



# REPORT

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THE NEWSLETTER OF THE EDUCATION RENAISSANCE TRUST

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## Since we last wrote...

- ❖ We've made a grant to a school in Nepal to help rebuild after the 2015 earthquake. And sponsored two of their teachers to visit St James.
- ❖ We've paid the first year's salary of the headmistress of the new John Scottus pre-school near Dublin.
- ❖ We've given a year's sponsorship to an intern in the Sanskrit department at St James Prep in London.
- ❖ The ERT is now a primary sponsor of Sanskrit @ St James, which promotes the teaching of Sanskrit in schools around the world.
- ❖ There are ERT-sponsored gap year students in Auckland, London and Melbourne.
- ❖ This month our annual grants will go to St James Durban and Johannesburg, which continue to be beacons in a troubled country.
- ❖ There's been a ninth ERT international teachers conference in Lucca, Italy.
- ❖ Our 5-year grant continues for the Little Stars School in Varanasi. Educating children from the surrounding slum.
- ❖ We continue to receive generous donations and legacies to help make all these things happen. Thank you!

## A TEACHER WHO MET MANDELA

In November the ERT was invited to attend the official opening of the John Scottus pre-School, in Old Conna, south of Dublin. It's actually a pre-school and year 1 of a primary school, housed in a splendid row of wooden classrooms just beside the imposing Victorian stone-built secondary school. All set in generous grounds and woodlands. We are paying the pre and primary head teacher's salary for a year, to get the new school going.

70 people - parents, governors, children and staff - gathered in the secondary school's panelled hall to hear from the chair of governors, Elizabeth Dempsey the new head, and of course from the children (see picture!). One of the governors told this amazing story of how Ms Dempsey decided to become a teacher:

In 1992, as a competitive autograph hunter, she happened to be in the same Dublin hotel as Nelson Mandela. So, when he was making a speech on the podium behind a phalanx of microphones, Elizabeth jumped up on stage and tugged his jacket. As she described later *'in that moment he stopped his address, turned to me and crouched down to my level, and shocked me into the present moment - that's the only way I can describe it. I would have been around 11 and I didn't really know who he was. But he took my breath away with his presence. It was just him and me in the whole room. He asked: "What is it you want to do?" And I said - I hadn't known it up to that moment, but I said, "I want to be a teacher". And he said: "This is good for you". I will never forget that moment. That's when I actually put into words that I wanted to be a teacher.'*

The ERT used to run workshops for teachers with the title 'So Why Did I Become a Teacher.' But no-one has come up with a response like Elizabeth's! We can confidently forecast great success for this new school. (Motto: *Laetus Impraesens: Rejoice in the Present.*)



Glorious Villa Bocella



## Letters from Lucca

*Education & Freedom* was the theme of last summer's ERT International Teachers Conference, the ninth to be held at the gorgeous Villa Bocella near Lucca, Italy. Here are extracts from some of the thank-you letters we received afterwards...

*'The event was a remarkable opportunity for both the sharing of good company but also of good practice.'*

*'I did the geometry course and it has given me more inspiration for when I teach geometry back home. It has awoken me to the beauty of the natural shapes in the world all around me.'*

*'It's been a brilliant week with nourishment on every level for everyone.'*

*'I enjoyed listening, learning and having time to reflect on the philosophy of St James Schools.'*

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The Education Renaissance Trust promotes schools and supports teachers around the world who provide a spiritually-based education. This ERT newsletter REPORT is published twice a year, to keep friends and supporters in touch with our work. If you no longer wish to receive it, please contact the editor, Hugh Venables.

## A SANSKRIT INTERN

Sejal Gir is on a one-year ERT teaching bursary with the St James Prep School Sanskrit Department. These are her reflections so far.

I am now at end of my first term and am very much enjoying being part of the Sanskrit department. St James has not only re-ignited my relationship with Sanskrit but I love teaching it too. It has been wonderful getting to know all my students and their varying personalities.

Coming from a non-teaching background, I have found this position to be both refreshing and exciting. I have learned so much. It is interesting to see the techniques applied to engage the young, enquiring minds. Teaching using games and the Sanskrit textbooks has been very successful.

So far I have been learning a great deal about classroom management, discipline, lesson planning, and various methods of teaching.

I find it a joy to teach the ever eager and enquiring younger Prep pupils and I'm constantly being kept on my toes by the older Prep pupils' thirst for more challenging work. I have great support and mentoring from both Elena and Warwick Jessup, whose hard work and dedication are really inspiring.

The children are a delight. It's all a new experience for me. I am fortunate to be able to recite Sanskrit prayers daily and hear stories from the Sanskrit epics during the Sanskrit assembly. I also find the pause to be a great opportunity to practise stillness.



My personal ethos is very much in line with that of St James. With Sanskrit I feel I am rediscovering my family roots. I recently discovered that my surname, Gir, (short for Giri) is one of the ten traditional names in the Sankara Advaita Vedanta tradition.

It is a privilege to be learning to teach amongst such incredible teachers and to be imparting the knowledge of this special language to future generations. I couldn't have asked for a better opportunity. I am truly grateful.

## 'ARISE, AWAKE, STOP NOT TILL THE GOAL IS REACHED'

So runs the spirited motto of HVP Schools in Nepal. We have just made a major grant to HVP Central School in Kathmandu, which was almost destroyed by the 2015 earthquake. Our grant will help build eight classrooms, and needless to say the school is delighted. As are the pupils – see below!



HVP stands for Hindu-Vidyapeeth, or centre of Hindu knowledge. It reflects 'HVP's promotion of wisdom in all generations of Nepali society.'

The School 'aims to place all the knowledge it bestows in a context of spiritual and cultural understanding, and to lead by example to a more peaceful and responsible society'. This aim is reflected by the 'Hindu' part of the name. Although HVP is not a religious organisation it recognises that the culture of Nepal is rooted in Hinduism. Efforts to improve the culture must build on the wisdom held in Hindu philosophy and tradition.

(HVP also stands for 'Human Values Philosophy', a more universally understood term for the values encapsulated by the schools.)

We were introduced to HVP by Helen Harper who chairs Sanskrit @ St James.

HVP teaches Sanskrit and pupils take the Cambridge IGCSE exam. It's one of several schools that set this exam (the St James family among them), and the future of the exam depends on a healthy number of candidates. Helen regularly visits Nepal to help and advise on the administration of the exam.

In the autumn term two of HVP's deputy heads visited the St James Sanskrit department in London, sponsored by ERT. They observed classes at Olympia and Ashford to better understand how the Sanskrit IGSE course is taught in English-medium schools. They were inspired by the quality and richness of the teaching.

A visit to St James for more of HVP's teachers is planned for 2020.

## CAN YOU HELP US?

Many ERT Friends now support our worldwide work through regular standing orders. Some sponsor bursaries for children at St James Johannesburg or help with the development of St James Durban. Others donate to the wider work of the ERT. The Chancellor kindly increases every donation from a UK taxpayer by 25%, via Gift Aid.

Contact us (see overleaf for details) and we'll send you a Gift Aid form. One-off donations, large or small, are equally welcome, cheques or cash!

You can now support us via [PayPal](#). There's a button on the ERT website – go to the *How You Can Help* page and then to *Becoming a Donor* (or click <http://www.education-renaissance-trust.org.uk/help2.htm> if you're online.)