

# Don McMath Foundation

## Newsletter

[www.donmcmath.org](http://www.donmcmath.org)

[info@donmcmath.org](mailto:info@donmcmath.org)

The Don McMath Foundation Newsletter – 14<sup>th</sup> December 2006

Hello All

Anne arrived back in Gambia on the 17th November and hit the ground running. The first job to organise was the repairs to the school. The girl's toilets had been closed (again) as they kept flooding. Most of the children here are used to hole in the ground toilets and though we teach them how to use European toilets they need constant repairs. She also had the electricians checked and repairs done to two of the fans.

Anne has had four teachers' desks made, so now all the teachers have a proper desk each.

One of the expenses she had not expected was for new textbooks for Primary 1 and 2. The Education Department have revised the school syllabus and re-written the textbooks, so we had to buy new ones. Anne has been assured that they won't be doing it again for five years, but this being Africa, it probably means ten years.



Anne also had to sort out registration. She registered the children for September earlier in the year, but there are always some who do not turn up, usually because they have left the area. It means we then have to locate the children on the waiting list to fill up the vacant places.

When Anne was here last we had built the new school block to ceiling height and now have re-commenced work. The latest news is, more bricks have been made, the gables have been erected, the iron roof structure has been made and put in place. Also the wooden beams to hold the corrugated roof have been fixed and the corrugated has just gone on. The metal doors have been made and are in place; the windows have been collected and are awaiting installation.

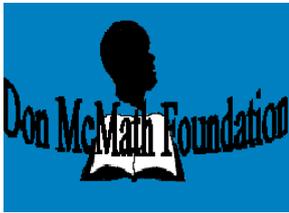
The new cesspit has been dug, all 3 metres of it by hand and they are making the supporting pillars from iron rods. These will be put in a mould and then concrete poured in. After this they then brick the rest of the pit into two chambers and a lid is put on.

Once the windows in, we can start plastering the walls. The ceilings are going in at the moment & they have started to plaster the classrooms. The first fittings have been done for electricity & plumbing. It will probably take the best part of a week to finish the ceilings & plastering.

School breaks up on Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> December, as Friday is a public holiday, due to the Presidents Swearing In. We are having the children's party on Thursday and Anne has managed to give them all a present (and wrap them).

We are not sure if at the moment we can afford to finish the building, as some of the materials, such as wood, cement and electrical wiring have shot up in price (all imported), but we will make every effort. Anne spends a lot of her time in The Gambia going from place to place, getting the best price for materials.

Hopefully in the next newsletter we will have photos of the completed building.



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We have just sent out the school reports for the last school year. Any sponsors with children who have just finished Nursery 2 or higher should have received their reports by now. Children in Nursery 1 don't get a report as most of their time in the first class is spent learning English. Anyone who has not received a copy of their children's report should get in touch with Mick.

We are looking forward to welcoming Liz Davis from New Zealand who is coming to the school in January for two or three months to teach and to assist the teachers wherever she can, Liz has been teaching for several years. Liz has written "Kiaora! My name is Liz Davies, I am 27 years old and I am really looking forward to the opportunity to visit your school in The Gambia. I completed my primary teacher training in July 2003 and have worked with children ranging in age from 5 years to 13 years. I love music, play the flute and have taken choirs and assembly singing. I am also a Brownie leader and trainer with Guides New Zealand having taught computer and guiding skills to girls and leaders. I love to travel, having spent a year based in the UK, and was selected to represent New Zealand on an international service project in Fiji this year. I hope to share my unique 'Kiwi' culture with the children in The Gambia and help the teachers to deliver effective teaching and learning programmes. Thanks you!"

Thanks to one of our sponsors Harvey Cole we now have the basis of a good library of reading books for the oldest children at the school, it's taken over a year to arrange transport but we finally made it last week, thanks to Mae Winterton of Schools for Gambia for her help.

We thought that you would be interested in this article from the Gambian presidential elections held earlier this year that should give you another view of the Gambia.



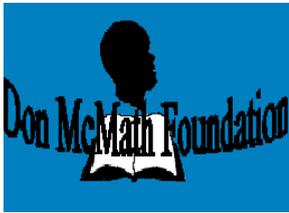
Gambians are voting for their president with a unique marble system. Voters enter a booth and pop a clear glass marble into one of three drums representing the candidates, instead of a putting a ballot paper into a box. As the marble falls into the drum, it hits a bell so officials can tell if anyone votes more than once. "It's a unique system introduced in 1965 because of Gambia's high illiteracy," Gambia's chief electoral officer Kawsu Ceesay told the BBC. The bell resembles a bicycle bell so bicycles are banned from around polling stations to avoid any confusion. "Three drums representing the three presidential candidates will be in the compartment attached to one another so they can't be lifted to see which is heavier," he says. The system also makes the counting process much more transparent said chief electoral officer Kawsu Ceesay "The drums are painted in the colour of the candidate's party and have their photograph and party symbol." Incumbent President Yahya Jammeh's drum is

green and his rivals Ousainou Darboe and Halifa Sallah are yellow and grey respectively. Sand or sawdust is also put into the bottom of the drum before it is inspected by party agents and shut with numbered seals so that a second sound is not heard. Afterwards voters have their finger dipped in indelible ink. Marbles have to be posted through a pipe at the top of the drum and those left on top are regarded as spoilt ballots. "The system also makes the counting process much more transparent," Mr. Ceesay says. The marbles are placed into trays with either 200 or 500 holes - similar to a solitaire board - which makes it easy for officials to verify numbers.

We would like to wish everyone the compliments of the season and hope that you all have a happy Christmas. Anne will be home at the end of January for a couple of weeks.

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.

Anne, Judy and Mick McMath



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