

END OF OUR FIRST TERM

The first term ended on 20th March. After the children had gone home, a luncheon was held for all the staff. For the Principal Ridwan and me it was a time for reflection as much as for celebration. In June last year teenagers were doing drugs on the field where now stands a school which is giving educational hope to generations of Vrygrond children. It has been a small miracle the way Capricorn Primary has established itself and settled down.

In only its first term, the school is already establishing a reputation as a place where exciting educational initiatives are taking place. We have been visited by a wide variety of interested people, from the Dean of the Dept of Education at one of our Technical Colleges, to a team from the national research institute who are compiling a report for the Govt on NGOs which are delivering education most effectively.

In the last week of term, the Dept of Education told us that they were giving us R260,000 to build two new Grade R classrooms (Grade R is the most junior grade in the school). This was significant vote of confidence: there are many schools far less favoured than Capricorn Primary, which have a more desperate need for new classrooms. By giving this funding to us, the Dept of Education is recognising that we are delivering education more effectively than any other school.

The most exciting sight for me is to come in on Monday and Wednesday mornings and see our special Learning Support room filled to capacity with our 26 volunteers,- under the supervision of Shelley O'Carroll, our professional remedial consultant, - giving concentrated education to individual children. I cannot believe there is any school in this country which has started off a learning support programme in such an organised and focussed manner.



LEARNING SUPPORT.



OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY

As part of our policy of MEASURABLE RESULTS the Remedial Team has assessed virtually every pupil in Grades 1,2 & 3, so we now have an entry

baseline assessment against which to judge future improvement. The results confirm the massive educational deficit that children from poor communities like Vrygrond suffer. **Not one child in the entire school is at the expected level in literacy**, ie at the normal level for their age! If anyone is interested I can let you have a summary of the results.

The pattern is that each class of 30 to 35 children, has around 20% relatively competent pupils, 20% who are at the bottom, some of whom will just not be teachable for various reasons, and 60% in the middle which is where we need to concentrate. Although in the "middle", this group is still on average 2 years behind the age appropriate level in reading and writing. That is the challenge this school was created to deal with!



PORRIDGE EVERY MORNING



PLAY TIME

Our other 'additions', paid for by your money, are equally successful. Christine Thomas left a management position in charge of several social workers, to join the school as our Social Worker. Her tiny office is always full of children or parents getting help with various social and behavioural problems. Together with one of the Wordworks team, she is planning on running meetings for parents in the new term, in which they will be encouraged to learn how to give their children support, both socially and educationally. Even if only half the parents take note, it will have a major impact not only on the pupils, but on the social fabric of Vrygrond beyond the school.

There is also universal agreement that our policy of having an Assistant Teacher in every class is vital. In addition to the extra attention this allows for each child, we make sure that both Xhosa and Afrikaans are available, as well as English as the common language of instruction.

Much of my time has been spent trying to find the money to pay for the extra interventions that the State will not supply, which are around R1 million per year (£65,000 or \$145,000). Individuals have offered to sponsor the salary of one teacher or assistant for a year, which helps immensely. But we need also to find support from major institutions. Although at present we have enough

money in the bank to pay only another 4 months salaries, I believe one or two of the applications to large funders will prove successful. I am concentrating on South Africans for the operational funding, since most of the money to build the school came from supporters living outside SA, many thousands of miles from Cape Town.

We are holding a celebratory open day on Tuesday 6th May. A few of our supporters from London are planning to fly out, and anyone who is able to visit on that day will be welcome, wherever you may come from.

We have been lucky in our choice of Principal, - Ridwan Samodien has been outstanding. He saw the first term as a time to establish the school, particularly to sort out the pupils and classes and teachers. He now intends to turn the attention to education, - seeing that our teachers are delivering the kind of teaching that we want. Assessing teachers is more difficult than assessing pupils. Ridwan will be sitting in on classes and together with the Wordworks team, concentrating on bringing all our teachers up to the standards of the best one.

This is getting too long! I must end by saying **THANK YOU TO ALL OF YOU WHO HAVE SUPPORTED AND SHOWN AN INTEREST IN THIS SCHOOL.**

The money you gave has been used to great effect, - with focus and efficiency. You have become part of a unique educational model for South Africa.