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# NEWS LETTER

## THE ACADEMIC YEAR – the ½ of it!

September 2019 heralded the start of a new academic year. The new intake in Nursery 1 settled quickly, the Nursery School had a full complement of qualified teachers, 1 part-time assistant and 1 teacher training at Gambian College. The Lower Basic School had 2 experienced teachers on courses but 2 temporary teachers were appointed to cover the days they were absent. These departments were stable and developing our established systems really well. By the end of Term 1 the Upper Basic School had recovered from some ongoing problems and a new team had been appointed to return it to a well-organised department.

**Abibatou Jawo, Head of Nursery:** I have a great satisfaction in my job this year because my staff and I worked hard to help the children achieve a great standard in phonics and the reading. Having meetings on Fridays with my staff was also a success this year. The pupils did extremely well, especially N3 and N4 in phonics. N3 have covered stage 1-5 sounding and blending 2 letter sounds to form a word. Only a few were struggling. N4 can blend 3 letter sounds and construct word on their own. A lot of progress has been achieved in Maths Targets, eg counting on from 0-20, counting back from 20-0, making number bonds 1-10, identifying shapes, colours and symbols. A lot of progress has been achieved in Oral English from N1 – to N4 identifying colours talking about their foods, vegetable, personal, action words, days of week, Months of the year. All the monthly topics have been covered and almost 85% achieved the expectation and 15% were struggling and progressing. The staff work very hard to raise the standard of their pupils and to achieve their targets. Due to Covid 19 pandemic a lot of contact hours were lost and the plans we had could not be put through.

## IMPACT OF COVID-19

Tony and Karen Di Marco (Trustees) had to cancel their visit to Farato on 17<sup>th</sup> March. Their 4 objectives were:

(1) to organise a refurbishment of the Nursery building (constructed in 2020) involving the removal of the solar panels to replace the roof. Bert Boxall was preparing to supervise this. We cannot hope to complete this in 2020 now and will have to postpone till at least April. Sadly Kebba Bah, the builder i/c, who has worked with us for years, died of a stroke last month, so we need time to find a new and equally trustworthy replacement.

(2) proceed with the plan to apply to the Gambian government for “subvention”, when the salaries of the teachers are paid by the Education Department.

Through email and WhatsApp chats with Moses, our Head teacher, we are proceeding with our application, together with statistics to show our exam and test achievements and breakdown of salary bills.

(3) complete the writing and training of Farato teachers for the reading Scheme and begin to share Gambian First Readers within our Cluster. We are able to carry on writing and editing the 20 books that are part of this individual reading scheme but we will not be able to meet with education ministers until 2021.

### Find out how you can support us on p.3.

(4) supervise the 14<sup>th</sup> team of pupils and teachers from Sir Roger Manwood’s (SRM) school. We had spent a lot of time meeting the team from SRM who had worked really hard for a year to raise thousands of pounds & plan lessons. A week before departure they had to cancel their school trip. We were all devastated. The future of school trips is now in question.

At first the virus had little effect in The Gambia. The first case flew in to the country the day before we were due to arrive. For months the figures slowly grew to 20. However, in the last month the picture has changed and currently the number of cases is over 3000 with 93 deaths. We fervently pray that the situation soon improves. Schools have been closed since March and the country is under lockdown until 21<sup>st</sup> September. The country has closed its borders so it is very difficult for us to imagine when we can next to out to work in the school.

## PADS FOR THE GAMBIA

For many girls in The Gambia, their monthly period means that they are not able to access the education that is their basic human right. SchoolGambia has been involved in helping girls to enjoy greater access to education. Originally a volunteer, Alice Kish, donated reusable sanitary pads to pupils and worked with local teachers, parents and nurses to provide an information and awareness programme. Last year the Paddock Wood U3A craft group made over 200 pads and created kits for the pupils and the school Mothers Group to make their own. This year, 2 UK students who had previously visited Yalding BCS with their Sir Roger Manwood's, decided to set up their own organisation based on the principles they had seen operating in Farato. They were booked to return to the school in March to expand their programme. Freya, Honey and Imi write: *Period poverty is something that should not be taken lightly. Many girls globally, unable to afford products and too embarrassed to ask, will miss events or school without help. It was not until our trip to the Gambia, where many families must prioritise food and shelter over period products, did I and many of my friends see the repercussions of a lack in period products.*

*Having seen the problem of period poverty first-hand in the Gambia, we decided to take action. We created padsforgambia, a non-profit campaign to spread awareness about the impacts of period poverty in both the Gambia and the UK. We sell handmade reusable pads on depop.com - inspired by SchoolGambia's efforts to empower girls in the Gambia to make their own. From this project, we hope to spread awareness about the consequences of period poverty and fight against the stigma that prevents people from reaching out when they are unable to manage their period sufficiently. Currently, most of our education is done via our Instagram page @padsforgambia.*

*The word "period" should not be making us squirm, but "period poverty" certainly should.*

## VOLUNTEER WORK



Pauline Fisher, a professional trumpet player and church organist for the Len Valley Benefice visited Farato in November 2019. Prior to her visit she raised considerable awareness, support and donations through talks and presentations. During the 2 weeks she stayed in the school, she helped the pupils in the Nursery school to read, recognise letters and sounds and she designed several creative projects with them and pupils in Grades 1 & 2. The highlight of the visit was the final assembly when the whole school sang the national anthem with Pauline playing her trumpet.



The Head of Plaxtol Primary School had planned to visit Farato but had to cancel her trip. However, the pupils raised over £200 for SchoolGambia and we have plans to work with the school in 2021. Year 1 pupils at Yalding Primary School (Kent!) have been enjoying lessons with SchoolGambia comparing village life and writing newsletters to each other.

## FUNDRAISING & EVENTS



**Art Exhibition** – POSTPONED until 16-18 April 2021. This huge event cannot succeed in a limited form BUT we are planning ahead. Please put the dates in your diary.


**Scones and Songs** – CANCELLED. This new event was very successful last year. We really hope that we can hold it in Spring 2021.

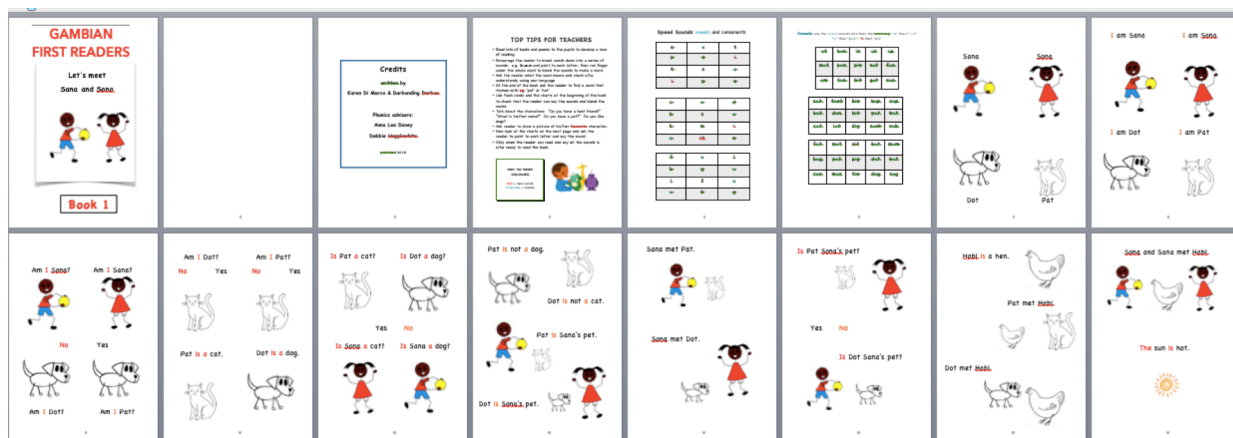
**SHOPPING ON LINE** – during lockdown many of us have discovered a risk free way to shop. SchoolGambia can benefit from this. PLEASE sign up for these effortless ways to raise funds:-

**EasyFundraising** – sign up and whenever you shop on line a % goes directly to the charity. [www.easyfundraising.org.uk/causes/schoolgambia](http://www.easyfundraising.org.uk/causes/schoolgambia). Please pass on the link to friends and relations.

**SmileAmazon.co.uk** – offset your Amazon footprint by using this scheme. Just go to this website and select SchoolGambia. We can raise over £10 pm per person through this method.

**Recycling printer cartridges** – SchoolGambia gains £1 for every cartridge (not inkjet) that is recycled, using [recycle4charity.co.uk](http://recycle4charity.co.uk). Contact us for envelopes. It is so easy!

**NEW IDEA!**  Currently (sorry about the pun) UK charities are having to find new ways to fundraise. SchoolGambia invite you to sponsor a page of **Gambian First Readers**. This set of 20 books, each with 20 pages, is being written especially for Yalding Basic Cycle School (YBCS) by 3 volunteers: 1 of our Trustees, 1 of our Gambian teachers and 1 young phonics specialist from Kent. We need funding to (1) publish the books in large quantities to sell to Gambian schools (2) train our teachers to become teacher trainers to their colleagues. Please go to <https://uk.virginmoneygiving.com/KarenDiMarco> to donate £1 per page towards this programme. Our school has proven to the Gambian government that when every pupil is taught to read independently, their chances of succeeding in education are significantly higher. We can be actively developing these books whilst schools remain closed.



## **REPORT FROM THE HEADTEACHER, MOSES DEMBA**

### **ACHIEVEMENT (PUPILS)**

First and foremost, all the successes achieved by the pupils/staff this year are due to the system put in place by the sponsors since when they took over the school in the year 2000. From chanting the alphabet and numbers by the pupils with the two teachers at the time, which is synonymous in public/Government schools (memorisation), putting things into practical; thus enabling the pupils to learn the concept on their own while the teachers serve as guides. This was possible, because the staff were conscientious, dedicated and hardworking. The spirit of team work inculcated into the staff helped a lot in the smooth running of the school by the administration.

#### **Now allow me to touch on few areas:**

1. The reading standard of the pupils have greatly improved, due to the reading scheme and the adherence of the staff to the rules and their commitment to make sure that the reading scheme works as planned (G1-6). Most pupils can read fluently and comprehend the text.
2. The pupils' performance in the monthly tests in the core subjects (G1-G6) (English, Maths, Science and SES) is highly satisfactory. See the analysed end of February test – Maths.
3. The pupils in Grade 3 now in Grade 4 performed well in the 2018/2019 National Assessment Test (NAT G3).

Most of them got mastery (80-100) in English; Maths and Integrated studies see the analysed results. Bringing Jamie Sumareh, an ex-pupil, on board to help the (ILP) Independent Learners Programme shows that in Yalding Lower Basic School each child is catered for despite their ability.

### **THE GENERAL RULES.**

In order to maximise time spent in class and to increase that time to focus upon the task set by the teacher, the pupils in G1-G6 are not allowed

to do the following; to write the date like this 18<sup>th</sup> August, 2020, but instead 18.08.20, Maths, English etc they are also not allowed to write, hence exercise books are provided for each subject. It also takes a lot of time for the pupils to write it. Doing the exercises given them is more important, extra work or challenge cards are provided for the intelligent pupils (differentiation). Pupils are catered for according to their ability these explanations show the system in place and how the school operates.

### **THE SATISFACTIONS I FOUND THIS YEAR.**

- ✓ introduction of the Gambian First Readers
- ✓ The staff adhering to the rules laid in using The Gambian First Readers
- ✓ The Academic Director, Karen Di Marco, conducts Staff trainings in English, Maths and Phonics on two days a week.
- ✓ The teacher in- charge of Phonics (Darbonding Darboe) going into classes to check whether teachers are on task, advice and help where necessary.
- ✓ The spirit of team was also very helpful and made the general operation of the school simple and easy.
- ✓ The staff adherent to the reading scheme rules.
- ✓ The sponsors' intervention in settling disputes and other issues that pose threat to the school development.

### **CHALLENGE(S) I FACED IN THE LAST YEAR.**

- ✓ Lateness of some staff and pupils.
- ✓ Few staff are weak in classroom control.
- ✓ The strike by UBS students; led by students who came to the school through the backdoor with the aid of a staff and refused to notify the Administration

**NAT\* Grade 3 results:** 90% girls & 60% Maths, 80% girls and 45% boys passed Integrated Studies.

\*National Attainment Tests taken by Grade 3 and Grade 5 in alternate years.