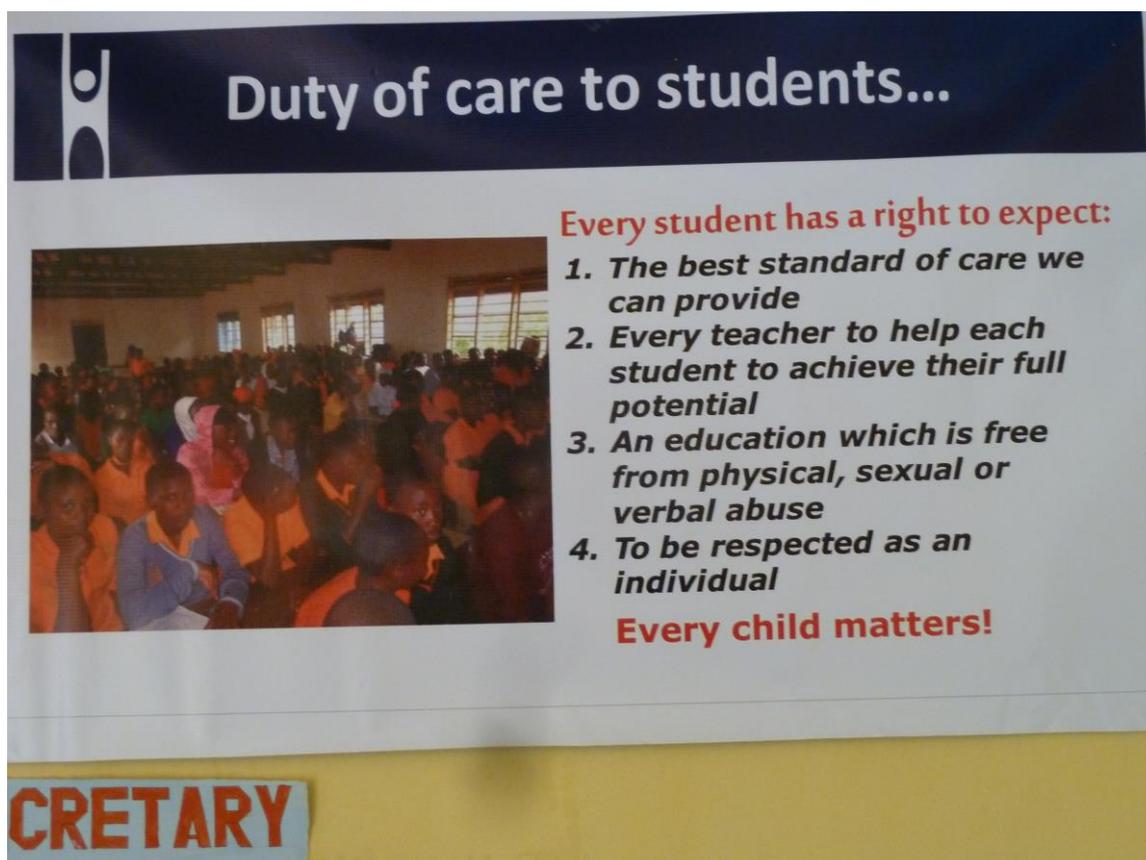




Uganda Humanist Schools Trust

## Mustard Seed School, Busota, Kamuli February, 2016



The above wall poster greets visitors to the school in the Secretary's Office

### *Encouraging Start to the School Year*

I arrived at Mustard School on Friday 29<sup>th</sup> January, which happened to be the day that national O-level examination results were published. There was an air of hopeful anticipation among senior staff at the school as they awaited news from Awali, the Deputy Headteacher, who travelled down to the UNEB offices in Kampala to pick up the results sheets. Unfortunately so many schools sent representatives to the UNEB offices that the

officials had been forced to turn them away and ask for results to be downloaded from the Examination Board website. This brought a rush to Kamuli town, the nearest place with an Internet café, 10 km away. Moses returned with the triumphant news of by far their best results ever.

At O-level, the Board gives individual subject grades but the all-important result is the aggregate over 7 subjects, which must include Maths, Sciences and English at pass level or

better. Less than 6 per cent of students in the whole country gains an aggregate Division 1, and this is rare indeed in impoverished rural areas. However, the school triumphed with 7 students attaining Division 1 (over 12 % of Mustard Seed students). The school's best performance ever. The nearest school with even a single grade 1 is 10km away from Mustard Seed, so the school has become the best performing school in a wide area - which should help with recruitment in 2016. The number of students at each level in 2015 was:

Division 1	7
Division 2	9
Division 3	15
Division 4	24
Division 9 (Fail)	2

These results would bring credit to an urban school. Only two students failed to gain an overall pass. These two only joined the school in Senior 4 after being educated in a very poor school for their first three years, and they did not have time to rise to the standard required.



"New Vision", the official government-supporting newspaper, published a ranked list of the top 1,800 schools in the whole country, based upon the percentage of students gaining a Division 1 and Mustard Seed came 462<sup>nd</sup> in this list. Furthermore, in the vast Kamuli District, where the school is located, Mustard Seed School came 5<sup>th</sup> out of 40 schools.

Another list, in the independent "Daily Monitor" newspaper, ranked schools on the basis of the average grade gained across all students in each school, so taking account of those students gaining weaker results. In this list Mustard Seed School came in the top

1,000 schools in the country, ranking 963 overall. The very fact of making it into this list was a huge achievement. It follows that the staff and students at Mustard Seed are delighted.

Reporters from local newspapers and radio descended on the school to interview Moses in order to find out the reasons for the school's success. Very diplomatically Moses praised the parents of the area on producing such bright and hard-working students. He also praised his teachers for working hard on behalf of the students. He picked out the good facilities, which the school has to offer and, particularly, the large stock of textbooks and computers meant that students had access to up-to-date information to help with their studies.

Talking to Moses afterwards, he explained a number of factors in more detail. Four years ago he started to direct scholarships from UHST supporters to students who had gained grade 1 in their primary leaving certificate and, from this group, he accepted those in the greatest social need. He says this group of students have been exemplary in their behaviour and diligence and they have, by their presence, provided a model, which has helped to raise the aspirations of fellow students. In fact all but two of the students who gained a Division 1 were in the group of bright but needy students recruited four years ago on scholarships provided by UHST supporters. The results profile of the UHST scholarship holders was:

Division 1	5 students
Division 2	5
Division 3	3
Division 4	1

The student who gained the division 4 was the girl who successfully led the Mustard Seed scouts in winning the District Scouting Competition and going on to represent Uganda in the East African Competition in Kigali Rwanda last December. I have met her

several times and she is a bright, eloquent young lady who will probably go far despite her disappointing O-level performance.

Moses feels that his policy of recruiting young teachers who are still in their training has paid off. He has taken second year education degree students who are keen and energetic and, importantly, who are willing to work for quite low pay in order to work their way through university. He gave them additional financial allowances to help them with their fees. They have been learning and improving on the job and many have stayed on at school after gaining their Bachelors in Education. Their loyalty to the school and increasing competence has done much to improve the standard of education and student outcomes.

A subsidiary factor, which may have also had some small effect, is that the school introduced a performance bonus, which the teachers were told about at the start of the year. The teacher or teachers sharing a particular class were told they would benefit financially if their students performed well – according to the following scale.

Distinction	10,000
Credit	8,000
Pass	5,000

The figures are in Uganda shillings (10,000 is just over £2) and they apply to every student in the class. The senior 4 class had 57 students – all 57 took the core subjects, but the optional subjects were smaller groups. On the basis of the current results the school plans to continue the bonus experiment in future.

### **Results by subject**

Although the O-level results, as a whole, were exemplary, when analysed by subject the results are patchy. There was a good overall profile of results in the core subjects of English and Maths, which are still very important in the formal employment sector in Uganda and for progressing onto further courses. The best results were obtained in

History, in which Moses Kamya himself shares in the teaching. There was also a fair overall performance in Geography, Agriculture and Commerce. The smaller number of students who did options in Entrepreneurship and Computer Studies performed poorly. These are both new subjects in the curriculum and little training has been provided for teachers.

Moses is disappointed by performance in the sciences: physics, chemistry and biology. There is a national shortage of teachers in these subjects and with the low pay he has been able to offer and the poor, rural location he has had to rely upon whichever teachers come forward in the area. All his science teachers are part-time and work in other schools. It is very difficult to expect huge commitment despite paying them at a slightly higher rate than other teachers.

Without teachers to advocate for science there have been insufficient efforts to ensure that science equipment is looked after and that science practical work is conducted on a regular basis. Although two rooms are identified as science labs, there is little dedicated furniture or equipment. This poses a major problem in that practical work is a significant component of the science examinations and a low grade in the practical paper can seriously depress overall grades. The science textbook stock is also inadequate.

Moses has ideas for improving the situation in the coming year. He is determined to rectify the book and equipment shortfall and we discussed the possibility of providing an in-service course for his science teachers. Peter Kisirinya, the Director of Isaac Newton School, is a national examiner in Chemistry and he has offered to bring along a team of examiners representing all the sciences to talk to teachers and help them improve the way they prepare students for science examinations. I made it very clear that UHST is keen to support financially the school's efforts and we would be prepared to find a decent salary for a well-qualified head of department and for a technician if he could find people suitable.

### Students and Teachers

The school had 360 students at the end of 2015. They also hosted 15 A-level students from Isaac Newton High School, who moved to the school to take their examinations. This was to take advantage of Mustard Seed Schools A-level Examination Centre status. Recruitment is already in progress for 2016, which starts later than usual on 22<sup>nd</sup> February, to allow for the participation of older 6<sup>th</sup> form students in the Presidential and national elections.

During 2015 Mustard Seed School increased their number of teachers by 3. So, by the end of the year, they had 8 full-time members of staff and 14 part-time teachers.

### Infrastructure

The new school clinic (below) was getting its finishing touches. The building has four rooms: one where a school nurse will sleep; a room where sick students can be cared for and sleep if necessary; a dispensary and treatment room; and a room with a flush toilet (shown right), shower and washbasin. The water supply comes from an overhead tank in the school courtyard and the wastewater is piped into the sump of the Blair toilets. At the time of my visit the school was actively trying to find a suitably experienced person to take up the position of school nurse in time for the start of term.



The school playing field is now in use. Grass cover is patchy in places and they are waiting for the rains to come so that more grass can be planted. They are using a variety of grass that spreads horizontally, and it is giving a remarkably quick cover to the bare ground.

The first use of the playing field, which has an adjacent water pump, was to host the district scout camp. Over 200 scouts from 10 primary and secondary schools in the District camped on the field and undertook various scouting activities and competitions over a period of a full week in July, 2015. The event received a lot of local publicity and the local M.P. and District Commissioner visited to extend a welcome. Hosting such a prestigious event was a feather in the cap for all involved from Mustard Seed School.



Unfortunately, the attempt to bring water storage to the new upper school site faced a setback when the new underground water tank sprung a leak. There was a material failure in the concrete and a large crack developed in the sidewall.

During my visit a second contractor was working hard to repair and strengthen the tank. This work was nearing completion (picture below).



there are wardens on site, Moses would like to have more staff around in the evenings and at weekends to interact with the students outside formal school time.



In order to reduce the problem of dust in the computer room a wooden ceiling has been fitted and the floor covered in patterned linoleum so it can be wiped down easily. They were waiting for an electrician to come and refit the computers and tidy up the cabling by trunking it around the walls.



One senior teacher lives on the school site. During term time, the teachers, who act as wardens of the girls and boys' hostels, sleep in the purpose built wardens' rooms in the hostels. From February 2016 the school nurse will also have a room in the school clinic where she can stay. A number of other teachers, including the Headteacher, rent within nearby Busota, the adjoining village and trading estate. It is clear that, over time, people in the area are beginning to see an economic opportunity by offering digs or rented accommodation to teachers. There are also some buildings on recently acquired school land that could be purchased and upgraded to provide some on-site accommodation, which would be attractive to single teachers. The school is seeking funds to buy these buildings and to meet the costs of necessary refurbishment.

Masonry on the library and science lab building is being repaired – see picture above right.

### **Staff Housing**

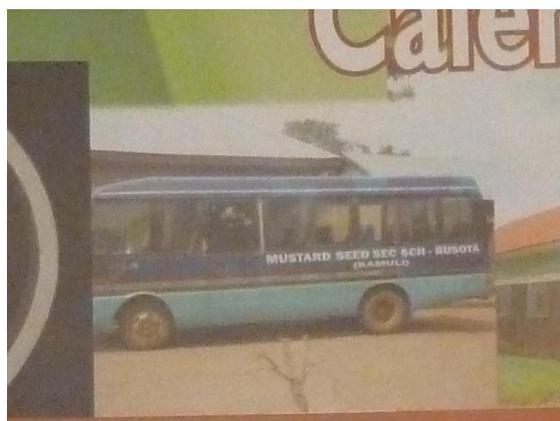
A difficulty the school faces is a shortage of staff housing in the vicinity of the school. The school is a long way from large population centres where potential staff members are likely to live and the travel distance and time discourages teachers from responding to job vacancies. The number of students staying in boarding hostel has grown and, although

### ***The story of the invisible school bus***

Students in Uganda travel out from schools a lot. Fieldwork is mandated in many subjects. In Geography, Chemistry and Biology specific fieldwork tasks are expected and, within the examination, students are required to describe fieldwork they have carried out on a particular theme from the syllabus.

Schools sports are also important. There is a national sports policy in place in Uganda and the Ministry of Education is now the Ministry

of Education and Sports. All Districts have active leagues and knockout competitions in boys and girls' football, netball, volleyball and there is a growing interest in athletics. There are also active inter-school debating competitions as well as links between schools for scouting and co-curricular activities, such as music and drama. Many schools now seem to have their own bus and it is increasingly expected of all schools. However, school buses are expensive to buy and to maintain and there are safety issues to consider, especially if no professional driver is to hand.



Moses decided to go for a half way house. He had a Mustard Seed School Bus decal made, which he sticks to the side of any bus the school hires. This gives the impression to everyone that the school has the expected school bus and a picture of such a vehicle is displayed on the glossy, colourful school wall poster and calendar. Whenever anyone asks to see the school bus they are told that it is in for repair. Ingenious, eh!?

### **Governance**

At a recent AGM of the "Not-for-Profit" Company that runs Mustard Seed School Caspar Melville, former editor of New Humanist and a Trustee of UHST, was confirmed as a Director to represent UHST on the school board. With Caspar's help, some modifications were made to the articles so they meet the current needs of the school. The annual accounts were approved and the annual return to the registrar of companies outlining the new Directors and amendments to company articles is ready for submission.

A new long-term lease is being drawn up on the land, which will give the school security for many years to come.

### **Cash Flow Challenges During 2015**

Last year, problems arose from the large rise in student and staff numbers. You could call it "*problems of success*". As a fee-paying school, like almost all in Uganda, a sudden rapid growth in student numbers brings higher income but not enough to prevent the school getting into financial difficulties. When a school expands quickly, costs tend to increase faster than income.

UHST provided funds for the school to construct a hostel to accommodate 50 boys. However, anticipating the rise in recruitment, the school took out a loan to extend the building so that it could accommodate 96. More beds also had to be bought for the new students at a cost of £70 per double bunk. Throughout the school, more furniture was needed, especially desks and chairs and more money had to be spent on educational materials, consumables, school meals and additional teachers and support staff. At the same time, many of the students enrolled found it difficult to keep up with the school fee payments, so the level of arrears by the end of the year was high. This reflects the fact that the school is located in an area of substantial poverty.

In July UHST gave the school money to smarten up the site by repairing damaged plaster, painting and carrying out other essential maintenance work. Unfortunately, there was such a serious cash flow problem that we had to agree to this money being used to support general running costs and to pay teachers. There has been a consequent rush, in the weeks before the start of the new school year, to carry out all the essential maintenance work. This work is already putting pressure on the finances at the start of 2016.

The picture following shows painters at work on the school entrance.



### **Priorities for 2016**

During 2016 the school faces a number of priorities:

1. The growth of student numbers increases the need for books and resources of all kinds.
2. More resources for science in particular is needed – science books, laboratory furniture, equipment and chemicals. Also for a salary for a well-qualified Head of Science and a technician.
3. The school needs more computers with open office for teaching Computer Studies, which is now compulsory for many students at A-level.
4. The school needs additional cooking facilities and a canteen, where students can eat their meals.
5. At least one additional classroom and another hostel for accommodation.
6. They need money for staff development and to extend the Humanist Ethos training to parents and the local community.
7. With a larger student body and more boarding on site there needs to be more spending to support co-curricular and leisure activities, including sport, dance, music and drama.

In the short period of its existence, Mustard Seed School has made huge strides. From small, humble beginnings when it operated on a shoestring, the school should grow to more than 400 students in 2016. Managing and financing a phase of rapid growth toward a sustainable future is going to be a huge challenge for the school and its supporters.

If you feel you or your group would like to contribute to meeting any of these needs then please contact [stevhurd@uhst.org](mailto:stevhurd@uhst.org) (01782 750338).

Donation and standing order forms can be found at:

<http://www.ugandahumanistschoolstrust.org/donate/>