

# VISIT TO ST JOHN'S SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF, SERRAKUNDA, THE GAMBIA, WEST AFRICA.

*Babs Day-June 2012*

This is a short report to Gambia Children's Support Project and Longwill School Governors outlining the work and outcomes of my two week visit.

The focus on Improving Teaching and Learning for deaf pupils was agreed by the Senior Team and based on previous shared time together. The teachers are not qualified Teachers of the Deaf and learn about Deaf Education on the job, or whilst doing initial teacher training.

Babs Day

6/12/2012





## Visit to St John's School for the Deaf, Serrakunda, The Gambia, West Africa.

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### **Overview**

It was good to be returning for a third time over four years and to see how the children had grown and developed. The welcome was warm and the teachers and SMT and Dan Mendy, the Headteacher, all were very open, as usual, to anything that will improve their practice. The school had been through a recent inspection (local Catholic Schools Inspection team) and a lot of effort had been made on the fabric of the buildings and site. Everything looked cleaner, clearer and brighter. The library, although still dusty had been reorganized and notices placed on the walls with rules for its use.



There was obvious improvement in the toilets and there are cleaner boys and girls toilets inside the school and running water often working. The vagaries of the electricity system

still in evidence but the solar panels kick- in to some rooms when the supply was interrupted. This does have a slowing effect on the work of the computer room and office.

The classrooms were brighter and a much improved environment for the children, who now number 250! The oldest class of the GADHOH nursery, the 5-6 year olds, is now at St John's in a pre-Grade 1 class.



The teachers continue to do a valiant job with big class sizes of 12 or 13 pupils and at times doubling up classes in the event of absence to 16 or 19 pupils...and all this with no Teaching Assistant or 1:1 worker for more challenging or pupils with additional special needs.

There is evidence of posters, displays, charts on classroom walls and a general feeling of hard work and improved concentration from the children, especially senior classes. Some teachers are active in engaging the children but this is still variable. My initial lesson observations quickly showed areas that could benefit from some TOD techniques and skills. This was mainly in the area of general deaf education with the lower grades (1-3) increasing visual approaches and exciting the lessons.

### **Jolly Phonics**

This phonics programme has been systematically introduced across Gambia and all the lower grade teachers have had the benefit of the extra training. The actions taught for each phoneme were enjoyed by the pupils who love the kinaesthetic approach but teachers reported that they found the signs collided with sign language and were very confusing and they were keen to relook at the Gambia Visual Phonics work we did briefly on my last visit.



## Training Workshops

Over the two –week period I offered an after -school hour session each day which was developed with the Deputy Head. During the school day I went into classes to support during the lessons, sometimes doing active teaching modeling, which I found to be a good way of supporting and sharing ideas. The DHT, Mariam and I also did some joint observations.

### Week 1

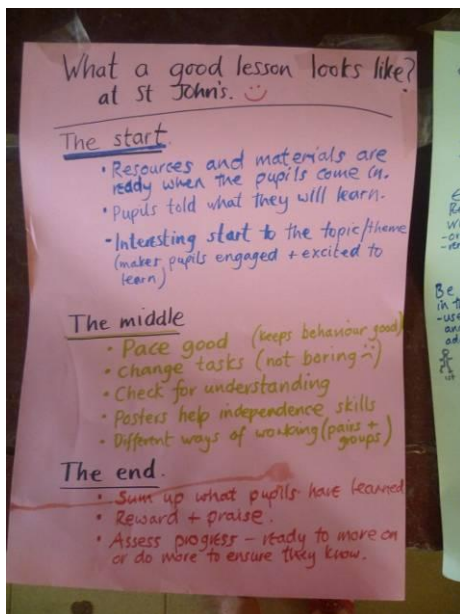
Visual Phonics Workshops – (filming and photos and creating Gambian Visual Phonics with the one handed fingerspelling as a base)

Observations and in-class work



### Week 2

Day 1 Language Development Workshop- ‘What a good lesson looks like at St John’s’



Day 2 Visual Literacy and deaf pupils (Drama and role play techniques)



Day 3 Stories, Sequencing and Order (making stories and books in several different forms)

Day 4 Effects of deafness on the whole child (Speech

Day 5 Feedback, discussion and sharing the Longwill Film and 'where next?'

**SMT Feedback meeting- last day**

**Actions and points for discussion**

- My suggestion for making mini blackboards for all Grade 1,2,3 children to encourage greater participation was enthusiastically agreed that they would be really useful for assessing learning. GDC fund agreed that we pay for 90 boards to be made in the woodwork shop.
- SMT discussed my concern about the length of the morning session ie -8-30 to 11-35am before the children had a break and suggested a short break at 10-00am for the lower grades would be really beneficial to concentration. SMT agreed to consider a small reorganisation (reverting to how it was before) and we discussed the hours- of- school directives from the Catholic Secretariat and the issue of making the timings right for deaf children.
- SMT agreed with me that the Grade 4 classes were too big for any reasonable learning to take place...two teachers were covering another on maternity leave.

- The graphics/posters from the training sessions were displayed in the hall for reminders for staff of the work we've done.
- It was good to be able to report to SMT that I had already seen on the last day observations some immensely improved 'deaf ed' practice with techniques and enlivened lessons after the training!
- SMT expressed their appreciation for the Longwill gifts from the children and staff and we felt there was more that we could share in the future. One suggestion was for some Longwill teachers to work alongside the St John's staff and share some TOD techniques.



### Other Projects

I was able to offer some assistance to Malcolm Garner and Dr Arne Eike working with the Audiology Clinic and the HARK bus to support their fixing- up of the room and equipment and delivering the training.

The end result was a cleaner room and a box of usable analogue hearing aids and training posters on the walls to remind the staff of the learning. A new set of filing cabinets to improve systems was set up and 10 deaf teachers were fitted with aids to lead the way as role models and hopefully encourage pupils to persist with wearing their aids that should now be better fitted and match their particular loss.

