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Welcome to the 12th Newsletter for Dihlabeng Christian School, in which we wish to celebrate the achievements and work of the school in the last six months.

Depending on when you receive this Newsletter, we hope you have, or have had, a very **Happy Christmas** and we would like to wish all our sponsors and friends a **Happy New Year** too.

NEW SPONSORS

We have great pleasure in welcoming 7 new sponsors of children at DCS, in the last six months. They are:

Chris Tuttiett, from Bristol

Alexis Goodson, from London

Colin and Rosemary Downey, from Essex

Naomi Barry, from Swindon

Helga Doenhoff, from London

Michael Doenhoff and Simone, from Germany

Wendy and Colin Slack, from SA, living and working in Dubai.

We hope you enjoy getting to know the children you sponsor and thank you for your generous support.

DCS PUPILS BAPTISED

As a Christian School it is our hope that all our pupils will come to know Jesus as their friend and saviour. So, it was an absolute thrill to have 8 of our current pupils and 3 of our past pupils baptised on 28th October.

They are:

Zandile Mani, Makgala Botha, Mamoya Dhlamini, Thapelo Lekgetho and Putsoane Putsoane, all from Grade 7.

Zodwa Nhlapo and Lesala Nkayi, from Grade 6.

Puleng Jobo, from Grade 5.

Past pupils baptised were Reitumetse Mokoena and David Mofokeng, Grade 7 2011, and Thoto Mashinini, Grade 7 2010.

What a joy!



Thapelo (top) and Puleng Baptised



From left: John Mokoena, Caroline Cole, Alice McCarthy, Laura Clark, Mandy Wilson, Naomi Barry, Lucy Harris, Emily Jarrett and Helen Thomas on a day visit to Lesotho.

OCTOBER - RED OAKS VISIT DCS

It was a pleasure to have a visit from a team of 8 teachers from Red Oaks School in Swindon, led by Caroline Cole who first visited us in April.

Naomi Barry (below) working with Pre-school.



The teachers taught lessons in all Grades throughout the school, including 'Talk for Maths', 'Stranger Danger' and using drama activities connected with humanities' themes. They also helped the Intermediate Phase children produce a fantastic version of Gary Barlow's 'Sing'.



Laura Clark helped the Grade 7 pupils paint a wonderful wall mural based on a Fibonacci design they had studied in maths.



Earlier this year Margaret was asked to write an article for 'Independent Education', a magazine produced by ISASA (the Independent Schools Association of South Africa). This was published in their Spring 2012 edition. The article gave such a good overview of the school that we thought you might be interested to read a slightly edited version.

School with a view: Dihlabeng Christian School.

'Dihlabeng Christian School is situated in Clarens, eastern Free State, in the foothills of the Maluti Mountains. It is an extremely picturesque town in a semi-rural setting, about 20 minutes drive from the Lesotho border, with a resident population of around 6 000 people, 5 000 of whom are Basotho (people originally from Lesotho who speak Sesotho). The town, known as 'the jewel of the Free State' - is a popular weekend tourist retreat for people from Johannesburg, Bloemfontein and further afield.



The school stands on Saron Farm, which is now owned by the municipality, and overlooks the mountains. The name 'Dihlabeng' means 'Highlands' - fitting, as the school is on a hill and holds a prominent position in the community.

A diverse staff changes children's lives

For some time, there had been two government schools in the area, struggling with large classes, too few resources and not enough teachers. Believing there was room for another school of an independent nature, I started Dihlabeng in January 2000 with nine children in the garage of my home, using an old door as a table and plastic crates as seats. My dream was to bring hope to the hopeless through the gospel of Jesus Christ. My vision was to break the cycle of poverty in this area, and change children's lives by providing them with an excellent primary school education in an intimate, family setting.



The school is growing consistently, and 143 children are currently enrolled. We keep our class sizes small and seek to educate children for life with godliness, so that they grow into confident, life-loving adults who are able to think for themselves and contribute proactively to their local community and the world at large.

We have on our staff local South African teachers, volunteer qualified teachers from the United Kingdom and local Basotho people, who act as assistants in the classrooms and as translators, as the majority of the children come to the school speaking no English at all. Two Basotho assistants have completed their teacher training, paid for by the school through donations. One of our ex-pupils has also come to work at the school this year as an assistant to a young cerebral palsy child in the Grade R class. A growing number of our young pupils are orphans, due to the

high number of deaths among young parents as a result of the HIV/Aids pandemic. The school provides a safe, family-type environment for these vulnerable children, and a sense of belonging and worth. We run a daily feeding scheme for children who do not regularly get a nutritious meal at home.

Sponsorship helps keep this low fee school afloat

One of the biggest challenges Dihlabeng Christian School has faced is finding the necessary financial resources to pay teachers, build and resource classrooms and ablution blocks and provide for general day-to-day running expenses. When we approach companies and corporate bodies from bigger towns for funding, they usually consider it more suitable to support a needy cause in their own areas. Donations received from friends and churches in the UK have enabled Dihlabeng to achieve what it has.

School fees are worked out according to parent's income and family circumstances. To help fund the poorest children, the school has developed and runs a most successful sponsorship scheme whereby people in the UK and South Africa are able to fully or partially sponsor a child's fees. The sponsorship scheme also offers sponsors the option of contributing to the feeding scheme, the general running of the school or the newly opened Grade RR (Pre-school)'.



Busy, happy days

I would like to share with you a typical day at Dihlabeng. Children and staff arrive from 07.00 and the bell rings at 07.50. The day starts with Bible time and class worship assemblies. Accompanied by my black Labrador, Mohlodi, I visit all the classes to say 'Good Morning'. If it is winter and all the heaters are turned on in the classes, the electricity trips several times, so working in hats, scarves, gloves and blankets is the norm. It is quite usual to see classes working outside to soak up the warm rays of the sun, until their classrooms warm up later in the day. The water in the taps is usually frozen until 10.00am, so flushing toilets and washing hands are not possible. Water is kept in large bottles in the kitchen so that the kettle can be boiled and cooking can continue, ensuring that breakfast and lunch for the children on the feeding scheme still happens. During break time the children run around and play soccer and as the day warms up, hats, scarves and jerseys come off. School ends at 13.00 for those in Foundation phase and after being escorted across the road, most of them amble home. Intermediate phase children end their academic lessons at 14.00 and then for an hour three afternoons each week participate in sports, such as soccer, netball, tennis or cricket. Practical life skills are also taught through afternoon clubs such as, knitting, gardening, sewing, making wire cars, recycling, playing chess, guitar and recorder playing and cooking.

The school follows the South African national curriculum, with many skills taught through cross-curricular activities. All lessons are taught with an awareness of the different learning styles - visual, auditory and kinaesthetic - to ensure that children fully understand what they are learning. The school encourages the Grade 7 children to get involved in their local community and provides opportunities for them to do so. This year several of them have helped one afternoon a week at an after school homework and care group for vulnerable children in the community.



Global partnerships

Dihlabeng has many links with those in the wider sphere of education. It had a very successful global partnership with a school in the UK for three years, which was funded by the Department of International Development and Joint Curriculum Grant. This enabled staff and pupils from Dihlabeng School and staff from our partner school at the time to visit twice yearly. The link was the catalyst for other Clarens-based schools to form international school partnerships.

Today, Dihlabeng School has close links with Red Oaks Primary School in Swindon and with Christchurch Junior School in Bristol. At the end of 2011, the head and members of staff from Red Oaks participated in an art competition with our Grade 6 and 7 pupils. In April this year, a teacher from Red Oaks joined us at Dihlabeng for a week. She worked with both Grade 4s and Grade 7s, creating art through textiles.

Interconnectivity is also part of our long-term vision at Dihlabeng. I want to help others start up small family type Christian schools in high-poverty areas both in this nation and elsewhere in Africa. I envisage we will be able to share both our successes, such as training and empowering local people, and the many challenges we have faced, such as learning to work on a very tight budget. We have developing links with those interested in starting schools, in conjunction with churches, in rural areas in other nations in Africa, namely Zambia, Burundi and Zimbabwe. Following my own visit to Burundi in February this year, the children have been fund raising to buy a cow for the village of Ryarusera, to enable them to start small scale dairy farming.

School with a view

I feel Dihlabeng is at a very exciting juncture. We may be a small school, but what we have to share is limitless. We stand on a hill, with a view not only of the Maluti mountains, but with our gaze turned firmly towards the future'.

Margaret Grant - June 2012



GRADE 7 LEAVERS

It is with real sadness that we say 'Goodbye' to our Grade 7 pupils. They have always been the smallest class right through the school and they are extremely talented pupils, both academically and as mature young people. They have served the school well as Prefects and have been a pleasure to know and to teach.

They leave us for various schools to continue their Intermediate phase of education in Grade 8 and 9. We wish them every success and blessing and feel sure that we will not lose contact.

From top left: Thapelo Lekgetho, Makgala Botha, Inger Van Biljon, Zandile Mani, Putsoane Putsoane and Mamoya Dhlamini.



GRADE 7 2012



Sports trophies were awarded to Valiant Mofokeng (left), Grade 2 and Lebohang Leboya (right), Grade 4. Also to Mohapi Mokoena, Grade 5 (absent on day of photo). Pupils are shown here with Kobus Basson, our sports teacher.

PRIZE GIVING

On 23rd November we gathered as a school to celebrate the academic achievements of our pupils and to award special prizes. The evening was full of all that is good about the school and its pupils, and it also acknowledged the hard work of all our dedicated teachers.



The school's trophy and cash prize for Exemplary Behaviour was awarded this year to Jessica Roy, Grade 6. The Principal's Prize for Leadership and the Oliver Family Good Fellowship Trophy, for being a good ambassador for the school, were awarded to Zandile Mani.

NATIVITY PLAY

A big 'THANK YOU' to Carolyn Revill and all the Foundation Phase children and staff for a wonderful Nativity Play on 28th November.



**Kings with Pages
and
African Angels!**

It got everyone's Christmas off to a good start!



ART COMPETITION

Joshua Van Den Dolder and Lesala Nkayi, Grade 6, entered a competition to design artwork for the vehicle of Cluny Animal Trust's new mobile clinic, soon to be operating in our community. This is an organisation supported by our local Vet's practice. Lesala won first prize and Joshua was runner up. Well done to both boys!

THE BURUNDI COW - Our Burundi Day Challenge!

To raise R8 500 to buy a cow for the people of Rya-rusera, Burundi. Our total to date stands at R7 200 with a promise of the balance to come!

Thank you to Yolanda for all her hard work in co-ordinating the events that produced this total, and to all those who contributed. We hope to complete this project early in 2013.



'Thank You' to all our Sponsors and Friends

