



### Welcome to our First Newsletter

The Bansang Educational Appeal (BEA) has now been up and running for eighteen months. Our aims are threefold:

1. to sponsor the education of students (at lower basic, upper basic and senior secondary levels) with the aim to assist them to achieve vocational positions and/or enter tertiary education.
2. to provide educational materials for the schools in Bansang
3. to raise educational standards in schools.

Our inaugural meeting was on 25<sup>th</sup> October 2008 when we first

consolidated our aims and hopes for the Appeal. Involving local schools in Essex early on in the Appeal's existence has proved invaluable in assisting the BEA in its aims and raising awareness of the plight of students in The Gambia. Since that time we have sponsored 53 students (49 currently) at upper basic and senior secondary level, provided basic school materials to primary schools in and around Bansang, overseen a container delivery of school and football equipment to the area as well as a visit by representatives of link schools in Essex.

I have been delighted with what we have achieved so far and hope the BEA will go from strength to strength. Thank you for all your support.

## Initial Visit

In February 2009 I visited Bansang with the aim of visiting schools in the area and identifying ways in which BEA could assist education. From experience I had realised you had to assist education at all levels to give students at senior secondary school the best chance to contribute well to society. I therefore visited some nursery, lower basic, upper basic and senior secondary schools in the Bansang area. There were still more to see, but I did not want to overstretch the Appeal just as it was starting. I met the head teachers, staff and students of each school and discussed ways in which they would like to benefit from the BEA.



Bansang Upper Basic School is generally in need of some TLC. Its buildings are rundown, staff morale is low and as you can see by the library, (pictured left) resources are lacking. This is an area that both The Plume School and Chelmsford County High School are keen to help improve.

Agape Nursery School is run by the local church. It has about 200 pupils from age 4-7, but its only brick building is the church which is divided into 2 classrooms. Another class meets outside in a temporary shelter, built from local fencing with a straw roof.

What came across to me was the dedication of the teachers to their work and the commitment of the students to their education despite the hardships they face. Many children at primary school level go to school without shoes and are lucky if they have uniform let alone an exercise book or pencil. Chalk is guarded carefully by the head teacher so none goes to waste. This is found at upper basic and senior secondary level also, although criteria on uniform and shoes are much stricter. At this stage children have to travel further and many walk up to 10 km a day in the tropical heat to get to school and back.



PROGRESS SO FAR

*In our first year of sponsorship 30 boys at upper basic and senior secondary level were sponsored, covering their basic school fees. Girls were not included in the first year as their fees are paid by the Government and international aid. In our second year 2009-2010 we are sponsoring 49 students including 8 girls who struggle to buy the most basic necessities for school. The most impoverished students benefit from a school lunch as well as receiving exercise books, uniform, shoes, and extra study fees.*

*To aid our second aim of providing educational materials, teachers at lower basic level identified children who were orphans or had lost one parent and they were provided with pencils and exercise books. It may not seem much to us, but on our most recent visit the entire school communities were outside waiting to greet us and thank us.*

*To improve educational standards, a combined approach is needed focusing on students, teachers and resources. After meeting several head teachers in the Bansang area it became apparent that linking schools with schools in the UK would boost morale of teachers, may lead to teacher exchange and sharing of teaching practice and allow correspondence between students encouraging them to see the world as a global community. Following the success of the recent link visit to Bansang we plan to look for other British schools to link with schools in Bansang. We also want to raise awareness of the appeal and encourage more individual sponsorship.*

*Thank you for taking the time to read this.*

*Annabel Kerr*

*If you feel you can help in any way please ring (07521 055926) or email me [annabel@bansangeducationalappeal.org](mailto:annabel@bansangeducationalappeal.org). Alternatively check out our website [www.bansangeducationalappeal.org](http://www.bansangeducationalappeal.org)*

First Link Visit

*On 29<sup>th</sup> January 2010 3 teachers set out for Bansang along with 10 football coaches from Maldon Saints Football team. The teachers were Isabelle Courcha from The Plume School, Keith Bannister head teacher of Gt Totham Primary School and Jemma Flynn, link teacher from Gt Totham School. After one night in a hotel they faced the arduous journey to Bansang in very hot and dusty conditions and were relieved to arrive late on the 30<sup>th</sup> January at Bansang Senior Secondary School.*

The visit was a huge success. The visiting teachers were amazed at the welcome and hospitality extended to them - even more so when they took



*Keith, Jemma and Isabelle meet Ismaila at Banjul Airport*

into consideration the difficulties faced by our hosts with regard to lack of water and electricity. They acclimatised well and threw themselves into the experience. After welcome and thank you ceremonies for the container items (which we didn't feel we deserved) everyone had time to spend in their respective schools observing lessons and having meetings.

Bansang Senior Football Secondary School

Having had a tour of the school Isabelle was invited to join chemistry, French and woodwork lessons. The chemistry teacher had recently been on a training course to Kenya. He was keen to demonstrate the improvisation skills he had learned to use when dealing with a lack of resources. Isabelle also spent time meeting members of the student council and discussing issues they are concerned about.



*Keith and Jemma meet The acting Principal of MK school along with students and parents.*



*A final goodbye to each class*

Mabali Kuta School

Keith and Jemma spent time in lessons and arranging a sports day at MK school. Several sports items donated needed to be explained to teachers and students alike, as they were meeting these things for the first time and did not know how to use some of the bats and PE equipment. They also had opportunity to discuss future plans with the board members and staff, as they are keen to progress towards the International Link School award. Although the schools are worlds apart in terms of resources and teacher training, both Keith and Jemma felt they gained a huge amount both personally and from the culture which they can bring back to the classroom in the UK.



*Presenting football equipment*

The footballers only had one full day in Bansang, but made the most of it. During the morning they had 3 training sessions with different age groups of children from 7-18. After a brief rest they had a football match against the teachers' team followed by a short ceremony and cultural entertainment including African drumming, dancing, and fire-eating. Although exhausted afterwards, they had had an experience they will never forget and they have already started thinking about their next trip in two years time.