

INHS Impact Report 2026

The Importance of Education in Rural Uganda: An Analysis

By Matthew Robson and Harry Wood



Notes from Authors

In 2025 me and my research partner Harry Wood were both studying a master's degree, International Development: Public Policy and Management at the University of Manchester. As our graduation neared, we were looking for opportunities to gain real-life experience and understand how development takes form in reality. After attending Dorset Humanists lecture and then communicating with Steven Hurd, the director of the Uganda Humanist Schools Trust, the potential to carry out a small research project on the INHS seemed perfect and we began to plan our trip. The two weeks we spent living in Masaka were unforgettable. Our frequent visits to the school to speak with the students, observe lessons and carry out our study were very memorable. We also experienced Uganda with the help of Peter Kisirinya, the school's founder. Trips included a brilliant Safari and a trip to Kalangala Island to see the palm fruit plantations; this adventure ended with a dramatic and successful dash for the ferry home!

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When Mattie came to me with the opportunity to take part in a research project in Uganda, I was immediately fascinated and I accepted the offer in haste. It was an excellent chance for us both to apply our learnings from our International Development degree into the real world and gain some valuable, relevant experience. For me, the idea was especially enthralling as it would be my first time travelling to Africa; I could not wait to jump on the plane, begin exploring Uganda, and get stuck into the research!

Our time in Uganda was incredible, but it would not have been possible without the help of Peter Kisirinya, the founder of Isaac Newton High School, to whom I would like to give a massive thank you. Peter ensured that we had the best possible experience during our stay, not only by organising fantastic day trips for us, but by taking care of the numerous practical aspects of day-to-day life. By providing us with frequent lifts to and from the school, picking us up from Entebbe on our first day, and giving constant recommendations, Peter went above and beyond to make our time in Uganda both extremely effortless and enjoyable.

Additionally, I would like to thank the students of INHS for welcoming us into what is their term-time home. Mattie and I sat in on several lessons, took part in the amazingly enthusiastic debate society, and shared with them some traditional Ugandan food, including posho and our newfound favourite fruit, jackfruit! We especially enjoyed spending time with the students of the Humanist Society, where we formed some fabulous friendships. The Humanist Society provided some much-appreciated help with our research and were more than happy to spend hours with us sharing some fascinating stories about life in Uganda.

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Introduction

Isaac Newton High School (INHS) is situated in the village of Kateera, a 20-minute drive from the small city of Masaka which lies close to the north shores of Lake Victoria. INHS began in 2005 with 40 orphaned children and since then, with the help of the Uganda Humanist Schools Trust (UHST), has grown into a thriving school which currently teaches around 800 students. It consists of both day and boarding students from Senior 1 through to Senior 6.

Following a 2023 UHST presentation exploring how the school has helped to develop the village of Kateera, this report takes a more on-the-ground approach to uncover the impact that INHS has upon its surrounding village, community, and students. Using insights from questionnaires and interviews, which were carried out with both locals and students, this report concludes that INHS has had an overwhelmingly positive impact on the village of Kateera, whilst the majority of students value the school extremely highly.

Following the introduction, this report is split into two key sections: **Local Impact** and **Student Impact**. Both sections begin by outlining the methodology which was used to gather the necessary data. This data is then explained and analysed to assess the effect that INHS has on both the local community and the students themselves. Finally, a concluding section ties together our thoughts.



Isaac Newton High School, February 2026

Local Impact

Methodology

The 2023 UHST presentation outlined many reasonable impacts which laid the foundations for our thinking. Examples include: the **multiplier effect** upon the local economy that would come from the injection of staff wages and student pocket money into the local businesses, improved local **infrastructure** such as electricity and roads that the school necessitated, and increased **investment** into the area as it became a growth centre. These impacts greatly validate the donations to the Uganda Humanist School Trust which have allowed the school

to become what is today. We saw the value in confirming these impacts, and set out to achieve this by asking the locals themselves.

This method took form as a set of survey and interview questions which we first put forward to local businesses and households. In total we surveyed 20 households and 14 businesses; when approaching, people were at first surprised, but were very happy to participate once informed about the purpose of our project. The questions we asked aimed to assess both qualitative and quantitative effects, with some questions being open-ended and other being more precise. For reference, some examples of the questions we asked included:

1. How has your income changed since the opening of INHS?
2. How many of your customers are either staff or students at INHS?
3. What is the best thing about INHS being in Kateera?

This was a great experience for us both, but we could not have done it without the help from the students of the INHS Humanist Society. They guided us through the village and offered crucial translation of our questions and the respondents answers.

Limitations

Before each interview we tried to make it clear that the participants were under no pressure to answer in favour of the school, and that our project would not in any way influence the prospect of future investment into it. Whilst honest answers, such as those relating to the rising rent and land prices in Kateera, led us to believe they were not scared to voice their true opinions, these answers of course come with potential bias and are not scientifically rigorous. However, many answers to our questions were consistent across the study and paint a good picture of the school impact. Additionally, the sample size is relatively small and thus the results should not be deemed scientifically accurate.



Kateera, February 2026



Authors and the Humanist Society during the field research

Indirect Income Effects

Our results from the local questionnaire provide strong evidence that INHS acts as pillar of economic stability for Kateera and its residents. The school has raised local demand, with staff and students making up a substantial share of the customer base of many local businesses.

85% of respondents reported increases in household income since the opening of INHS in 2005, with 65% attributing these increases to the staff and students that have become customers of their businesses. This confirms the suggestion outlined in the 2023 UHST presentation that INHS gives way to positive multiplier effects as incomes are spent locally. Staff and students require food, transport, medical products, and other goods, all of which are sold by small businesses in Kateera, with the increased demand boosting revenues. As such a high number of households have reported income gains, it suggests that the benefits brought about by the school have been experienced by the majority of locals; they have likely been distributed equally, with none facing disproportionate gains or losses. Additionally, it is important to note that no respondents reported declines in income since the opening of INHS, indicating that the school's multiplier effects have not displaced any existing economic activity, but appear to have expanded overall economic output within Kateera.

Such patterns are reinforced by the data collected in the local business questionnaire. The majority of local businesses in Kateera state that staff and students make up a significant share of their customer base, with 93% reporting some level of business growth since INHS's opening. Furthermore, over half (57%) of the businesses we questioned claimed that they would either not survive, or have to operate at a reduced capacity, if the school were to no longer exist. These statistics further enhance the suggestion that INHS is a vital economic institution within Kateera.

Direct Income Effects

As well as indirect multiplier effects, INHS has significant direct impacts on the community, notably in its contribution towards employment within Kateera. 30% of respondents reported having a household member who works for the school, either as a permanent member of staff or through construction. This level of reported employment shows that INHS has adopted inclusive local hiring practices, meaning that the potential employment benefits are likely to be felt within the community of Kateera.

The above statistics reflect two forms of direct impact that INHS has had on employment:

1. **Short-term employment:** Work that was generated during the construction of the school (10% of the reported 30%).
2. **Long-term employment:** Work such as teaching, maintenance and catering that permanently employs local people (20% of the reported 30%).

In rural settings such as Kateera, formal job opportunities are often limited. Such positions offered by INHS can provide income stability and reduce households' vulnerability to economic volatility, such as potential agricultural shocks that can dictate the incomes of many in rural Uganda.

Additionally, wages that are earned via employment at INHS are likely to be spent locally, reinforcing the indirect multiplier effects that were outlined above. It is likely that the direct and indirect income channels created by the school are mutually reinforcing: school employment increases household income which is then spent within Kateera, enhancing local trade and further boosting local incomes.

Community Benefits

As well as gathering raw statistics on income and employment, we wanted to capture the local peoples' perceptions of INHS in order to fully understand the social impact that the school has had on Kateera.

100% of respondents report that INHS has had a positive impact on the local community. We understand that we must not rule out the possibility of bias in this scenario, however it is hard to argue against such an extraordinarily positive response towards the school. This positive outlook was associated with a range of factors. When asked to identify the biggest benefit of INHS, 85% respondents referred to the advantages that nearby education provides. The advantages noted included:

- Increased access to education for locals
- Reduced transport costs
- Attraction of trade to the local area
- Electricity supply to Kateera
- Job opportunities

Improved access to education is achieved by both the proximity of INHS to the community, reducing transport costs and improving retention rates for those in Kateera, and the bursaries and scholarships offered that allow those, who may otherwise have struggled, to receive a quality education. Such improvements in education access represent an investment into long-term human capital. The benefits that can be achieved from this kind of investment may even exceed the income effects explored above; increased productivity, reduced unemployment, and better lifetime earnings for students are all likely to support long-term economic stability in Kateera.

The support for local business was also a popular response, with 30% of respondents citing this as the biggest benefit of the school, reinforcing the economic findings discussed in the

previous sections. Additionally, 15% emphasise the importance of the bursaries that are provided by INHS to lower-income locals. Many students are given financial assistance by INHS in order to help them cover the costs of attending school. These bursaries suggest that the economic growth generated by INHS is inclusive, with households from a variety of financial backgrounds having the same access to high-quality education, and thus the potential economic benefits too.

Other reported benefits, such as the introduction of electricity access and the students' contributions to local cleanliness indicate that the school's impact extends beyond economic variables. INHS produces tangible infrastructural benefits that are experienced by the entire community within Kateera, whether you have any association with the school or not.

Student Impact

Methodology

Here, our method was similar to the one used to measure local impact. We interviewed 40 students total, ranging from 14 – 20 years old with an equal split of male and female participants. We designed the questions to be more open this time, allowing students to offer more long-form answers in the hopes that we might gain a deeper insight into their experience at the school. We were keen to understand the students' perceptions of education and INHS, for instance by asking questions about how their career aspirations may have been different had they attended another school.

Why Isaac Newton High School?

Half of the interviewees cited better quality education as their primary reason for attending INHS, with 70% claiming that either the teachers, quality of teaching, or quality of facilities is the best thing about the school. Such results show how highly students value the education offered to them at INHS.

40% of the students that we interviewed were on either a scholarship or bursary. Many of the scholarships are given to students who have performed well academically in previous schools, so it is unsurprising that these same students value the quality of education at INHS. The importance of both scholarships and bursaries cannot be understated; 10% of students reported that they would likely not be in education if they were not able to attend INHS, with 15% claiming that they would, but likely at a lower quality institution. By offering scholarships and bursaries, INHS enables those who may not otherwise be able to attend school to receive a quality education, allowing them to have strong career aspirations, a topic that will be explored shortly.

Notably, 15% of interviewed students specifically referenced the Humanist values of the school as one of their primary reasons for attending. Numerous students explained they felt

more comfortable in the more secular environment and felt the schools focus was more in-line with their own goals.

Aspirations and Economic Mobility

The student career aspirations are very positive. 50% aspire to become doctors or surgeons, 15% are looking to become engineers, and 10% nurses. In total, three quarters of interviewees are aiming for highly-skilled professional careers. These ambitions not only reflect the students' optimism and self-belief, but the trust in the education provided to them by INHS. It is clear that the students recognise the quality of education that they are receiving. This is further reinforced when we asked the students whether they feel that by attending INHS over other schools that they are familiar with or have previously attended, they have a better chance of achieving such career aspirations; 95% agree that it does.

Insights like these can be limited, as students may have felt pressure to describe INHS in a positive light, however an undoubtable fact was the optimism that they displayed.

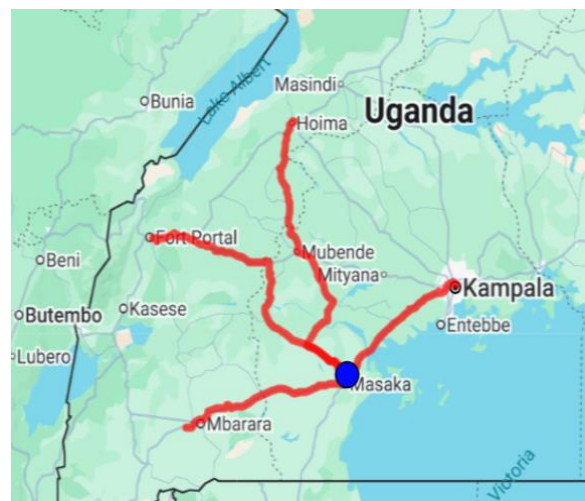
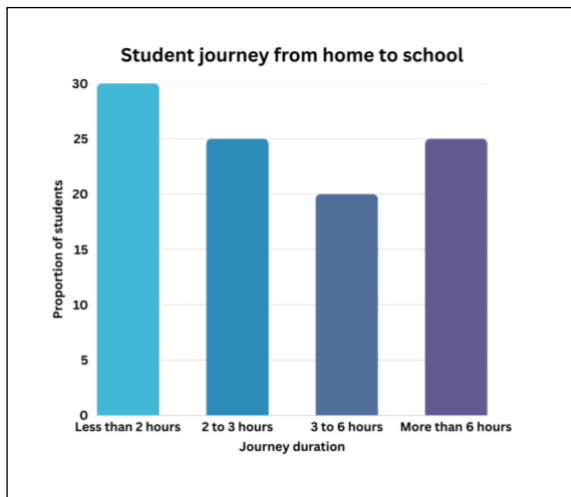


The debate society engaging in a debate

Student backgrounds

The students at INHS come from a wide range of backgrounds, as shown in the variety of school commute length (*See graphs below*). While most students board, many return home during the school holidays, with several students travelling up to a day to reach the school. The map below outlines a few of their journeys, with some home villages being as far as the DR Congo border or central Uganda. This suggests that INHS not only has a positive impact on the local village of Kateera, but for wider Uganda too. With students being located all over the country, the effects of quality education are likely to be felt far and wide.

The schools significant reach could be attributed to the scholarship program funded by the UHST. Students who achieve the highest grade in their primary school examinations are eligible for a scholarship paying a portion of their school fees; during our surveys we asked students who reside in distant villages why they study at INHS and 40% highlighted the scholarship program directly. This may raise concerns about the exclusion of local children, however, our local surveys found 85% of households have at least one student who attended or currently attends the school.



Left: Bar chart depicting duration of interviewees' journey to INHS

Right: Examples of some students' journeys to INHS

Concluding Remarks

When speaking to the students and staff of INHS, the main takeaways are very positive. There is a feeling of everyone pulling in the same direction. Everybody is organised well and seems motivated to support the strong learning environment that already exists. This encouraging attitude strongly corresponds with the overwhelmingly positive results taken from our study.

The local community values INHS highly, as do the students themselves. It is clear that tangible impacts have been felt throughout Kateera, with households experiencing rising incomes and many local businesses seeing growth. Through direct employment and indirect multiplier effects, INHS has



UHST Logo

established itself as a central economic institution within Kateera, supporting livelihoods and promoting economic stability.

The long-term implications of INHS are also highly significant. Improved access to education through scholarships and bursaries and the strong aspirations expressed by students indicate that the school is making an investment into human capital in both Kateera and wider Uganda. If students are able to realise their ambitions in highly-skilled professions, the benefits of INHS will extend far beyond short-term income effects; the future prosperity of Kateera and opportunities for the locals could be further transformed.

When asked what they would change about the school, students gave varying answers including better transport to and from school and more extra-curriculum activities, but there was not one answer that stood out.

Whilst it is important to recognise the limitations of a small sampled study and the potential of bias in our results, the consistency of our findings across households, business and students strengthens the credibility of our conclusions.

Education in the Current Political Environment – Mattie Robson

We arrived shortly after the 2026 general election in Uganda. Following a controversial win, Yoweri Museveni begins his seventh presidential term at the age of 81, becoming the third longest standing non-royal leader in the world. This election result was heavily disputed, leading to significant violence between security forces and supporters of the opposition. While the state of government in the UK seems unstable, for Ugandans, a power struggle at the top represents far greater risk to their everyday lives, in many conversations people spoke of anxiety regarding the political future of their country. For Isaac Newton High School, the external source of funding somewhat shields the students from this risk. This security further validates any donation to the Ugandan Humanist Schools Trust.

Appendices

Appendix A – Local Community Questionnaire: Results in Full

Sample: 20 households

- 100% of respondents believe that INHS has had a positive impact on the local area (Kateera).
- 10% of respondents have a family member that works for INHS as a member of staff.
- 20% of respondents have a family member that worked/works on the construction of INHS.
- 85% of respondents have a student that attends or attended INHS.
- 85% of respondents reported that their household income has increased since the opening of INHS, with none reporting reductions in income.
- Increases in income were attributed to:
 - o Staff/students being customers of their business (55%)
 - o Jobs at the school enabling them to open a new business (10%)
 - o INHS provides an incentive to work to afford school fees (5%)
 - o Selling food to the school (10%)
 - o Other/unsure (20%)
- 90% of respondents reported increases in rent/land prices since the opening of INHS.
- When asked about the benefits of INHS, respondents gave the following answers (multiple answers permitted):
 - o Nearby education (including reduced transport costs, population increase, and attraction of trade) (85%)
 - o Education bursaries for lower-income students (15%)
 - o Support for local businesses (30%)
 - o Other (job opportunities, electricity supply, students cleaning the local area etc.)

Appendix B – Local Business Questionnaire: Results in Full

Sample: 14 local businesses

- What share of your customers are either staff or students of INHS?
 - o Most (22%)
 - o Many (43%)
 - o Some (28%)
 - o None (7%)
- How much has your business grown since the opening of INHS?
 - o A lot (29%)
 - o A little (64%)
 - o Not at all (7%)
- Would your business survive if INHS did not exist?

- Yes (43%)
- Yes, but it would operate at lower rates (50%)
- No (7%)

Appendix C – Student Survey: Results in Full

Sample: 40 students aged 14-20, 50/50 split between boys and girls.

- How far do you live from INHS (in time)?
 - 2 hours or less (30%)
 - 2-3 hours (25%)
 - 3-6 hours (20%)
 - 6 hours + (25%)
 - Unsure (5%)
- 10% of interviewed students report that they would not be in education if they were unable to attend INHS.
- 15% claim that they would still be in education if they were unable to attend INHS, but their education quality would be lower.
- Why do you attend INHS? (Multiple answers permitted)
 - Quality of education (50%)
 - Location (15%)
 - Bursary/scholarship (40%)
 - Humanist values (15%)
 - Other (15%)
- Career aspirations:
 - Surgeon/Doctor (50%)
 - Engineer (15%)
 - Nurse (10%)
 - Business Owner (10%)
 - Other (15%)
- 95% of students believe that their chances of achieving their career aspirations are improved because they attend INHS.
- What, in your opinion, is the best thing(s) about the school (multiple answers permitted):
 - Quality of teaching/facilities (30%)
 - Teachers (40%)
 - Extra-curriculum activities (20%)
 - Location (10%)
 - Other (10%)
- What would you change about INHS?
 - More extra-curriculum activities (15%)
 - Food (15%)

- Transport (10%)
- Buildings/Facilities (15%)
- Modernise Teaching (15%)
- Nothing (15%)
- Other (30%)