



Uganda Humanist Schools Trust

Mustard Seed School, Busota, Kamuli

July 2018



Moses Kanya, School Director, and Simon Bogere, Humanist Counsellor and trainee Humanist Celebrant

Developing on a split site

Uganda is experiencing unprecedented investment in new road infrastructure, with funding coming from loans and grants provided by the World Bank and China. As main trunk roads become tarmacked, people and traders are attracted and small trading centres (embryonic market towns) spring up along the highway. Busota is one such trading centre. It is located on the new road, which goes north from Jinja, on Lake Victoria, to Kamuli, the administrative town of one of three large districts that make up the ancient kingdom of Busoga – where Uganda's President Yoweri Museveni restored the monarchy a few years ago.

When the school was established in 2005 (school sign alongside new road right), Moses Kanya acquired a small plot of land, fifteen-



minutes walk from the centre of Busota on the edge of the settlement. After writing to the then editor of New Humanist and Chief Executive of the Rationalist Association, Caspar Melville, an appeal was launched for funds to build a new Humanist School on the site. With the £30,000 raised, an attractive first building was constructed with adjoining long-drop toilets. The building comprised a

small staff room and a long narrow hall, divided into 3 classrooms using flimsy wooden partitions. At the time, the school had no running water and no access to electricity. Water had to be carried in jerry cans from the nearest pump, in the grounds of the Catholic Church. However, after the school refused to allow the priest to hold religious services in the school, the church denied them access to water during school hours. Though they conceded to allowing the school to draw water at night. Below is the typical queue for the water pump at the Catholic Church.



Over the years, as the school has grown, it has acquired additional land in a piecemeal fashion. First, an adjoining plot with a few buildings, which linked the original site to the road leading into Busota. It then took over a private primary school site, which had failed financially. This site was 200 metres away and separated from the school by a row of houses. The school site came with a number of run-down classrooms, which we were able to help the school to renovate. A couple of years later, the school acquired a piece of land adjoining the primary school site, on which we have funded the construction of a boys hostel. The final acquisition, across a small dirt road beside the primary site, was a large block of land, which has been cleared to provide a playing field and space for a new classroom block and a multi-purpose hall, currently under construction.

Having multiple plots of land causes some fragmentation at Mustard Seed School but, the distances are short and the school is perfectly workable operating across, what is now effectively, two sites. Progressively, the

bulk of the teaching will take place on the new land, which will have the new Hall, classroom block and playing field, with water from a borehole and lift pump. The original site will be the focus for central services such as the school administration, the Library and Information Centre, main computer room and science laboratory and the location of the girls' hostels – a second hostel is urgently needed as some girls are having to sleep in a classroom.

Caspar Melville, who organised the initial funding for Mustard Seed, is an active member of the Board of Trustees of UHST and still represents us as a Director on the Board running the school. The school received initial funding of more than £50,000 through the New Humanist and many of those initial donors continue to support the school through UHST. Since UHST was set up we have raised grants for Mustard Seed School to the value of £360,000 in the period 2009-2018.



The original school site (above), after the addition of extra land and buildings, contains:

- *A school Hall, divided into 2 classrooms*
- *School offices and a small staffroom*
- *A small computer lab with 12 Z-box computers*
- *A science lab*
- *A bookstore/lending library*
- *A hostel for 90 girls - with showers and washroom*
- *A classroom, currently used as an overspill dormitory for girls*
- *A cook house and server for school lunches*

- *Various toilets and washrooms*
- *A school clinic with nurse's quarters, two twin-bedded isolation rooms, treatment room, flush toilet and shower*
- *Two units of teachers' accommodation and another building let out as a police post (this increases school security)*
- *We hope to build a second girls' hostel on this site*



In the picture above our visiting party follow Annet Kisakye, headteacher since the school opened, into the former primary school site, which now has additional land alongside. This site contains:

- *4 classrooms and a small chemistry lab.*
- *A hostel for 90 boys*
- *A classroom used as a spill-over dormitory for boys*
- *Toilets and wash rooms*
- *Two buildings, which are being converted to provide accommodation for teachers.*



Finally, the picture above shows the view from the playing field to the new classroom block on the largest plot of land, which contains:

- *The school playing field – used for boys' and girls' football, athletics and other sports*
- *A new 4-classroom block with additional staffrooms. The classrooms are well finished and have ceilings to reduce noise during rain storms and to prevent sound passing between classrooms.*
- *A new multi-purpose hall (under construction) will be used for assemblies, music, dance and drama events, and for examinations. The building will have a stage with changing rooms on either side. (See below)*



Water has been a major issue since the school began. As the school has grown, so has pressure on water supplies. Things reached crisis point last summer when the main borehole ran dry, due to a fall in the water table caused by excessive extraction from all the wells and boreholes in the area around the school. This forced students into a long walk to the remaining pump at the far end of the playing field and, to harvest sufficient water, students were taken out of lessons throughout the day to ferry water.

Fortunately, the problem has now been solved. UHST paid for the local water authority to bring mains water along a pipe, over a kilometre in length, from the nearest pumping station on the River Nile. The water rises under pressure into two high-level tanks, one on each school site. The water is pre-filtered and chlorinated so it is perfectly safe to drink. The piped water is metred and needs to be paid for, but the costs will be affordable.

Mustard Seed School has been growing fast, partly as a result of its location next to the rapidly growing trading centre of Busota, but also due to its steadily improving academic performance. It took a few years before the students on roll rose to 100 but, today, the

school has reached its target intake of 600 students. This is despite the fact that recruitment of students into the sixth form fell, due to the late publication of the school's O-level results.

While the school's facilities are improving, some challenges remain. Both the boys' and girls' hostels are overcrowded and students have to be accommodated in classrooms, which is far from satisfactory. A second girls' hostel is urgently needed on the main site to relieve pressure on boarding accommodation and two classrooms on the primary site need to be adapted for use as dormitories for the boys.

Once the new multi-purpose hall is finished we will also need to find resources to convert the old hall into a Library and Information Centre and computer room. The science lab on the main site needs refurbishing and a science storage and prep room is required.

Learning Resources

A central part of the ethos of the Humanist Schools is to empower students to take charge of their own learning. They are encouraged not to believe unquestioningly what they are told by teachers and other authority figures, but always to check information from reliable sources – such as properly edited books and trusted web-sites (such as the materials of the rigorously edited RACHEL repository, which the school has on its intranet).

The school library is well stocked with text and reference books, and novels by international and African writers. We learned that students are expected to buy, for 5,000 Uganda shillings (£1), a plastic photo-id card, which they deposit with the librarian in order to borrow a book. As purchase of the card is voluntary, many of the younger students choose to delay buying the card until they enter Senior 4 – their "O" level year – when the card is required to sit external examinations. This has meant that, up to now, many students in years 1, 2 and 3, have not been able to borrow books from the library.

When we discovered this we made representations to the School Director, who has now agreed to issue cards to all students and to incorporate the 5,000 shillings charge in the first term's school fee.

In order to stimulate the reading habit, we have run, for the past two years, a Reading for Pleasure Project culminating in an annual competition. Before we arrived at the school, two winners were chosen from each school year. Each student gave a short review of their chosen book to the rest of the school before receiving their prize of an Oxford Learners' Dictionary and small amount of cash. Some of the winners are shown below holding up their prize dictionaries.



As well as books, students have access to extensive learning resources on the school intranet. Last year we upgraded the network by bringing in 10 new powerful Z-box computers, each containing an extensive non-fiction reference library.

The resource policy that UHST has been pursuing with the schools, for some years now, is really beginning to pay dividends. This year, Mustard Seed School showed a large improvement in performance in national exams. During our stay we organised a party to thank staff for their hard work and dedication to the students. One of our Trustees, who has been concerned about the continuing low pay of staff, has given £1,000 to be shared among staff as an exam bonus. This amounts to a bonus of 20% of the 2017 salary and is hugely appreciated by all the staff at Mustard Seed School.

UHST regularly pays an annual bonus, equivalent to a month's pay, to staff at the Humanist secondary schools. This has helped the school to retain staff. Between 2017 and 2018 no teachers at all left the Mustard Seed School. During our visit we found very high levels of staff satisfaction. Teachers at Mustard Seed School work really well as a team and morale is very high.

Other items

During our visit I gave a First Aid demonstration to the Humanist Students Club. Using some books I took along, the students are going to teach themselves First Aid principles, with support from the school nurse, Lydia, and the Humanist coordinator, Simon Bogere. Once the students become confident, they intend to organise sessions to teach First Aid to other students. This fits in with the Humanist club ethos, which focuses on doing practical things to improve life in the community around them.

Simon Bogere, the Humanist Counsellor, plays a general student-counselling role within the school. The Humanist Schools reject oppressive methods to control non-cooperative students and use an empathetic approach based upon counselling and guidance instead. Teachers and students try to get to the root of problems and bring in families to help, where necessary. Simon works with the student Chair of the Humanist Club to facilitate activities in the community. In recent months, the Humanist Club has been into Busota to clear up litter, cut grass to keep away snakes and planted trees. Currently Simon is training to become a Humanist Celebrant using an online course developed by Kato Mukasa with support from the Humanist Society of Scotland. This is a wonderful initiative that will make an important contribution to promoting Humanist values in Uganda and elsewhere in Africa – the scheme has now been extended to 10 African countries.

My wife, Hilary, met all the scholarship students – 60 in all (picture of some of them

below). This is the first year there have been no dropouts from Mustard Seed School.



We estimate that the school needs only a further £50,000 to £60,000 to complete its core infrastructure to cater for 600 students. The remaining priorities are:

- *A second girls' hostel.*
- *Refurbishment of the old hall, which needs equipping to become a Library and Information Centre.*
- *Equipping a new room with Computers for teaching Computer Studies.*
- *Refurbishing the science lab and adding a prep room.*
- *General work to repaint the buildings and smarten up the two school sites.*

If you feel you or your group would like to help us with these, or to sponsor a student, please contact stevehurd@uhst.org (01782 750338). Donation and standing order forms can be found at:

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

Steve Hurd
Chair, Uganda Humanist Schools Trust
July, 2018