

**OPENING:**

South African schools open for the first term of the new school year on **16<sup>th</sup> January 2008**. So on the morning of the 16<sup>th</sup> January, - two months from now, - several hundred Vrygrond children will gather in the new school Hall and be shepherded off by their teachers to their new classrooms.

And so will begin the experiment in providing first class education to kids who would otherwise have little hope.

At the beginning there will doubtless be a fair amount of chaos. It will probably take a couple of months for things to settle down, for all the snags to be sorted out and routines to be established. But begin we must on that day!

Here is an update on the various issues.

**BUILDINGS**

The buildings are going up on schedule. A few days ago I met with Dennis Fabian the architect and Abu Varachhia the Quantity Surveyor, and it looks like we will be on budget and that we now have enough money to cover the building costs. The Project Manager for Group 5 Construction is confident they will finish on time.

At present the roofing is on and they are painting the inside and outside of the classrooms, and paving the internal quadrangle. We are now addressing issues like security, and an established alarm company (ADT) has joined the many local companies which have become part of the team of donors who are putting in equipment free of charge or at a large discount.



***QUADRANGLE WITH CLASSROOMS***



***NEW SCHOOL HALL***

**PUPILS**

We now have a list of some 250 names of children whose parents want them to attend the school. The capacity of the school is 405 pupils. My initial preference was to begin on day one with a full complement of 405 pupils, but in fact it will certainly be better if we start without a full house and build up the numbers as the year progresses. I am told by community people that there will be many children coming to the gates of the school in the first few days after it opens, and I am sure these will add to the numbers.

The list we have is fairly frightening. It includes kids of 8 or 9 who have missed the preceding years schooling and who will be barely literate. Clearly the school cannot put a 9 year old in a class with 5 year olds even though that is where he may belong

academically. The classes must be age-consistent, and so we will have classes with wildly differing levels of literacy. But of course that is exactly the task that we are dedicated to handling: **taking children who are 3 years behind the age benchmarks for reading and writing, and bringing them up to standard.**

## **REMEDIAL**

One of the ways we do this is to have **large scale remedial intervention.** This will be a fundamental educational pillar of the school, and will be staffed by volunteers. We had a good response from our appeal for volunteers from the neighbouring Marina da Gama. Under the tutelage of our professional remedial team, (Shelley O'Carroll and Cynthia Pelman of Wordworks), some 20 people came to our first two meetings. We will try to build this up to about 30 people.

After a short training session each volunteer will teach 2 to 3 children for an hour at a time. The aim is for each child to have two such sessions a week. Since at least half the pupils will need such lessons, this is a big organisational challenge.

We will use the time between now and the December holidays to set up a pilot scheme and train the volunteers, so that when the school opens the system will already be up and running and can transfer to the dedicated remedial classroom.

A recent international survey found that one of the factors which is common to those countries with the best educational systems, is that they intervene early to help kids who are falling behind. This is exactly what we are now doing by **building the volunteer team which will intervene to give individual attention to the children.**



***REMEDIAL TEACHING VOLUNTEERS***



***LIBRARY- RESOURCE – COMPUTER LAB***

## **STAFF**

The Department of Education has approved our Principal, Ridwan Samodien, who seems excellent. He is leaving a well-established Primary School which he has headed for 8 years, because he wants the challenge of being part of creating a new, start-up, educational venture. For the past month and a half he has been extremely active, - visiting the site several times a week, engaging with officials from the Dept of Education and attending to the many other matters relating to opening a new school.

He and I have interviewed about 13 prospective teachers, and have chosen the three senior Grade Heads. We want a good balance of teachers and Ridwan is fine-tuning the selection.

He is shortly interviewing for the 12 teacher's assistants, - one in each class,- and will appoint these in the next few weeks.

### **PARENTS & SCHOOL NAME:**

South African State schools are legally controlled by a Governing Body on which parents must be a majority. So the selection of this body is important. We recently held the first meeting of the interim Governing Body, which must later on be subject to election at a school parents' meeting.

Most people living in Vrygrond prefer to say they live in Capricorn, taken after the name of a business park next door. So the parents asked that the school be called **CAPRICORN PRIMARY SCHOOL**, with the motto "The heart and soul of Vrygrond".



***FIRST GOVERNING BODY***



***INTERIOR OF SCHOOL HALL***

The Governing Body parents also confirmed unanimously that the school is to be an English medium school in which a priority is to make the pupils proficient in speaking, reading and writing English.



***MAIN QUADRANGLE***



***FUTURE PUPILS***

### **EDUCATIONAL RUNNING COSTS:**

A while ago one of the donors said "Putting the buildings up is the easy part". At the time we were still struggling to raise the money to pay for the buildings, so it did not seem easy. Now however we face the next task which is to make sure that within those buildings, we deliver the kind of education which we all want.

The Dept of Education, which has been totally supportive and encouraging, is covering the basic staffing costs for the school, but **we need to supplement this with additional educational input**. The cost of the extra educational input will run at R66,000 (£4,720) per month. This is for very specific costs which are discussed in the school website (<http://vrygrond.co.za/>) and summarised in the table below. At present we do not have this money, either in the bank or promised. We are nonetheless making arrangements to hire the various people in the expectation that somehow we will pay their salaries come January!

The buildings were largely paid for by UK donors, and I am approaching local companies to help fund these specific running costs. I hope that in the next 2 months someone will come forward to cover these costs. The school will exist and run without these additions, but they are the things that will **push the school to a higher level and make it a nationally recognised centre for excellence in early education**.

Thank you once again to all of you who have supported and shown an interest in this important educational project. Thanks for being part of the team.

**COSTS OF ADDITIONAL EDUCATION INPUT TO VRYGROND SCHOOL  
WHICH THE DEPT OF EDUCATION WILL NOT PAY FOR.**

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | <b>RANDS PER MONTH</b><br><i>(£ Sterling)</i> |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| <b>TEACHERS:</b> The WCED (W. Cape Education Dept) will pay for 9 teachers. We need 12 (one for each class of 30-35 pupils). So we need 3 more teachers at salary of R9,000 (£650) per month.                                                                      | R27,000<br><br><i>£1930</i>                   |
| <b>TEACHING ASSISTANTS:</b> Having a Teaching Assistant in each class dramatically improves the pupil-teacher ratio and the time available to each pupil. That is 12 Assistants at R2,000 (£145) p month                                                           | R24,000<br><br><i>£1720</i>                   |
| <b>REMEDIAL TEACHING:</b> We have agreed a proposal from an established group, Wordworks, specialising in remedial teaching. Their brief is to set up and train volunteers and teachers, so that after the first year their intervention will reduce dramatically. | R6,000<br><br><i>£430</i>                     |
| <b>SOCIAL WORKER:</b> WCED will not pay for a dedicated social worker just for Vrygrond School. Many of the children will have serious family problems at home, and the intervention of a Social Worker is critical.                                               | R8,000<br><br><i>£575</i>                     |
| <b>MATERIALS :</b> Remedial teaching books and games and consumables.                                                                                                                                                                                              | R1,000<br><br><i>£75</i>                      |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |                                               |
| <b>TOTAL</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | <b>R 66,000</b><br><i>£4720</i>               |