



Uganda Humanist Schools Trust

Progress Report from the Director of Isaac Newton High School, Kateera, Masaka September 2020



Foundation work on new Hall

Introduction

Due to the Covid pandemic my flight to Uganda in May was cancelled and Entebbe airport has been closed to overseas visitors ever since. So, I am very grateful to Peter Kisirinya, the Director of Isaac Newton High School for writing this update on Isaac Newton's recent progress.

Steve Hurd, Chair of UHST

Director's Report

I am happy to report that in the year 2019-20 Isaac Newton High School continued its tremendous progress and is having a great positive impact on the community around.

Academic Progress

In the results of the 2019 Uganda Certificate in Education (Ordinary Level)

Examinations, published in January, 21 of our students passed with a grade one aggregate (only 6% of students nationally attain this level). This was an outstanding achievement for any rural school in Uganda and placed us 143rd out of 4,123 schools in the country.

Our particularly high grades in Science caused some puzzlement at the examination board and, at first, our results were withheld. Such exceptional performance in science was unprecedented for a rural school and ran contrary to the general downward trend of science results countrywide. We were asked to take the whole class to be interrogated by the examination body, which we did. After a rigorous oral examination our students were found to be very competent, and our high results were upheld. We are very grateful to our science staff for their hard work and to Uganda Humanist Schools Trust (UHST), which has given high priority to science and funded the construction of two well-equipped science laboratories and a good supply of quality textbooks.

Uganda Advanced Certificate in Education results were even better, with 92% of the candidates scoring the minimum university matriculation requirements of two principal passes at A-level or better. No single candidate failed the examinations. Sadly, Covid has closed down all education institutions and prevented many of our students, who deserve a place, from going on to university or vocational colleges.

Infrastructure

Normal teaching had to stop in March, due to a blanket closure of all schools due to the threat of Covid. Fortunately for us, UHST maintained their capital funding for developing the infrastructure of the school.

As a result, the past year has seen a host of new developments:

- Painting of the classrooms in the new teaching block has been completed (below).



- A new boys' dormitory was built (picture below). It is divided into 8 rooms and caters for 96 students.



- Two new toilets have been constructed.
 - a. One at the Girls' wing, which became necessary after the collapse of the cesspit after heavy rain. This has 4 squat stances and one with a raised pedestal and toilet seat.
 - b. Another toilet block was built to serve the new boys' hostel. This has 9 squat stances and 3 with raised pedestals and toilet seats.
- We also built, for the boys, three bathrooms with showers.

- Fencing of the school has been completed with chain link fence.
- A three-phase power line was extended to the school compound and to the surrounding villages, 10% of the funds came from UHST supporters and the rest from the World Bank.
- Piped mains water has been extended, from the trunk water pipeline 3kms away, to the school and the communities around the school.
- Unfortunately, the government has introduced high water charges for metered mains water. So, with UHST's help, we have renewed the damaged pipeline and bought an electric pump, to bring water up $\frac{3}{4}$ mile from a local well in the valley below the school. The previous diesel pump has been refurbished and is used as a backup for times when there are electricity outages.
- As is the case every year, more books, laboratory materials and sanitary towels have been bought.
- Computers facilities have been extended with 10 new computers in our IT room.
- We are working to build storm drains (picture below) to protect the classrooms from flooding during heavy rainstorms.



Community Benefits

Isaac Newton High School has become the major driving force for rural development in the community around the school. The school provides direct employment to 52 people in the area, with a further hundred jobs being supported indirectly.

The transformation in local production and living standards brought about by the school is enormous. This is evident as you come into the area, where houses have been rebuilt and modernised and people are wearing better clothes and have more goods available to them. Extending electricity has attracted new families to the area. New houses have been constructed and the local market is busier. Maize and coffee processing factories have been built. A modern poultry farm with 90,000 birds has been attracted and this employs 33 youths. Roads are now regularly maintained by local government because the area generates the taxes to cover the costs.

Workers from the school spend most of their earnings in the area and this has greatly improved the economic status of the area.

Challenges

Since the closure of schools in March, due to Covid, Isaac Newton has had no local fee income. We have only been able to support our staff as a result of scholarship and additional hardship funds provided by UHST. These have enabled us to pay half wages to permanent staff and provide assistance with food to temporary staff. We are very grateful to UHST supporters for helping us through the Covid crisis. Teachers were finding it almost impossible to survive and pay house rents during this time. Some of our teachers have been evicted from rented accommodation, because they have been unable to cover the full rental charges. Fortunately, UHST support has enabled most of us to manage basic subsistence during the period of closure.

Currently UHST is funding the construction of the main hall/dining hall and it is at the roofing stage.

Once we get through the Covid crisis, we are confident that the school will be able to get back to the high standards of education and welfare that we were attaining before the shutdown.

However, a few critical infrastructure needs remain:

- At least five more staff houses will be needed in the vicinity of the school. These may come from local families building rooms to let but, failing that, given the large number of boarding students, we would benefit from having some staff permanently housed on the school campus.
- More expenditure on drainage and upgrading walkways to cope with times of heavy rain.

- Two additional blocks of flush toilets - one for boys and another for girls.
- Playing fields for sporting activities.
- Transforming the old hall into a Library and Information Centre and an additional science laboratory.
- Fitting loudspeakers and data projectors including curtains in the multimedia classroom block.

Peter Kisirinya,
Director of Isaac Newton High School

If you feel you or your group would like to help us to support the Humanist Schools in Uganda, or to sponsor a student then please contact stevehurd@uhst.org (01782 750338).

Donation forms can be found at:

<https://ugandahumanistschoolstrust.org/donate/>