



QUEEN ELEANOR PRIMARY SCHOOL  
NEWSLETTER  
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GHANA SPECIAL

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As promised Mrs Parker has written about her journey to Ghana over the half term break. We hope you enjoy reading about her experiences.

### Ghana February 2011

I have been to Africa! I still can't quite believe that I can say that. Memories of February half-term 2011 will stay with me forever.

I was offered a unique opportunity to visit Ghana and be part of Tongo Junior High School for one week.

It was with lots of misgivings that I took my first steps onto African soil. The first thing to hit me, literally, was the heat and humidity. Even at 9.30pm it was quite overpowering, considering we had left the cold and rain of Milton Keynes some 12 hours earlier.

Our journey north was to continue the next morning after an 8-hour wait at Accra airport. It was not the most comfortable of places. However we flew up to Tamele. Watching the sunrise over the African landscape again was amazing. The land appeared very brown with

pockets of green. We saw villages spread all over but very little sign of roads. We were to become very aware of the tracks over the next week.



At Tamele a mini bus met us and with 20 suitcases loaded precariously on top of the roof, we set off on our 2 hour drive to Bolgatanga. This was our first opportunity to see the true Ghanaian countryside. It struck me as very dry (of course we were in the dry season). The ground was covered in a red dust, which was prevalent all over. The villages with their huts with straw roofs were scattered everywhere. We could see people walking to and from the bore-hole to collect water. Young children as well as women carrying large containers on their heads full of water. We were told that as many as 10 to 12 visits were made on a daily basis. By the sides of the road

were makeshift stalls, which offered fruit vegetables, fish, packets of water and other items for sale.

There were very few cars but lots of motor bikes with 3 and 4 people riding them at one time. It was very noisy as each time anyone overtook, they sounded their horns.



### Tongo JHS

The staff and pupils of Tongo JHS made me very welcome when I arrived on the Monday morning.

Mr Michael Zoogah,, Headteacher introduced me to his school. There were lots of inquisitive faces peering through the open windows of the school classrooms. I joined their staff meeting, first one I've attended sat under a kapok tree!

Everyone was very kind and had lots of questions about the way education was taught in UK and what life was like for us.

They were particularly interested in our seasonal weather.

The school itself was built nearly 40 years ago. It has 9 classrooms with an office block. The rooms are quite small with wooden desks and chairs. The school has a role of 400 pupils, so class sizes range from 40 - 50.

The school day starts at 8.00am and finishes at 2.00pm. They have 2 breaks during this time but are not fed. Most children have rice in the morning then eat later in the evening. They were curious about our school dinners.

All children are expected to speak English and all lessons are taught in English. They also mostly speak Talensi - their native local language.

Parents have to pay for their child's education and uniform. The children were extremely smart in their yellow and brown.



The children walk to school, although some children living further away are given financial help to buy bicycles.

Teaching is through the use of a large blackboard and chalk. There were very few resources available to support their learning. The top class is currently

studying for exams to move onto senior high school, which depends on them passing.

The pupils were very excited to receive letters from Queen Eleanor and spent a morning replying to them.



They are very keen to develop their ICT skills and practice writing the theory of how computers work without actually having any computer equipment in the school.

Football is extremely important to them and they are very knowledgeable about different football teams and leagues here.

Children performed for me their traditional dances and songs. Songs and dance is a very important part of their culture and together with their vibrant costumes and headwear. They love drama and playing musical chairs!



## Tongo Village

The village of Tongo was a half-hour drive from Bolgatango along a very dusty dirt track. Never again will I complain about the potholes on the A45 or the A5.

There is evidence of change happening with the building of new houses. There are the round mud huts with their straw roofs, which have to be rebuilt each year due to the damage done during wet season. They are beginning to use the clay bricks to build structured single dwelling with a brick pattern as we use and corrugated roofs.



The bore-hole in the middle of the village which serves the whole village actually has a tap; most other villages have hand pumps.

Electricity is on its way to Tongo. Pylons are under construction and Michael is hopeful that the school will be connected 'soon'.

I was very fortunate to be able to meet The Chief. He talked about how his wish for the people of his village would be that the crops would not fail and there would be plenty for all and no famine. They are

so dependent upon the land to provide.



All around the village crops were being grown. Millet, corn and wheat together with tomatoes, onions, fruit trees being the main crops that they depend on. Market day is very important to everyone as they can sell their crops and materials to make money. Animals wander freely around the area, always returning to their owner at night for feeding. There were no fences to keep them in. It was very disconcerting to have cows, goats, sheep and guinea fowl wandering across at all times.

I found out that Ghana produces gold and cocoa (all of which is bought by Cadbury). Oil has recently been found in the north so has yet to make an impact on the region.

Crafts are a way of making money as they can be sold at local markets. A craft centre is in development in Bolgatanga. I was fascinated to watch them weaving straw hats, fans and baskets. The quality of which is extremely high. They use the hides of animals to make sandals and bags.

Wood is used to make a variety of musical

instruments, particularly drums and wood carvings. The material produced is highly coloured and their batik designs depict African life.



Wherever we went children would come crowding up to us, especially if we had our cameras out.

Michael and some of his staff took me on a sightseeing tour. They have a special place called The Rocks where their shrines are. These are huge red boulders on the outskirts of their village. It was with a lot of difficulty that I managed to climb three-quarters of the way up. The views were magnificent. I sent the camera up to the top!



### Day and night

Everyday the sky was blue. No sign of rain clouds. Temperatures therefore reached up to 42 degrees. Luckily there were lots of trees around to give shade.

Many are grown just for this purpose. Water obviously is an important part of their life. Many trips are taken daily to collect water from the bore-holes, none is wasted. At night the sky was so clear that the stars were twinkling far more brightly. No light pollution to spoil the effect.



### Links with Tongo JHS

The main purpose of my visit was to establish a link with Tongo JS that will be of equal benefit to both of us. It is very important that it is an equal partnership, so that both can learn from each other to enhance the learning and understanding in both schools of each other cultures.

With this in mind Michael and I talked about 'Cultural Diversity', a way of learning about each others' cultures, traditions and lifestyles.

To make a start Tongo JHS will collect together traditional stories from African and Ghana and I will send them traditional stories and histories from our past.



### **The next steps**

Reading, writing, problem solving and ICT skills are essential for the learning development in both cultures. Hopefully we can share together our schemes of work and programmes of study to develop strengths and resources for the way ahead that will enhance the learning of all our students and help in some way them to achieve their potential.

During our last assembly together I was able to give gifts from Queen Eleanor to the pupils and staff. I was assured that they would be used and valued. The staff and pupils were so generous with gifts. They had made me leather sandals and a bag together with one of their traditional tunics that I proudly wore as I left them.



I have so many memories of my short stay with them.

I have had an amazing experience. To be invited to be part of a completely different way of life was a privilege, and to have been welcomed so readily by the staff, pupils and families of Tongo JHS was very emotional.



**JULIE PARKER**