



Uganda Humanist Schools Trust (UK)

Report on International Friendship Week Visit to the Mustard Seed School, Busota

Thursday 1st and Friday 2nd July 2010

Steve Hurd

Introduction

The Mustard Seed School was set up using money raised from readers of the *New Humanist* magazine, and donations channelled through the Rationalist Association were the main source of outside finance for the school up to 2009. From August 2010 money raised through the New Humanist will be channelled through Uganda Humanist Schools Trust to support all the Humanist schools in Uganda.

The visit to the school on this occasion was to take part in the schools' International Friendship Day programmes. This is where they invite international visitors to take part in educational activities with school staff and students. The programme reflects the interests and knowledge and skills of visitors and how they can contribute educationally to the school. The group of visitors from the UK included Steve and Hilary Hurd, Paul Gubbins, from South Cheshire and North Staffordshire Humanists, his daughter Jill and Andrew West, a final year photography degree student, who volunteers as the official photographer of the British Humanist Association.



Paul, Jill and Hilary at the Mustard Seed School and Andrew at the source of the Nile, Lake Victoria

International Friendship Programme

The International Friendship Days have a number of objectives. They give supporters of our charity an opportunity to visit the schools and take part in activities with the staff and students. The school welcome specialist talks, which open out into discussion and group work. There is also scope for practical activities such as sports, arts, crafts and music. The main objective is to allow students to interact with supporters from abroad and to give them an opportunity to hear and attune to English spoken by first language speakers. This gives the school students an opportunity to improve their own listening and speaking skills.

During this particular visit we organised activities that enabled students to learn about three interesting and important issues:

- “The recent Discovery of Oil in Uganda: what difference will it make?”



- “The Power of the Press: how to write a newspaper article”



- “Mosquitoes and Malaria – causes, symptoms and prevention”



On the second day the Mustard Seed students organised a formal debate on the motion “*The discovery of oil in Uganda will be more of an advantage than a disadvantage.*” The school has a strong debating tradition and this showed in effective organisation and the quality of presentations given by proposers, opposers, seconders and the school audience. The debate pitched the boys against the girls, which ensured an equal contribution from each group. As visitors we saw marked improvements in vocabulary and growing confidence in public speaking. There is strong evidence that the textbooks UHST has provided to the school are beginning to make a positive contribution to improving general standards of English.



The students are a delight to work with. When activities go well the joy is evident in the students’ faces and they are very generous in showing appreciation. General morale among the students was high and they supported each other. We all feel that the school is developing into an effective learning community.

The classroom sessions were broken up with some fun activities. We took along and projected the Walt Disney “*Jungle Book*” Film, which the students were completely engrossed in until the electricity failed – a reminder of the problems that schools in Uganda have to face all the time.

Jungle book film being projected



We were treated to a drumming, singing and dancing show presented by the students.



We also had an opportunity to talk with individual students and to see the football team show off the new Stoke City strip, which we brought out with us (courtesy of Stoke City FC).



Our visit ended on the second day with a tour of the local area, where we saw the local small farms, a goat being butchered, local women queuing at the water pump, coffee bushes in flower and coffee beans being dried, the village shop and student homes (where we met the families of two students).



Progress since the visit in March 2010

1. At the start of the year the Mustard Seed was formally constituted as a “Not for Profit” Company (i.e. a charity), with a constitution that ensures that the land and assets will be used for Humanist schooling in perpetuity. The new Board has one outside member nominated by IHEU (The International Humanist and Ethical Union). This is Caspar Melville, editor of *New Humanist*, who was instrumental in the school being set up in the first place.
2. Once charity status was confirmed IHEU’s International Trust awarded the school £4,760 to purchase the main block of land on which the school buildings stand. This helps to secure the future of the school.

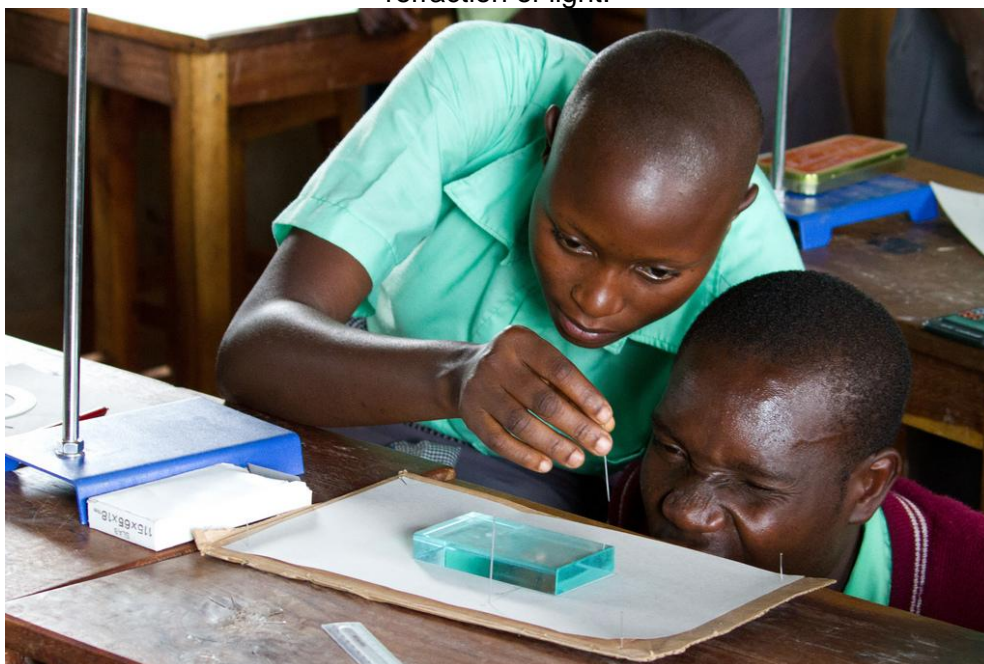
There remains, however, one other contiguous block of land that the school rents and which contains two buildings with 6 small rooms where they accommodate two teachers, 6 boy students, 6 girl students, the school’s book store and lending library, and two store rooms. The owner has offered the land and buildings for sale (asking for a sum in the region of £13,000). He has indicated that the rental arrangement must end. If they lose this land and the two buildings it will pose major problems for the school, so they are looking for the Humanist donor community to help them raise this money. Below is one of the two rented buildings and the boys’ sleeping room.



3. During 2010 UHST supporters have provided scholarships for 10 students (£1200). This amount is equivalent to 80% of the funds they raise from fee paying students, so it is very important in meeting the school running costs (principally salaries). Below are three new scholarship holders...



4. UHST sent £500 to open an account for Mustard Seed school with a science supply company in Kampala. This has enabled the school to choose the equipment they need most urgently, such as retort stands, test tubes, chemicals and prisms. During our visit we saw Physics students using prisms and pins for experiments on the refraction of light.



5. Our charity also added £1200 to the Mustard Seed's bookshop account, which has enabled them to buy a textbook for every student in Senior 4, in their final year before taking O-level examinations. When we visited the school in March and July it is evident that lessons in the school are making effective use of the textbooks, which are greatly improving the quality of learning and increasing private study time outside classes.



6. The school has made further progress with its new building (below), which will house a science lab and library/information technology room. Moses Kanya, the school manager, took out a bank loan for this building on his own initiative after being told by the local school inspector that the school would be closed if they could not provide these facilities. Moses accepts that agreeing to proceed with the loan was an act of desperation and he is very worried that the school will not be able to keep up the monthly payments. They are hoping that some international donor will be able to help them. However, at the moment, the cost, in the order of £15,000, is beyond the resources of UHST.

