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ONE YEAR ON: SELF MANAGEMENT

For several years the Trustees of SchoolGambia have been in discussion with the Senior Management Team (SMT) of Yalding Basic Cycle School and the Board of Governors (BoG) of the school to make a plan to future-proof the school. The charity's objective has always been to support the school in becoming independent and self-sufficient. We have worked hard towards advising rather than micro-managing and increasingly this is succeeding.

It was agreed to apply to the Gambian Education Department for "subvention" - the government pay the teachers' salaries whilst the school runs itself independently. Our first try was turned down and that helped us to think again. None of the stakeholders want to lose the independence of using our own methods to ensure good results for all the pupils: small class sizes, weekly reading groups and extra 1-1 classes for those pupils needing more support. So the decision was made to increase fees and pay the teachers out of the income—become a Not-for-Profit enterprise. SchoolGambia provides bursaries for the families that genuinely cannot afford the fees and the parents have all been involved in discussions and information about the way forward.



Gambian First Readers: the reading scheme that has been written by us is being effectively taught by most of our teachers and the pupils are learning fast. We plan in March 2024 to publish and share it with other schools in the village and Cluster.

NEW LIBRARY OPENS! For several years, the school has had a small cupboard full of donated books that the older Primary pupils have been borrowing. Once we had found two teachers (Jamie and Alamin Drammeh) who were prepared to run a system efficiently, it worked well. But we needed to expand and increase the quantity of books as well as the number of people having access to reading them. Before Lockdown we had raised the money for a customised building but digging the foundations could only begin in November 2022. Weeks later, the walls, floor and ceiling were all in place. In March this year Tony (Trustee) returned to supervise the completion of the building and with the help of the Headteacher, Moses, Omar, our teacher in charge of the environment and the security officer, Ebrima, the bookshelves were up in a weekend, lighting and fans installed and the reading corner prepared. Alamin Drammeh has been appointed as full-time Librarian and he has all sorts of plans to run literacy classes for adults, host reading groups, hold poetry readings, and even a Scrabble Club.



APPEAL FOR MORE BOOKS—Please contact us if you have any spare novels (especially by African authors) suitable for adults and 13-15 year olds (no violence or aliens please!); or for younger children (7-12 years) but no TV series or films as not all our pupils will have access to these characters..

TEACHING TEAM

Since the charity started supporting this school in 2000 we have expanded from 2 unqualified teachers to 25 teachers. Most of our Nursery and Primary team (photo) have worked in the school for ten to twenty years. SchoolGambia has sponsored most of them on College and University courses and contributed full pay for six months of confinement leave. The team spend a lot of time together outside school hours and work with each other for school events and in the classroom. Moses, the Head Teacher for 13 years, often confirms, "we are a family."



Ida (in yellow in the middle) has worked in the Nursery ever since she left school and has developed into a very creative teacher. Her PE games are always innovative and enjoyable and she uses resources from the environment to teach maths and language. She has been promoted to the role of supporting her colleagues in these areas. Alamin Drammeh (red shirt in the front) teaches the pupils who need extra help and runs the new Library. Omar Juwareh (black T-shirt in the front) teaches Grade 6 but also is doing an excellent job at managing the environment, maintaining the water pump and building bookshelves in the library. Moses Demba, headteacher, (white cap at the back) has also been helping with bookshelves and Abibatou Jawo (white dress and blue head dress) is our Deputy Head and manager of the Nursery School. Jamie Sumareh (not in the picture) returns to work in the school in September as co-teacher with Alamin Drammeh. SchoolGambia have been sponsoring her to qualify as a Primary teacher. She was a pupil in the school when the charity started. Isatou Jallow (in red on far right) is our bursar and was also a pupil in the school at the very beginning.



WORKING WITH OTHER SCHOOLS

Some of the other Nursery Schools (for 3-7 year olds) in the village have formed an Association to share ideas and training. Trustee, Karen Di Marco, has worked with Nursery Head, Abibatou, to organise workshops and visits to the other schools with a view to supporting one another with materials and methods of teaching reading, phonics and practical maths. None of the schools have as many teaching resources as Yalding Basic Cycle School and SchoolGambia is prepared to share books and teaching materials. However, the best resource for a school is its teachers and by meeting regularly for whole day workshops, setting assignments and sharing feedback, we hope to raise confidence and standards throughout the village schools. Some schools are challenged by very large classes (up to 80). The one in the picture is planning to build new classrooms but in the meanwhile the teachers can only teach the whole class as opposed to directing learning to individual pupils.





BUYA'S NURSERY

Buya Bah has been running her own Nursery School for many years and is doing her best to reduce class sizes, arrange the children in social groups and teach to the individual. She welcomes new ideas and is very active in putting them into practice. She has started a wonderful vegetable garden in the school compound and all the children take turns to water and cultivate the crops.



FARATO CHURCH CHOIR

The adult choir members approached SchoolGambia to help with (a) lessons in reading music (b) drums and bass guitar

Daily music lessons with Trustee, Karen Di Marco, began in March and the attendance was extremely good. The classes continued at a distance on WhatsApp once Karen returned to UK. Using singing new songs together as the main teaching tool, the choir made quick progress in reading notation. The sessions will continue when Karen returns in November. Farato Church choir would love to invite Yalding (Kent) choir to visit and sing together!

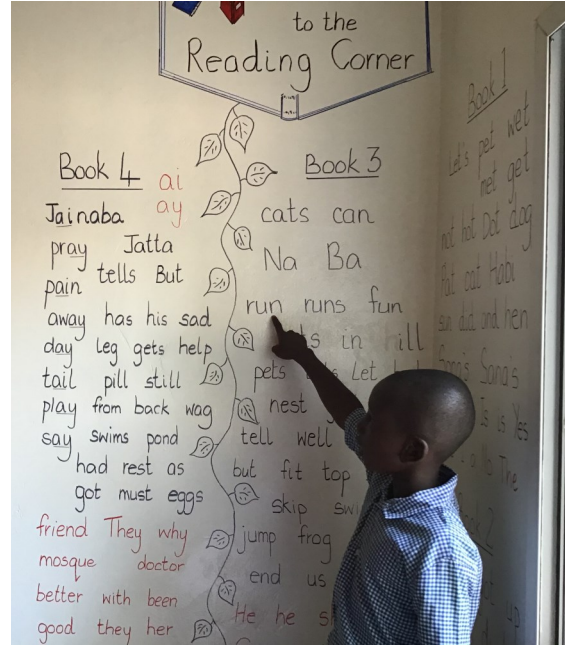
SIR ROGER MANWOOD PUPILS RETURN

In March 2020 a team of 12 pupils from this Sandwich school, led by their headteacher, were due to visit Yalding Farato to work in the classrooms and mix with village life—as teams from their school had done for the preceding 14 years. Sadly that trip was cancelled. We are thrilled to hear that in April 2024 a new team will be camping in the school, teaching daily in the classrooms, visiting teachers in their compounds and learning African drumming and batik. Over the years we have been helped by hundreds of volunteers from ages 10–85. And we are always looking for new recruits. Do contact us if you are interested.



LIBRARY PROJECT Once the building was completed we spent a weekend furnishing it and cataloguing the books. Reading classes started immediately and gradually Alamin, the Librarian, admitted Upper Basic (13-16 year olds) and Primary children to choose books. A poetry group used the space in their break time and teachers and students are all extremely happy.

LIBRARY
 "No need even
 To take out
 A book: only
 Go inside
 And savour
 The heady
 Dry breath of
 Ink and paper,
 Or stand and
 Listen to the
 Silent twitter
 Of a billion
 Tiny busy
 Black words."
 Valerie Worth





Youngest Nursery pupils enjoy water play with their teacher Sohna



Older Nursery pupils welcome their new pencils with Abibatou, Nursery Head

HOW CAN YOU HELP? There are several ways that you can support our work:-

- 1) Become a sponsor (contact us for a form) by setting up a regular monthly payment
- 2) Collect books, blue uniform, pencils, A4 paper and jigsaws (contact us to collect)
- 3) Sign up to easyfundraising.org.uk and choose SchoolGambia. Your shopping on line will automatically send a donation to the charity. So far we have raised over £1000
- 4) Let us know if any schools, clubs or organisation would like us to give a free talk and presentation on our work or Life in The Gambia.
- 5) Support our fundraising events

KEEP THESE DATES FREE! and encourage your friends to come along.....

ART EXHIBITION from 17-19 November 2023 in SS Peter and Paul Church, Yalding. Preview night (with music, wine, soft drinks and canapes) on the Friday from 7pm. A wonderful range of top quality artists will be exhibiting their work and a percentage of their sales will go to SchoolGambia.

ART

EXHIBITION AND SALE

Friday 17th – Sunday 19th November 2023
Yalding Church ME18 6HU

Friday 17th November - Meet the Artists
7 to 9.30pm

Entry £5 - includes a glass of wine - tickets available on the door

Saturday 18th November, 10 am to 5 pm

Free Entry

Sunday 19th November, 11 am to 3 pm

Free Entry

In aid of:



KENT POLICE MALE VOICE CHOIR will be performing at the church of SS Peter and Paul, Yalding at 7.30pm on Saturday 6th April 2024. It has taken two years to book this fantastic choir, so do not miss the chance to see and hear them.

Details of ticket prices coming soon.

AND FINALLY A HUGE thank you to Baba Koma (Grade 5 teacher and IT super specialist) who has done so much extra to keep the wheels oiled and running smoothly.