

Anne is busy sorting out a library for the school and getting a system running. We have a lot of books; she has sorted out about 400 so far and has more to do, but no proper system for the children to take out books. Hopefully that this will be up and running by next term.

The School open day was held on Wednesday 6th March 2013 some of the sponsors have written their views on it:

Sue Freeman

It's six years since my first visit to the Don McMath foundation school. I already felt that I knew it well, as my husband Richard had made his first visit there the previous year. He and his friend Roger Bruton had both taken part in the Plymouth Banjul rally, where they met Luke McMath, Natalie Sole and their friend Paul Nayton. (The idea is to drive a car from the UK to The Gambia then to sell it at auction to raise money for Gambian charities. However some of the charities involved did not seem all that impressive.) Luke and co had already arranged to donate their car to the school. They took Richard and Roger along to have a look and they were so impressed, that the following year Richard decided to drive over independently with another car which he gave to the school to sell. He took masses of photos and video, so by the time I arrived it all seemed quite familiar to me. We became sponsors that year and have become frequent visitors to the Gambia and the school. During this time we have seen many changes to the school, a second classroom block was opened that November and the school has grown in numbers and stature ever since. At this year's open day we were shown round by two charming pupils one who told me that she intends to become an accountant, and I am sure she will! They showed us round all the classrooms, the children were all working hard, but stopped to greet and welcome us. Their behaviour was impeccable and they all seemed really keen to learn. (There is some lovely new furniture in the Nursery block.) We were particularly impressed by the vegetable garden where the year 9 children grow lots of good things which are then sold to add to the school funds.



As always the highlight for me was when the children sang for us. Particularly when they sang 'Something Inside So Strong' (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dnoMIHhIMwI&>) I always have to put on my sunglasses to hide my tears, although glancing round I saw a few grown men with tears in their eyes! It really is a very humbling experience. I cannot praise the work that Anne and all her staff are doing too highly. It only costs sixty pounds a year to sponsor a child and the rewards are amazing. Keep up the good work.

Cath and Alan King:

Wednesday 6th March 2013 we were lucky enough to be able to visit the school on an Open Day. Having driven down a dusty bumpy road with no pavements our taxi pulled up alongside a rather dark uninviting wall. Through a small gateway we were warmly greeted by Anne McMath and a number of smartly dressed, smiling pupils who had the task of acting as our guides around the school.

Two 15 year old very proud and enthusiastic young ladies proceeded to take us class by class around the school. In each class we were warmly greeted by children and staff alike, with the kids immediately standing and remaining stood until we asked them to sit (how humble we felt!). We viewed some of the work being done and what stood out was how neat & tidy their handwriting was, how proud they were of their school, how keen they were to learn and how smart they all were in their uniforms.

We were then entertained firstly by the lower school singing to us, then the upper school - an experience that really pulled on the heart strings!

in all we were thoroughly impressed by the discipline, cleanliness, enthusiasm and quality of work that we saw during our visit. As new sponsors we had the opportunity to see how well the money is spent.

Hazel and David Hanley:

David and I went to The Gambia for the 10th anniversary of the opening of the school. So not to disrupt the children's lessons too much, there was an Open Day. We were shown around by two 15 year old pupils who wanted to be a surgeon and a businessman.

We were at the first official opening in 2005 so we were amazed to see all the changes; the three new buildings, classrooms, hall, science room, vegetable patch and football pitch (which has the unusual feature of a large tree in the middle of it!). As we went in to each of the classrooms the children all stood and said "good morning sponsors". We looked at some of their work (their writing was much neater than mine, even Hamsa's who writes with his foot) and we asked some what they want to be when they leave school. They all answered straight away; doctors, teachers, lawyers, a pilot, the Minister for Education and even the President! Their English is very good. Several classes came out in to the yard and sang to us in English which was very moving.

The school has 30 places available from September and over 150 applicants. Anne goes to every child's home to check that they live at the address given, and that the family is poor enough not to be able to afford to pay for the child to go to school. David and I went with Anne and Sisawo to see some of the children. While Anne was taking photos of the children and Sisawo was telling the parents to come to the school in April to see if their child had been accepted, we had a few moments to take in the scene, and it was a real eye-opener. The compounds are very basic and crowded, usually with several families living there, but everybody was very welcoming and smiling and excited to see us. They appreciate what the child getting in to the school means for the whole family.



All



Thanks are due to the 2nd Verwood Beavers, Cubs and Scouts for their fund raising. Mick and Judy were impressed with their efforts and were presented with a cheque at a ceremony in February. As a result of running several events they raised £857 and are now sponsoring 5 children.

Thanks also to one of our young supporters, Daisy Mather, who ran in the Bath Half Marathon on March 3rd



to raise money for the school. Daisy managed to run it in 2 hours which sounds pretty good to me. She has raised over £200 but you can still sponsor her at <http://uk.virginmoneygiving.com/DaisyMather>.



Hamsa's new wheelchair

Thank you to Suzanne York who brought some small gifts for Grade 3 and has paid for Ous (our administrator) to do the Association of Accounting Technicians Level 1 course which he starts next term. The fees are over £200. She has also given Hamsa a wireless remote control car, to help him strengthen his hands. He has a little bit of movement in his fingers. It has rechargeable batteries, which we can charge at school as he doesn't have electricity at home. Hamsa also has a new lightweight wheelchair given to him by Julia Manneh.

Well done to Fatomata Sankano and Fatou Badjie for winning the Graham Grierson awards for top student and runner up for 2012.



Fatomata Sankano and Fatou Badjie
Top Student and Runner up 2012



A pat on the back for the school, came from Waec (the exam board). At a meeting there one of the examiners asked if anyone knew anything about our school, because his son is friends with one of our children and had got hold of one of our exams . He said that the exam paper was excellent, because it did not just test the children's knowledge, but also their understanding. At which the practical art assessor said that she had been so impressed when she did the assessment, she asked the head to keep the work until after the exams, incase anyone wanted to challenge her marks!!!!!!



The brother of one of our sponsors has painted an original picture for us to sell to raise funds for the school. It's a Gambian river scene and has been painted by Robert Smith. It's a beautiful picture and brings back memories of a trip up the river Gambia. If anyone is interested in buying it please get in touch with Mick.

Thanks to the new sponsors who have signed up over the last few months we always need more! We had another 33 children starting in September 2012 as the new intake in the Nursery 1 class and so far we only have sponsors for 24 of them. Please pass this on to anyone you think might like to sponsor a child, as Anne has mentioned in the past "£5 a month is only the cost of a bottle of wine!"

Please note the website address: www.donmcmath.org and the email address: info@donmcmath.org. You can also reach Anne and Mick via: anne@donmcmath.org and mick@donmcmath.org.

If anyone who currently receives this newsletter through the post is now on email could you please email us at the above email address so we can email you future newsletters as this will cut down considerably on our costs.

Thank you all for your support.

Dates for your diaries: Spring Term: 7th January - 27th March, Summer Term: 11th April - 19th July, Winter Term: 17th September to 20th December.

The Verwood Garden party will be held on Sunday Verwood 11th August at Mick & Judy's house in Manor Road Verwood. The date and format of the Bexhill Garden Party has yet to be decided.