a week and a half before our arrival. Lydia is a cheerful,



vivacious lady, who is brimming with enthusiasm for her job.

Lydia was delighted by the design and furnishing of the clinic. We gave Moses money for mosquito nest over the beds earlier in the week, and they were already fitted. This is most important for, when the clinic is treating malaria patients, the nets prevent the parasites from being transferred by mosquitoes to other students. Below is a picture of Lydia with the new nets.



As yet, the clinic has little in the way of medicines and bandages and plasters for wounds, but Lydia made a list of the things she needed and Moses despatched her to the nearest pharmacy to buy them. As at Isaac Newton School, students are being asked to

contribute 10,000 Uganda shillings (£2.50) a term towards a school-based health insurance scheme. This will cover them for treatment given by the nurse and also for fees charges for outside health centres and hospitals, should they need them.



While we were at the school a sudden medical emergency occurred. One of the girls collapsed in uncontrolled hysterical episode. Below is a picture of her friends taking her to the clinic to see the nurse. One or two of the students feared that she was possessed by evil spirits (belief in witchcraft is prevalent in much of Uganda and is the main challenge for the Humanist Schools). The nurse could not immediately pacify the girl so she phoned the girl's father for more information. It turned out that the girl had just heard of the death of a close relative and, as she had a known heart problem, the father said he would come straight to the school to take her to the nearest hospital. In this case, the calm judgement of the nurse was invaluable.



On a tour of the site, the Deputy Head, Awali Mulehdu (with Hilary above), told us about the current water problems. The original

water source was a lift pump drawn from a 60-metre borehole under the round concrete cap in the picture below. The water



from that borehole was safe to drink but somewhat discoloured and with a tainted taste. Also, after pumping, it took several hours for the water to refill from the water table around. Three years ago we paid for the borehole to be deepened and the lift pump was replaced with a sunken electric pump, which raised the water to an overhead tank so that water could be gravity fed around the school site and to provide showers in the girls dormitory. This worked well for some time but, over the past two years the ground water source has become depleted (largely due to climate change, which has brought a period of much lower rainfall). Finally, in January this year, the pump stopped working and the school has had no water on the original site since.

For months, students have had to fetch water in jerry cans from a new borehole and lift pump that was sunk near the swamp, where the water table is higher. Water from the new pump is of high quality, free from bacteria and pleasant to drink. The only problem is that girls in the hostel on the old school site have to carry all the water they need over a distance of half a mile – and the same goes for the school kitchens. The bicycles (below) are the ones used for carrying water and other goods to the kitchens.

There is hope on the horizon. The School's local M.P., who is the Speaker of the National Parliament, Mrs Rebecca Kadaga, has promised to bring piped water to the school from Kamuli, the nearest town, 7km away.

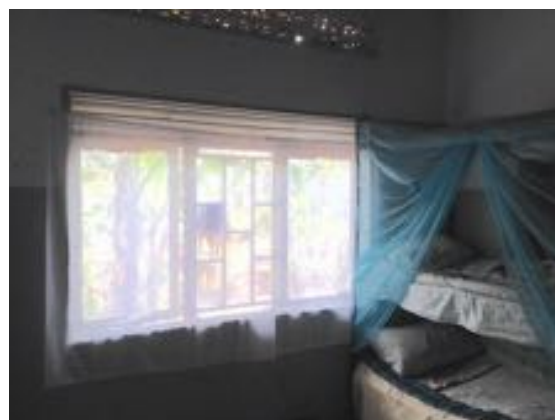


The pipeline is already half way to the school and UHST has funded the construction of an underground reservoir to store water, when it arrives, on the upper school site. Due to the use of a poor concrete mix the first attempt to create a watertight structure failed but, another contractor was brought in, and the reservoir is now ready for the arrival of the pipeline. When it comes, there will be relief all round. So much time is wasted at the school, and throughout Africa, with the simple but essential task of fetching water. Below is a picture of the school cooks, outside the Kitchen. They have had a difficult time in the past few months due to the shortage of water.



Hilary noticed on our last visit to the school that the girls had draped a rag-bag of pieces of cloth and clothing over the windows of their hostel to provide privacy. So she brought with her 20 sets of net curtains and curtain springs to go over the windows. Awali Muledhu, the deputy headteacher, immediately set to work putting up the curtains, much to the delight of the girls. The

curtains will not only provide the privacy the girls they need, but will also make it harder for mosquitoes to fly into their bedrooms through open windows at night. This will help to reduce the incidence of malaria. The picture on the next page shows the hostel before the curtains went up. As an extra precaution, every bed has a mosquito net to prevent the girls from being bitten in the night.



The girls are very happy with their hostel, which houses 97 girls in 12 separate rooms. Their contentment is evident from the picture above. The girls are responsible for keeping the hostel clean so they make sure they all remove their shoes before entering. We were delighted to see that the hostel was spotlessly clean (see cleaning brush below) and there was no overcrowding. In fact it accommodates only one more girl than the number for which it was designed.



On our tour of the school we witnessed school democracy in action. We came across, in the shade of the trees beside the school playing field, the hustings for the Head boy and girls



prefect. Each candidate took their turn to explain how they would carry out the job and what they would do for other students, and each contestant came with a seconder who presented the candidates CV. It was interesting to hear the arguments put forward which included, "Vote for me and I will:

- *Lobby the school administration to improve school food so that we move away from a monotonous diet of poor quality posho (maize meal) and beans (we want more oil to be used in cooking the beans);*
- *Ensure that the grass is cut regularly and the compound kept clean and tidy;*
- *Make sure that all students speak English at all times, because all of our futures depend upon being excellent in English;*

- *Insist that all students wear school uniform and look neat and tidy at all times;*
- *Make sure the school cows do not stray and annoy neighbouring farmers;*
- *Campaign for the TV to be brought back for use at weekends and for a school bus."*

The school is proud of the fact that it has a democratic structure and that all prefects are selected by a vote of the student body.

The School Curriculum

Subjects offered at Mustard Seed School include:

- English, English Literature, Luganda
- Mathematics, Computer Studies
- Physics, Chemistry, Biology
- Geography, History, Economics
- Agriculture, Commerce, Entrepreneurship, Fine Art
- Religious education, General Studies

O-level results, published in January, were excellent and placed Mustard Seed School as the best school in the sub-county and 5th highest school in Kamuli District. This was a huge improvement on previous years. Moses Kanya, the school Director, puts the improvement down to the large number of books in the school and the ability of students to study independently to supplement what they learn in class.

Fieldwork is conducted in a number of subjects:

- Geography students are taken to Masese fish landing site, Njeru livestock farm and an industry in Jinja (e.g. textiles).

- Agriculture students also go to Njeru livestock farm and to the National Agricultural Show (at Jinja show ground).
- Entrepreneurship students are attached to businesses such as manufacturing enterprises and large hotels.

Although exam results as a whole were good in 2016, those for science were disappointing. The main Physics teacher last year, worked in two or three other schools and often failed to turn up for lessons. The students also felt they did not have access to the best Physics textbook. We are helping the school by providing extra money for science. Partly to buy more books, equipment and chemicals, but also to pay part of the salary of a well-qualified Head of Science, money to train and employ a science technician, and more to bring in science trainers to work with existing staff to help them to raise standards. We were pleased to see that a new cupboard has been bought for science equipment, which is being kept in a more orderly way.



Co-curricular activities are also strong and include:

Football (Mustard Seed were the District champions), Netball, Volleyball, Handball and Athletics (Several students represented Kamuli Districts in the national athletics championships), Music, Dance, Drama, scouting and girl guides (district champions in the annual scouting competitions). We were also pleased to see that a Humanist Students'

Association has been established this year. Its first project is to buy in chicks and raise chickens, with the intention of bringing more meat into the school diet.



Below is one of the Humanist Ethos posters, which encourages good inter-personal relations:



We had a very good meeting with Leo Otim, who is Head of English and coordinator of the Reading for Pleasure Project. Earlier in the year we provided money to buy books recommended by the East African Reading Project. Leo has organised a Reading for Pleasure Club. The students meet each week and tell each other about a book they are reading. The Reading Project books are proving popular and the students are planning to watch the DVD film, based on one of the books, when they have finished reading it. The school is hoping that encouraging the reading habit will help the students to become more capable and rounded individuals, with benefits right across their studies.

In the past few months UHST has bought the school 5 new computers. They are Zotec Z-box machines which are very fast but compact mini-computers with a very low electricity usage. Each machine works independently and is packed with all the educational software that is on the existing server: the RACHEL non-fiction repository, e-books, Khan Academy science videos, a typing tutor and the Encarta



tuition programme that teaches students in a structured way to use the Office suite of programs. It was evident on this visit to the school that many students visit internet cafes when they visit towns near where they live and they each have their own e-mail accounts.

The Z-boxes come without peripherals such as mice, keyboard, headphones and flat-screen monitors. While we were there we gave the computer studies teacher money to buy the necessary additional equipment to enable them to be used by students. We have ordered more Z-boxes and two HP laptop computers with CD/DVD writers, which the school needs to prepare student work to send to the exam board. Once they are all in place the school will have a very good facility with 20 workstations that can be used both as a learning resource and for teaching computer studies.

Students

Hilary met the students on UHST scholarships. She spoke to all of them in year groups and spoke to each of the new scholarship holders individually. On this visit, we had a number of individual students who came to us to explain



that they were very poor and could we find them a scholarship. This is always difficult but we had to explain that the number of scholarships was limited and we leave it to the school to decide who receives them.

After consultation with the Headmistress, Deputy Head and the Director, Hilary and I agreed to fund an additional boarding scholarship for a particularly bright but needy young Moslem lady, Phiona Nabiri (pictured below).



Phiona gained a grade 1 in her primary leaving certificate. She is one of 7 students who gained a Division 1 in her O-levels, the top grade obtained by fewer than 6% of students in the whole of Uganda. At the beginning of the year her father died and her mother went to live in Arua, in the extreme north-east of Uganda. Phiona was left for a time to live with an aunt, but then moved to Mukono to look after her

aged grandmother, who had no money to care for them. Because of the upheavals in her life she returned to school late, after all the Senior 5 scholarships had been allocated. Because she is bright, the school has allowed her to stay but she has two-months arrears of school fees and has not been bought the school uniform. She expressed concern that, at any time, she could be asked to leave the school. She is a girl with great ambitions. Her A-level subjects are Maths, Physics and Economics and she want to study either Astronomy or Engineering at university. Her teachers expect her to do well at A-level, so it was an easy decision to provide the scholarship to enable her to complete her A-level. By the time we left the Headteacher, Annet Kasuubo, had presented her with her school uniform, so she could fit in with the other students. Although Phiona has been brought up as a Moslem, she had developed a profound interest in Humanism and she is the Chair of Mustard Seed School's Humanist Students' Association.

A number of scholarship students at Mustard Seed School have left the school during the course of the year. This is a cause for concern.



We have heard that parents have taken them away for one reason or another; at least two of the girls have left for marriage but the school is carrying out an investigation so they understand the reason why each scholarship dropout has occurred. Above are pictures of some current scholarship holders.

At the time of our visit the number of students at Mustard Seed School was as follows:

	Student Numbers in 2016		
	BOYS	GIRLS	TOTAL
Senior 1	38	46	84
Senior 2	46	47	93
Senior 3	32	31	63
Senior 4	27	28	55
Senior 5	13	12	25
Senior 6	10	03	13
TOTAL	166	167	333
Boarding	92	97	187

Moses provided data on what happens to students when they leave school.

Destinations after O-level

A-level courses	20%
Lower-level vocational courses	20%

Unskilled jobs	40%
Return to help at home	20%

About 1 in 5 O-level students are accepted onto A-level courses. Some stay at Mustard Seed School but others move to other schools.

A similar proportion go into lower-level vocational courses for such skills as: hairdressing, building trades, lower-level nursing and vehicle repairs. 2 in every 5 take unskilled jobs such as shop work, domestic service, cleaning, agricultural labouring, riding motor-bike taxis (boda-bodas). A further one-fifth continue to work with their families as peasant farmers.

Destinations after A-level

University degree courses	40%
Higher-level vocational courses	45%
Return to help at home	15%

Mustard Seed School has relatively small numbers taking A-level courses in the school. Of those that do roughly 2 out of every 5 are accepted onto university courses – though a number drop out due to inability to keep up with the fee payments.

Staff

The school currently employs 30 teachers – mainly part time. There is quite a large staff turnover but, as the school has grown and finances have improved, they have been able to attract better-qualified teachers. Currently Mustard Seed School employs 14 graduate teachers and 16 who have been trained in National Teachers Colleges.

We were struck by the confident and contented manner of the teachers we met. Excellent O-level examination results, published in January, had given everyone a surprise but was a very welcome boost to morale. Pay levels are better than before but still quite low. However, the school is trying to offer more perks to the teachers to

compensate. Teachers have contracts and are enrolled in the National Social Security Scheme, which is a pension scheme to which both employees and employer contribute. Many teachers receive transport and housing allowances. They can educate one of their children in the school free of charge and get discounted rates for other children. UHST provides money to pay an end of year bonus, which helps to see teachers through the long annual vacation from December to the beginning of February, when they would normally receive no pay. Holiday pay is rare in Uganda.

The school also employs 11 ancillary staff including: 4 cooks, a school bursar, a librarian, hostel wardens, 2 askaris (guards) and the school nurse.

UHST support in 2016

In 2016 UHST supporters have funded 55 day and 17 boarding scholarships in the school. The scholarships bring bright but needy children into the school and providing an education to such children really does transform their life chances. In addition, so far this year we have approved the use of funds for:

- Upgrading the computer system to 20 workstations by adding 10 low power use Zotec Z-box mini-computers and 2 HP laptops with DVD writers. This involves purchasing additional low-power use flat screen monitors, mice, headphones for listening to online video lessons, and a mobile dongle to give live internet and email on one of the Z-box computers.
- The purchase of a large number of new books to support the Reading for Pleasure programme (new books being entered in the library stock in picture below).
- Purchase of additional equipment and chemicals for science education (checking new science equipment in next picture).



- Funding towards the salary costs of a new Head of Science and Science Technician and to bring in outside trainers to work with the science teachers to raise standards.
- A year's supply of re-useable sanitary pads – Afripads - for all girl students. The girls are delightedly holding up their Afripad packs in the picture below).



- Funds to enable the school's football team to attend the regional championships,
- A grant to support the work of Mustard Seed School's Humanist Association.

Priorities

Over the coming period the school has asked for our help by providing resources for:

1. A Science Project in collaboration with Isaac Newton High School. This will include help with the training and pay of a technician and staff and with new books and materials for science.
2. High-speed RISO offset printer. This is a fast machine with low running and maintenance costs and will be used for general school reprographics.
3. Lawyers fees related to the establishment of a long-term land lease for the school.
4. 50% contribution to the annual accounting fees (£600).
5. Back up solar power to provide lighting to enable students to study during power breaks (which are frequent).
6. The school is working on a site development plan in an effort to prioritise future building needs. Forthcoming priorities include upgrading the science laboratory, a larger room for the library, a dining hall and study space and staff housing.

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

Donation and standing order forms can be found at:

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