

## **REPORT On CAPRICORN PRIMARY SCHOOL, VRYGROND; 1 August 2008.**

From Jonathan Schrire.

**SUMMARY:** The momentum with which Capricorn Primary School opened in January this year has been maintained. In the space of only two terms it has been recognised by the Dept of Education, as well as by outside educators, as an educational model, in which superb teaching methods are being used to address classic problems of poverty and deprivation in education.

1. **EDUCATION:** As always, our overriding focus is on the education the 400 pupils are receiving.
  - a) The first two terms saw the extremely successful implementation of our **VOLUNTEER LEARNING SUPPORT PROGRAM** (under Shelley O'Carroll and Cynthia Pelman of Wordworks), where 26 volunteers from neighbouring suburbs give individual teaching to over 100 pupils every week. This has been a huge success, so much so that it was actually leading the education in the school, and some teachers were relying on it too much. The classroom must be the main arena for education, with the learning program being a support for, not a replacement of, what takes place in class.
  - b) As a result we have now come to agreement with Dr **Louis Benjamin** to start a major program of **TEACHER TRAINING** in the third term. Dr Benjamin is a well-respected educationalist whose literacy programs have seen great success in other poor schools, esp in the Hantam District near Colesberg. He is also much hired by W. Cape Education Department (WCED) to run teacher training on their behalf. Louis's courses have already started.

Louis shares our vision of making Capricorn an educational model, and wants this to be a 3 year project. Not only will our teachers have the benefit of his training, but the school will be subject to ongoing assessment from a professional educator. We have found funding for his first year costs from the Exclusive Books Reading Fund.

Louis' program will hopefully correct the imbalance caused by the success of the Learning Support Program, and give our teachers the additional training and education so as to strengthen what they do in class.

2. **COMPUTERS:** The Dept of Education has stated that it wants to use Capricorn as an experimental school to model latest educational practices. Their computer arm (Khanya) has now agreed to put computer-driven **Interactive Smartboards in every one** of our 12 classes, so that we will be a **pilot for the use of IT and computers in early education**. This is an investment of nearly half a million Rand from their side which is confirmation of our standing in their eyes. The staff have been receiving ongoing training in these Smartboards and they are being much used in class. We are now better equipped with computerized Smartboards than most private schools in the country!



**SMARTBOARD IN USE**

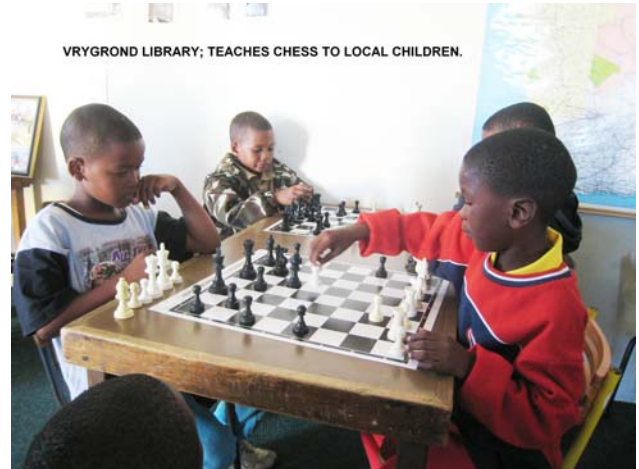


**READING FOR PLEASURE DURING BREAK**

**3. EXTRA MURAL:** Our **ART** Department is running strongly, built up entirely through the work of a few passionate volunteers (led by Lella Kondylis). Every single child in the school now gets art once a week. We have now found a permanent place for Lella's Art Classes on the mezzanine level of the Worth Hall, and have fitted cupboards, basins and the appropriate furniture.



**NEW ART LOFT**



**CHESS IN THE LIBRARY**

I have contacted the Dean of **MUSIC** at Univ of CT and they have sent someone round to see if they can help with Music. We need to establish a proper Music Dept in the course of this year. In the meantime we have a volunteer who plays the piano each week and involves the children in the lower 2 Grades. We may have to consider hiring a music teacher if the volunteer approach does not work.

A group of supporters is engaging with the local Municipality to get them to bear the cost of converting the sandy site next to the school into a proper **SPORTS FIELD**. This

is going to cost a million Rand including irrigation and fencing, and is not something we have the capacity to fund raise for at present. Although everyone acknowledges the importance of sport in children's development, our priority for the foreseeable future has to be the educational side of the school. So for the moment there is no sport facility other than the excellent Jungle Gym for the little ones, which was donated by Yabonga.



**NEW T SHIRTS - MAY**



**NEW TRACK SUITS - JULY**

#### **4. PHASE 2 - EXTENDING THE SCHOOL:**

When we built the school last year, we only had enough money for the first 4 grades (Grade R to Grade 3). We have a long term hope to **build another 12 classrooms** which will cover the next four Grades, Grades 4 to 7, - we will then have a **full Primary School of 8 Grades, with 800 kids**. At the time we were all focused on getting the present school built and running, but now of course we are forced to think about the pupils who have to leave next year.

Building the next phase would **cost about R9 million (£600,000 or \$1.3 mn)**. I have no idea if we will ever be able to raise this money. In the meantime we need to think of enlarging the school incrementally, classroom by classroom, each year.

We have two main priorities:

- a) **GRADE 4 CLASSROOMS:** At the end of this year our present Grade 3 classes (two of them) will have to leave the school and find places in the surrounding, less favoured, schools unless we can find some way to create two new Grade 4 classrooms in time.
- b) **GRADE R CLASSROOMS:** Because of the way in which our present 12 classrooms are occupied, we would next year have to halve our intake of new Grade R kids, ie 2 classes instead of the 4 we have at present.

In response to this problem, the Dept of Education has agreed to give us two Mobile classrooms next year to house the Grade R's (the youngest children). I am hoping to be able to obtain from the Dept, - if necessary pay for, - another two such classrooms to cater for Grade 4. At this stage I do not know if they will be available nor how much they will cost.

Mobile classrooms are not what we had in mind for Phase 2, but at least it enables us to continue delivering education. Temporary structures have a habit of becoming permanent, and it will require some effort to replace these with standard brick classrooms at some time in the future.

5. **FUNDING:** I have for the last 9 months been spending much effort trying to secure the R1 million per annum (£67,000; US\$145,000) needed to pay for all the educational interventions in the School, - salaries of extra teachers and assistant teachers, hiring of social worker and educational professionals. At present (Aug 2008) we have some R800,000, and have several applications pending which will be resolved in the next couple of months one way or another. I am fairly hopeful that we will find the money in time.



**PREPARING FOOD FOR 400 KIDS**

**PORRIDGE EVERY MORNING**

## **6. ORGANISATION:**

During the last month the Trust was lucky to be given two awards. We won the Nedbank "Local Heroes" award; and the Provincial Department of Social Development named us "Community Builder of the Year".

Another critical job in the months ahead is to restructure the management of the Vrygrond projects. The Trust is now responsible for the daytime feeding and education of **600 children**, and this is too important a social venture to rely so much on one person. I have already made some changes in the administration of the funds, so that it will be easier for an institution to administer the distribution of funds each month to our three projects (School, Preschool and Library). More on this when it happens.

**THANK YOU TO ALL OF YOU WHO HAVE IN ONE WAY OR ANOTHER HELPED MAKE THIS IMPORTANT EDUCATIONAL PROJECT A REALITY.**