

St Joseph's link with Chipili Primary School in Malawi

What is the link for?

In September 2010, St Joseph's set up a link with Chipili Primary School in Malawi. The main aim is to enhance educational opportunities for pupils in both schools through sharing topic work with a skills-based focus. A central premise of this is to ensure that pupils relate to one another on an equal basis, understanding that they are all 'experts' in knowing about their own culture and country and can share this information with pupils in the link school.



There is particular emphasis on pupils developing their thinking skills through activities such as considering the similarities and differences between the two schools and in thinking about causes, symptoms and consequences. Pupils also develop their empathy and understanding for life in a different culture and environment.

How does the link work?

Mrs Lea, who visited Chipili school frequently in 2008-9 and again in August 2012, works on the educational side of the link with groups of Year 3 and 4 pupils as part of their Tuesday afternoon carousel. Emails are sent to a charity called 'Hope Missions' based in Malawi and working with Chipili school. These messages are then translated and printed off for pupils at Chipili school (which does not have electricity) to read. The process is reversed so that St J's pupils also receive messages from Chipili.

Although the main basis of the link is educational and not financial, Chipili is a poorly resourced school so extra funds are very welcome. In May-July 2011, Mrs Cooper worked with pupils in years 5 and 6 to carry out some fundraising for the school. Funds were also raised at the Y3/4 production - many thanks to all who donated so kindly. Funds raised so far have been used to help pay for a new school roof to replace one which blew off in 2011.



Jan 2011: Roof blown off in a storm



Aug 2012: New roof being built with funds raised by St Joseph's

Education in Malawi

Malawi is one of the tenth poorest countries in the world. Per capita income is around US\$800, with the family income for many rural dwellers (like families at Chipili) averaging less than \$0.50 per day for a family of 6 or 7 people.

Not surprisingly, therefore, the budget for education is low, and although primary education (years 1 to 8) is now free, the government has not been able to meet the demands for extra teachers, classrooms and books placed by increases in pupil numbers. Consequently, many schools, particularly in rural areas such as Chipili, have too few classrooms and teachers. Existing classrooms are frequently in poor states of repair, and pupil to teacher ratios are often way over 100:1. For example, in the year 1 class at Chipili, there are currently over 200 pupils to one teacher.

As a result of these poor working conditions and high pupil to teacher ratios, it is very hard for pupils in Malawi to complete their education, even at primary level. Poverty makes it difficult for significant numbers of pupils to attend school regularly, and as a result only a quarter of primary school pupils continue onto secondary school. Half of all primary pupils have left by the end of year 4, and many drop out after only two or three years of education, with only very basic literacy and numeracy skills.

About Chipili School

Chipili Primary School is situated in Kayabwa village, 6km outside Malawi's capital city, Lilongwe. It is in a rural area, surrounded by farmers' fields. Children from Kayabwa and nearby villages attend this state-run primary school for years 1 to 5. Over 500 pupils are on the roll, managed by Mr Gabriel Matumba, the headteacher, and 5 class teachers.

Even by Malawian standards, Chipili is a poorly-resourced school. There are four basic classrooms (the fifth class are either taught outside or have lessons in the adjoining nursery school if it is available). Classrooms do not have glass in the windows, or furniture apart from a blackboard. However, new



concrete on the floors and lockable doors now mean the classes can be now furnished. Recent improvements to the staff room and office include glass in the windows, concrete on the floors and new library shelves provided by the headteacher and staff.



Our educational link with Chipili

Year 3 and 4 children have swapped information about the following shared topics so far:

- Farming
- Food and healthy living
- Leaders
- Transport
- Electricity
- Trees
- Olympic Games

The children have described issues around these topics in their home countries to one another and then compared the similarities and differences. They have also swapped questions and answers.

Chipili and St Joseph's pupils also exchange annual newsletters which include information about pupil's daily lifestyles, and information connected with some of the shared topics. Y4 presented a whole-school assembly about Chipili school in July 2011 and information about Chipili to their parents in July 2012.

In March 2011 St Joseph's had the exciting opportunity of meeting Mr Matumba, the headteacher from Chipili. He toured the classes and then spent time with the Y3/4 classes in particular. Pupils were able to ask him questions face-to-face, perform drama about diets in the UK and Malawi, and heard Mr Matumba tell a very animated traditional story about how the tortoise cracked his shell.



Further details about facilitating the link

Since September 2011, the mechanism of linking with Chipili school has become more formally organized through Starfish Malawi, a school-linking charity. Starfish Malawi was founded in 2005 by its director, Chris Knott. The charity currently helps 55 schools in the UK link with schools in Malawi, and St Joseph's school's association with Starfish Malawi should ensure that information and ideas can be shared with Chipili school for many years to come. Starfish Malawi has the capacity to ensure that funds raised by UK schools are spent effectively at their link schools.

In February 2012, Starfish Malawi sent a container on behalf of its UK schools to their Malawian link schools and St Joseph's sent four packing boxes of materials including stationery, reference books and sports equipment. Thank you to all those who kindly donated.

Meanwhile, as Chipili school does not have access to computers (there is no electricity supply in Kayabwa) a Malawian-based charity, Hope Missions conveys email messages between St Joseph's and Chipili and oversees the spending of any funds. Hope Missions works holistically in Kayabwa and other nearby villages.

For further information about these two charities, see their websites at the following addresses:

www.starfishmalawi.com

www.hopemissionsministries.com