

The Don McMath Foundation Newsletter – 22nd December 2010
The Don McMath Foundation



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Hi All

First of all we would like to extend our thanks to Steve Gotting of CMI Trading (UK) Ltd for shipping out equipment for the school, his services have proved invaluable to us and have enabled us to equip a lot of the



new Upper Basic school. Dorothy Webster is a teacher from Scotland, who comes each year to teach in the school. She came this November for three weeks and the teachers always find her a great asset, as she introduces them to teaching methods that they are not aware of. Many thanks for all your help Dorothy.



Thanks to Helen Wray and Sue Smith who donated all the science gear, Helen also came and gave a talk to Grade 7 and their science teacher about safety in the lab. She got them to do a risk assessment. She also helped the teacher to identify some of the equipment he was unsure of. Thanks also to Geoff Buckingham who has donated a set of five a side goal posts and some football kit to the school, this will prove to be very popular with the children.

Special thanks also to Mary Dymore-Brown who is continually introducing new sponsors to us. Mary works at Coco Ocean resort in The Gambia, one of the best Gambian hotels if you want a touch of luxury. One of the people introduced to us by Mary is the broadcaster and ex-footballer Mark Bright. Mark is now a sponsor and has promised to help us find more.

Unfortunately we have some tragic news to pass on in this newsletter. One of the boys in Primary 2 has recently died. He was at school on the Monday and by all accounts was his normal self. After he went home he told his mother he was unwell and she took him to hospital where he died 5 hours later of chronic malaria. Although malaria is the biggest cause of death for children in The Gambia this is the first time that it has happened to any of our children since the school opened in 2003. Everyone at the school is devastated by this and the school closed for the day on as a mark of respect.

The school from a sponsors point of view:

Visit to The Don McMath Foundation School October 2010 By Brian and Marysia Keaveny



We had booked an Autumn/Winter holiday break in The Gambia from 8th – 18th October and a friend who has been sponsoring a couple of children at The Don McMath Foundation School made us aware that the school was not too far from our hotel and we might enjoy a visit. We contacted Mick McMath and it was obvious that a visit by us would be most welcome. We are both retired teachers with a spread of experience. I was a Secondary Head teacher (18

years) Assistant Director of Schools for a Diocese and Senior Lecturer at Canterbury Christ Church University College and my wife was an experienced Primary teacher with responsibility for Environmental Science and Special Needs.

We did emphasise that our visit was to be supportive and fact finding and certainly not inspectorial/judgmental. We were collected on Tuesday 12th October at our Hotel by Sisawo Conteh (School Transport Manager) in his 'Cuban Merc'. After a 15 minutes drive on some challenging roads/tracks (not made any easier by the very heavy rainfall during the summer months) we reached an impressive enclosed brick built site within which were a well constructed and clean set of three buildings – The School buildings. All was quiet with nobody to be seen. We were introduced to Mr Dembajang, the Headmaster. He made us most welcome and gave us a short history of the school and a trip around the office/admin area and stock room. We also met the school administrator, Ousman Sawo. We then embarked on what can only be described as a 'magical tour'.

We visited each classroom and were so impressed with the calm but vibrant atmosphere in each class (we noticed some very exciting and colourful notice board displays). The teachers were so 'open' and welcoming and the children were all calm and polite and so pleased to meet us with exciting eyes and desperate to sing to us and show off their work, which was of a high standard.

On our trip round the classrooms I really enjoyed having 'Maths Fun' with the pupils, seeing nothing but a positive response to all learning activities. Then we entered a classroom of 9/10 year olds – everybody stood up except one boy with his feet on his desk looking a little glum – I thought we had at last met somebody with 'attitude' but NO he stood up slowly and displayed a broken body: no hands, deformed legs and able to write with his toes "GOSH". We then saw the work he (Hamsa Jallow) was undertaking – he was an absolute credit to himself, the teachers and the whole school community. When my wife asked him what he wanted to do when he left school, he replied confidently "I am going to be a Doctor". A great lad who I met on my return visit.



During the rest of our tour we were royally treated to rote learning exercise, phonic exercises, maths tables routines, PE and a most professional mini drama production by the oldest pupils. On the class blackboard there were notes from a previous lesson on a serious debate on the topics of Aids and Malaria. Throughout our tour all pupils were very calm and respectful of each other and the teachers. They were a great credit to all involved at The McMath Foundation.

On returning to the Hotel, we remembered and talked about our exciting and humbling experiences to other guests. Our memories include: a caring and welcoming atmosphere, warm relationships, ambitious young people, vibrant and exciting classrooms, enthusiastic teachers with great pride in what has been achieved and young people having fun learning.

I made a return visit on Friday morning to bid my farewell (my wife stayed at the Hotel with a tummy bug). It was Break time. Football was being played with a variety of footballs – leather, stones rolled up in paper and small rubber balls. Each child playing in different kit: no shoes, big boots, old trainers, old exercise books as shin pads and the occasional football shirt. The girls were running round as if training for the Olympic 100 metres, playing tag with each other and the school dog! Many others just sitting around waiting for the hand bell to be rung (by the head girl). The young disabled boy I had met earlier in the week, was able to demonstrate his great skill in being chased in his wheelchair at break neck speed all around the compound. He and his mates were having a great time together.



The Bell. All the children quickly formed lines – separate Junior and Primary. A very ordered and moving end to break time with all pupils singing and clapping and being extremely well managed by the teachers and finally marching into class in unison ready for the final session of the week.

Everybody thanked us for our visit but in reality it was a tremendous privilege and a humbling experience for both of us and we thank you for being allowed to spend time at such a happy, busy and inspirational school. Brian and Marysia

In May this year, two intrepid dads from Guildford are attempting the Coast to Coast walk to raise money for the school. The route, made famous by A Wainwright, is a walk from one side of England to the other - From St Bees Head on the Irish sea to Robin Hood Bay on the North sea with two thirds of the walk lying through the areas of three National Parks. Andy Davey decided to attempt this walk after coming home from visiting the school in The Gambia in April this year with a desire to do something to help raise money for the school. The walk is not an obvious choice for Andy as he has no walking experience and is well known for his slow stroll when out for a walk! We aim to arrange some shorter sponsored walks during the two week period with a 5 mile walk for the children on the last day...more details to follow.

Just to remind everyone that the opening ceremony for the new Upper Basic School will take place on Wednesday 9th February 2011. At the moment it seems that we might have quite a crowd there.

While we are there we will be taking the class photos for the 2010/2011 classes and will be sending them out to sponsors later in the month.

Other dates for 2011 are:

Verwood Garden Party - Sunday 3rd July

Bexhill Garden Party - Sunday 4th September.

The Charity Clay Pigeon Shoot at Verwood will be on the 31st July.

Mick and Judy will have a stall at the Verwood Rustic Fayre on Bank Holiday Monday 29th August

Although we have managed to get more sponsors over the last few months we still need more. 30 children started in September as the new intake in the Nursery 1 class. 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.

Happy Christmas to all our sponsors
Anne, Judy and Mick McMath
December 2010