



Uganda Humanist Schools Trust

Mustard Seed Schools, Busota, Kamuli

March 2023



Boys' and girls' football teams training for big championship matches.
The school playing field is bordered by trees planted by the children.

First impressions on entering the main secondary school site are of a pleasant green environment for learning and living. The Humanist Schools' Tree Planting Project has created stands and borders of mature trees. Swards of green grass are kept short to discourage snakes.

The kids and staff were pleased to see me and I them. Some secondary children returned to school a week or so late after helping at home on crop planting. There were 560 children in the secondary school - close to the pre-Covid maximum of 600.



The school has a couple of small shops, like the one below, run by local people to serve the needs of staff and students for provisions and snacks.



The Primary School

When the primary school was run by a Muslim foundation, Primary Leaving Examination results were poor, with grade 1s almost unknown. In its first year operating as Mustard Seed Humanist Primary School, 3 children gained grade 1 in PLE, and overall results were raised from well below the national average to just above. Teachers expect to do even better next year. Staff motivation has improved. Teachers are being paid better and regularly and UHST supporters have provided books, which were few and far between before. Since improved results were posted, local children have been keen to enrol in the school though class sizes remain small.

MS Primary Class Sizes

Nursery	30
Primary 1	15
Primary 2	30
Primary 3	20
Primary 4	18
Primary 5	21
Primary 6	15
Primary 7	22
Total	171

I had a wonderfully positive meeting with the dynamic young teachers at the new Primary School. They have seen an improvement in the school, where children are now happier and learning well.



The teachers showed their appreciation for receiving regular salaries and having a responsive management. We explained the importance of the not-for-profit status, which means that nobody is creaming off money from the school for personal gain. All income is used to pay teachers, feed children and for resources to improve the school. Teachers were reassured to learn about the thoroughness of the audit process. The auditor was visiting the school to scrutinise the use of recent UHST grant money, and we were pleased to learn that everything was in order. Below is Moses Kamyia, the school's Director and Headteacher, with Peter Kisirinya, a co-Director from Isaac Newton School, and Dan Kasanda, the UHST's auditor.



Moses Kanya is proud of the impact of the school on the lives of individuals and the community. At the age of 51, Moses feels that the school will be his lifelong legacy to his community.

He introduced me to an old boy of the school, who after training to teach mathematics returned to the school as a mathematics teacher. 25% of school staff are former students. Moses admits that he was demoralised when Covid closed all schools, but since it reopened, he is determined to build upon the school's earlier successes.

Alan, the son of a former Ugandan ambassador who has a house nearby, has been very interested to see the progress of the Mustard Seed Schools. He is a Ugandan economist, currently working in Peterborough, where he runs an NGO to help children excluded from school through disability or poverty in the Busota area. Alan told me that Mustard Seed is well respected in the area and that Moses enjoys a high standing in the community. Alan's NGO is establishing Maths Hubs in the area for disadvantaged kids, and there might be the possibility of establishing one on the school site.

I met current scholarship students (next picture). The 5 children from Katumba and 3 from Eagle's View Humanist Primary schools are settling in well and local students are helping them to integrate. It is quite a culture shock for the Katumba children, who are 20 hours by coach from their homes and having to adjust to a different local language and food. For such children, English becomes the lingua franca, although they will quickly learn Lusoga, the local language around Busota.



UHST scholarship children

Below are girl and boy footballers in a training session ahead of big games with other schools.

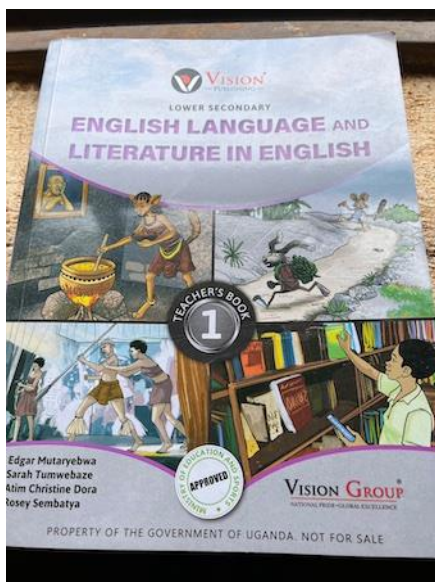


Here are a group of fans watching the teams training:



As well as sports, scouting is still strong in the school, as is music making and singing.

Secondary curriculum reform, spearheaded by the National Curriculum Development Council, has been embraced by staff and students at Mustard Seed School. Lessons are structured around an initial presentation by the teacher, reading from engaging new textbooks, group problem-solving activities and a final plenary to draw together the threads.



I observed classes in English (Oral literacy) and Entrepreneurship (Family businesses). Children were found the activities in the new textbooks both novel and interesting.



The school's biggest problem is how to attract good maths and science teachers to the Busota area, which has low incomes and poor housing and amenities. All private schools are finding it hard to compete with government schools, since the Uganda government raised the pay of science teachers to 2.8 million (over £600) Uganda shilling per month. This is almost three times that in the rural private schools, such as Mustard Seed. The school's response has been to offer part-time contracts to experienced science teachers from other schools. In this way, Mustard Seed children get the science they need. However, the part-timers are not around to organise practical work and without

this it is hard for children to do well in their final examinations. Consequently, science results at O-level were poor.

In contrast, at A-level, due to the efforts of a couple of dedicated part-time teachers, results have improved. I met a bright Chemistry teacher and UNEB national examiner who works part-time. He likes the atmosphere at Mustard Seed School and is willing to bring lessons he has already prepared in his main school and earn extra money to pay his own children's school fees.

As a new departure, the school intends to offer optional vocational courses in the coming year. The range of short courses will include such things as poultry rearing, bee keeping, football coaching, IT and a range of crafts.



Cornerious Matege

At a meeting with the secondary teachers, the newly appointed Head of English, Cornerious Matege, spoke up. He explained that he was a former student of the school and had fond memories of being presented with a dictionary as his prize for winning the Reading for Pleasure competition. This proved life changing. The competition encouraged him to become a regular reader, to go to Teacher Training College and then to return as a teacher of English. He was delighted to be back in school helping Moses to convey Humanism to a new generation of children, such as these pictured in front of the main classroom block and hall:



Other teachers outlined what they needed to do their jobs better :

- Certificate and Diploma teachers requested help to raise their qualifications to degree level.
- more books to cope with the new secondary curriculum.
- more on-line computers so staff and students could access information on the internet and improve their computer skills.
- bring in examiners to explain the requirements of good examination answers.
- provide data projectors and PA systems to improve the quality of presentation.

Teachers were pleased to have returned to school after Covid and to be receiving full and regular pay again. They were delighted to hear from the school Director that, as a result in the rise in UHST scholarship income, basic monthly pay would be increased from 400,00 to 500,000 Uganda shillings (£90 to £115). There was a general appreciation of the contribution that scholarships from UHST supporters made to the school. They provided an educational lifeline to bright children from challenging circumstances, who went on to gain good grades and boost the school's performance at O-level. Scholarships also gave the school regular monthly income to pay teachers and improve educational resources in the school.

The Humanist Counsellor explained how the school follows a policy of *guidance not violence* in promoting order and good relations. They

aim to foster self-discipline and responsibility to the group. In a few difficult cases parents are brought into school for consultation.

Hellen Namaganda, the senior female teacher, spoke of the transformational effects of providing reusable sanitary pads on girls' performance. Before Afripads were provided, girls missed school and lessons and performed poorly. Now teachers have no idea when a girl is having a period. Attendance is good and girls are beginning to outperform boys.

Water continues to be a pressing issue. Although UHST supporters funded the extension of mains water to the school and surrounding community, metered water charges are so high that it must be used sparingly. Children still need to draw water from underground using a lift pump, which requires hard physical labour.



Water is needed for personal hygiene, for cleaning and for clothes washing.



Mustard Seed Schools AGM

Sunday 4th March 8.30-10.30am

Present

Chair & Managing Director: Moses Kamya
Directors: Peter Kisirinya and Steve Hurd (apologies from 2 others)
Auditor: Dan Kasanda + 3 Parent-Teacher Association representatives.

Chair's Report

Moses thanked UHST supporters for help with:

- Refurbishment of boys' sleeping quarters in former classrooms (nearing completion).
- Emergency funds to sustain school and permanent teachers through Covid.
- Emergency food to help casually employed staff.
- Funding purchase of failed Muslim Primary School, its refurbishment and addition of kitchen and toilets.

School enrolment:

Primary school has 171 children and growing.

Secondary has 560 (+ 30 who have returned to Senior 5 since the AGM).

Dan Kasanda, UHST's auditor, is helping the school to train its primary and secondary school bursars.

Teachers' standard of living has been eroded by inflation, so a decision was taken to raise the basic monthly salary by 25%. The basic full-time teacher's monthly salary will become 500,000 UgSh (£115). Higher scholarship income will help to fund this.

Science Performance discussion

Overall grades at UCE were depressed by low grades in science. However, at A-level, performance in science matched those of arts subjects.

The school cannot match the new science pay levels in government schools and has been unable to recruit full-time science teachers.

They are trying to attract good teachers from other schools by employing them on a casual

part time basis. For 2 days equivalent in part-time hours they pay 400,000 U.Sh (£90).

A proposal to train up a full-time technician was discussed and accepted. Training will be conducted by staff at Isaac Newton, the sister Humanist school.

Books

There is call from teachers for books in all primary and secondary subjects.

UHST will help with this.

Auditor's Report

The 2021 accounts were accepted.

Dan Kasanda said he believed that UHST involvement with all the Humanist Schools had been a spur to improving governance and accountability. The impact of Covid on incomes and costs could not be overstated. He welcomes the fact that bursars have now been given complete oversight of school financial flows and access to bank statements. The accounts are now transparent. At present the Primary Headteacher is acting as bursar. Dan recommended that someone be employed to relieve him of the burden. There have already been huge improvements in accountability. As a next step he would like to see:

- Daily reconciliation of cash movements.
- The digitisation of all accounts. This requires the purchase of 2 laptops and *Quickbooks* and *Tally* accounting software (Cost per unit = 1.16m £270).
- We agreed to get the system up and running at Isaac Newton Schools and share the templates with the Mustard Seed Schools in September.
- Inflation had hit projects such as the new kitchen and IT room refurbishment. It was resolved that projects would be undertaken and completed more quickly in future before material prices rose.

The meeting ended with thanks to each participant for their contributions.

If you feel you would like to help us to meet the essential needs of the schools, please contact stevehurd@uhst.org (01782 750338).

Donation forms can be found at:

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