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Investing in Knowledge – with George Kebasso

UK based Eastleigh High School Old Boys give computers, promise facelift

News about the plight of Nairobi's Eastleigh High School got the old boys thinking.

The 51 year old school has been reeling with falling standards, dilapidated infrastructure, indiscipline and poor response as those called to join form one often shun it and opt for boarding schools.

So in October 2006, a group of 160 old boys of the school who are living and working in the UK, USA and Canada converged to craft an initiative that would bring them into contact and to participate in the school programme.

The Old boys, most of who were at the school between 1956 and 1972 came up with a reunion of Eastleigh High School right in the heart of London and founded the Eastleigh Old Boys association.

"We got reports of falling academic standards, mismanagement and indiscipline among the students. These reports very discouraging and thought-provoking" says Mr Jayant Tanna, the association's Chairman.

For a while, they put aside their business and took to the streets of London to look for their other colleagues. The team launched a vibrant outreach campaign, contacting all their colleagues in the UK and overseas, especially those among them who left the school in the 1950s, 60s and 70s. This enabled them to develop a database of the old boys.

The Reunion was for a cause – to get the school back on course, and make it live up to the challenges that come with modern age.

Since April, the association has been in constant touch with the school for updates. This effort culminated into a trip by Jayant Tanna and Nisar Butt to present 31 desktop computers and a laptop to the school. Teachers, members of the school Board of Governors and the students, witnessed the presentation ceremony.

Mr Tanna is a retired inspector of schools in the UK while Nisar Butt is a partner at Pawley and Malyon Chartered Accountants in London. Ted Josiah of Samawati Studios in Nairobi and commonly known in the entertainment circles as "Big Ted", is also an Eastleigh High School old boy.

Among the future plans for the school is a fund-raising Dinner Dance scheduled on October 20th this year in London to raise money for at least 50 more desktop and laptop computers. Mr Tanna has invited the Principal, BoG, PTA and a number of teachers to attend the function. Mr Tanna says the UK based old boys have asked the school management if they could repaint the school, improve the general lighting system and equip the library among other things at the same time.

"It's unbelievable that this is how our school looks like. When we came here, we were devastated! How could this happen?" he posed. He is convinced that if the students' learning environment is improved, they will flourish in their studies.

Mr Tanna has been in the country working with the teachers, training them on how to use computer application packages. He told the *Education Times* that they used Computer Aid International, a UK computer

firm, to supply and ship the computers to the school.

This move will answer the Ministry of Education requirement that at least every school in the country should have a minimum of 45 students in computer studies.

The BoG Chairman, Dr. Nelson Karagu requested more computers if the school is to achieve its objective of becoming computer literate. He says the school's plan is to have at least all students in Form I and II to take Computer Studies. The Principal Mr Richard Maina Wambugu however says the school has been on an academic upward trend for four years now since 2003. Mr Wambugu attributes this to the increased concentration on studies by the students.

"More students are now getting interested in studies and are focused on scoring high grades due to competitive higher education opportunities in the country. There has been a greater improvement in the last four years. We have already constructed a perimeter wall to prevent our students from sneaking out to shops where they used to buy cigarettes. We have also sunk a bore hole to provide sufficient water for them within the school compound", said Mr Wambugu.

Last year alone, the school recorded a high of 11 grade As including A minuses - a performance the school describes as the best since the 8:4:4 system was introduced in the country about 20 years ago.

Teachers at the school, however, say their endeavour to improve performance has for a long time been hampered by its status as a day school.

"Many bright students who are granted admission to the school do not take it but opt to seek Form I places in boarding schools", a teacher Hellen Boruett told the *Education Times*. For instance in January

2006, out of the 225 students who were selected to join Form I at the school, only 3 honoured the admission while this year only 4 students turned up for enrolment out of the 225 selected to join.

Now the 51-year-old school with a student population of close to 800 and 47 teachers has drawn a 5 year action plan requiring that stakeholders source the Shgs. 39.81 million plan to transform it to a world class academic centre of excellence.