

Dear friends and supporters

We are writing to you at the end of what must be the strangest school year ever. Normally at this time of year, we would be in Ethiopia, working with the school to complete their budget for the next year, preparing for the annual parents' day events and helping to celebrate graduation day with the students. In a normal year, the first weekend in July is always very busy with a student exhibition of science, technology and art, for parents and other visitors including dignitaries from the city of Mekele. Graduation day is when we celebrate the achievements of our students and thank other supporters including parents and local bodies, such as Mekele University and small business, who all make different contributions to the success of the school.



Parents Day demonstration



Graduation, singing performance

But this year, everything is “on hold”!

What has been happening this year?

Ever since the “lockdown” started in Ethiopia on 17th March, our schoolteachers have been sending our students their coursework, tests, textbooks and other teaching materials to their homes. Parents have helped facilitate this and have brought their children’s work back to the teachers for marking. At all times, the teachers have been available to help the students with their questions. As a result of the tremendous dedication to the children, the parents, local education authorities and other organisations in the city have been full of praise for the school.

Sara, our student welfare director, calls different families every day to help them with any important issues and check that there are no severe financial problems in the homes that are affecting the welfare of the children.

Our teaching staff continues to be fully occupied with lesson preparation, marking and meeting parents as they would be in normal circumstances. However, the absence of pupils from the actual school premises means that it made good sense to re-deploy many of the supporting staff to other school activities.

These projects which are of great value to the school include growing vegetables in the school gardens and planting extensive areas of land with bamboo for future use in building construction and production of furniture. They have also planted hundreds of saplings as part of a tree-planting and re-greening project run by the school.



Distribution of vegetables at the school



Chilli peppers are essential for traditional Ethiopian dishes

Our science staff has been especially busy producing bleach and hand-sanitisers. They have also been researching the use of Neem (a variety of tree which grows in Ethiopia) extract as an insect repellent. Using Neem trees growing on the school campus, they have made extracts from the leaves to make a crop spray which is environmentally friendly. This natural pesticide stops bugs from eating plants and vegetables, but most importantly it acts as a repellent against desert locusts. Huge swarms of these voracious locusts are again devastating crops in East Africa and have recently been seen again in regions close to Mekele. This is the main growing season in the country and so any locust attack would be catastrophic. Rainbows4children and the Nicolas Robinson School especially appreciates the great support of Mekele University in giving advice and training in many of these projects, especially regarding tree planting and natural insect repellents. The Tigrai Plant Tissue Laboratory in Mekele has donated more than a thousand bamboo seedlings as well as other plants. We have also had some support from the charity CultivaId, who are working on agriculture projects in Tigrai and have send some of the experts to give advice on vegetable planting and have provided seedlings.

Many thanks to all of our helpers!



Hand sanitiser preparation



Dr Sarah (Mekele University) trains our staff on the planting of bamboo seedlings. The bamboo will also help stabilise the river bank as it grows deep roots



Our head of science spraying trees with neem insect repellent



Student handout and worksheet distribution

What are the future plans?

The Tigrai regional education bureau has announced that the official exams for grade 8 and grade 12 students will be delayed from the usual time of mid-June and are recommending that they will now be held in October of this year. This needs agreement from the Tigrai administration.

During the summer holidays the school will coach parents to support the younger children with continued classwork, especially focussing on the ones who are struggling, so that they do not fall too far behind in their skills. In September, the school will re-open to students for a month of revision classes ahead of the exams in October.

“Normal” school will resume in November, and the students at the Nicolas Robinson School will be given every opportunity to obtain assistance from the teaching staff and have access to libraries and computers to help them improve their studies and their grades. Like everything in these uncertain days, these are plans and dependent on Covid being successfully kept under control in the region.

We are very proud indeed of the response of the school and all our staff during this very challenging time and pass on our thanks to each and every one of them.

Our new kindergarten classes will also start in the autumn, but at the time of writing this newsletter, the date has not yet been confirmed. However, we already have 30 young students waiting to join the school if we can find sponsors for them!

Many of our supporters already sponsor one or more students, but if you or any of your friends would like to help, please do let us know - it is a great way to support the school. Sponsorship costs \$500 per year and more information on the programme can be found on the website: <https://www.rainbows4children.org/sponsorship-programmes>

Alternatively, please reply to this email with any questions.

Thank you all for your continued interest and support, we hope you and your families stay healthy and safe.

With our very best wishes,



Kathryn & Max Robinson
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