

Lotus Leaves

Winter 2007-8



Letter from the Principal

Dear Readers, Julay!

Thank you all for your tremendous support. Although we are tucked away on top of the world we are very aware of everything that you do to enable the school to grow.

This has been a very special year for the school with two visits from His Holiness Gyalwang Drukpa. The whole school community looks forward to His visits and His guidance. Being actively involved in the celebration of 800 years of legacy of the Drukpa lineage has brought the children's heritage alive.

Visitors to the school always comment on the feeling of warmth and happiness as they wander around. This is thanks to our committed team of teachers and support staff who are working together to encourage the children's development and of course our emphasis on the fact that 'learning can be fun'.

After all the excitement, we are well into the third term now and the students have settled down to work hard for the end of year tests and reports. However, there is always time for house competitions like designing our vehicle to enter for the next Gravity Challenge at Cowdray Park, UK, in Spring 2008!

With very best wishes from everyone here at the school in Shey, Ladakh.

Maureen Songhurst
Principal - Druk White Lotus School

News from the School

The 2006-7 school year started on 1st November 2006 with Junior 5 (10-12 years) as the top class. We welcomed 67 new children, bringing the total to 362 (190 girls and 172 boys). The Principal and the Estate Manager (David Songhurst) are from the UK, while the 18 teachers and 16 support staff are Ladakhi or Tibetan.

The school is developing a strong reputation within Ladakh for the quality of its teacher training. Led by the Principal, this takes place out of school hours and all teaching staff attend.

Tashi Lamo and Stanzin Thinles, Head Girl and Head Boy respectively, successfully completed their first year in office, supported by the five House Captains.

Druk White Lotus School places particular emphasis on sports, as part of a balanced education. House competitions continued throughout the year, including girls' and boys' football, cricket and athletics, and students made good use of the tracksuits donated by a generous supporter. Jigmet Chosdan gained a gold medal for ice-skating. Volunteer Jon Griggs was at the school between March and June, and helped with sports activities.



The school welcomed several international groups. Students from St. Christopher's School (Hertfordshire, UK) made a second visit to the school, in April. One of the students said, *"Working with the children in the Druk White Lotus School has shown me how much more they value every little thing. This has taught me to be a lot more grateful for my possessions and not to take everything for granted."*



A group of 13 students from Alton College (Hampshire, UK) came to the school in July to undertake a World Challenge project. They raised funds for their trip and also donated £1,300/US\$2,600/€1,950 to the school. On site, they built two adventure playgrounds for the residential children.



The 800th anniversary of the Drukpa lineage was celebrated in July at the Naropa Palace on the school campus. The formal proceedings culminated in a 'Long Life Ceremony' for His Holiness Gyalwang Drukpa during which He greeted around 1,500 representatives of villages and families. Many cultural performances took place over the week of celebrations, and participants enjoyed a unique firework display. One of the highlights was the cultural performance given by Druk White Lotus children to more than 600 people in the recently-completed Central Courtyard. The Head Boy and Head Girl were honoured to present traditional scarves to His Holiness.

A key achievement this year was the development of the Parents Committee. The Committee comprises two representatives from each of five regions. During the 800th anniversary celebrations, parents sold lunches and refreshments to raise funds for another school bus.

The school is gradually developing its IT facilities, financed by a grant from the Member of Parliament's Fund. Kevin Flynn of Cisco Systems and his partner, Emmanuelle, visited in August and are advising on how best to expand IT and communications.



Child Sponsorship and Education Development Fund

The sponsor base now includes Trusts, a French school and individual sponsors from 11 countries. They are supporting 84 children plus two teaching posts.

The school welcomed 24 new children into the residences in November 2006, bringing the total number of boarders to 96, of whom 59 are sponsored. In November 2007, we aim to offer sponsorship to 14 additional children from remote areas, and are still seeking a few more sponsors. We shall also be offering sponsorship to five more day pupils, bringing the total to 30 day sponsored children.

Wendy Cornwell, Sponsorship Coordinator, visited the school in August and said, *"The children are growing up quickly, I can see their progress from year to year and their confidence is improving enormously. I like to check the finances with the accountant, Mr Norboo, discuss next year's sponsorship priorities with my local counterpart (Sarla Chhewang) and the Principal, and take photos of the children for their sponsors. This year was fun because my son and his three children joined me and were able to play cricket and other games with the residential children."*

Design and Construction

The main construction effort during 2007 went into advancing the **Middle School Courtyard** (to accommodate classes 6-8). This courtyard will include the first science laboratory and a creative arts studio, both financed thanks to the generosity of individual donors. The south block is due to open in November 2007 and the north block in 2008.

Since there is strong demand for residential places, and Residences 1 and 2 are full, we advanced construction of the south block of **Residence 3**, in order to be able to welcome more children from remote areas in November 2007.

The **Central Courtyard**, which lies at the heart of the school, is now complete thanks to the generosity of Drukpa centres around the world. However, the Arup Design Team - always striving for excellence - came up with a proposal to construct the school library at first floor level around the Central Courtyard. This proposal has fired the imagination of all who have seen the computer-generated simulation (see image below), and we are actively fundraising to be able to complete this library structure in 2008-9.

The school experienced **water supply** problems during the year and so Dorothee Richter, public health engineer with Ove Arup & Partners and a former Resident Engineer, kindly visited the school again in April 2007 to work with the Construction Manager (Angdus) and Estate Manager (David) to resolve the problems.

Unfortunately the school has to rely on a diesel generator since the mains supply of **electricity** is highly unreliable in Ladakh. Even when mains electricity is available, the voltage is often inadequate to power the school's photocopier and computers. We conducted a tender among local suppliers and hope soon to be able to order the next stage of a renewable energy installation, including solar photovoltaic panels and a small wind turbine to be tested on an experimental basis.

Construction of the buildings is now well past the halfway mark and we are aiming to make the transformation from a 'construction site with a school' to a 'functioning school with on-going construction'. To help with this challenge, Neil Marlow (landscape architect) visited the site in July 2007 and this was his opportunity to experience conditions first-hand.



Neil commented, "*The school site would appear at first to be the most barren of landscapes but once you get to experience it at close hand and see how the Ladakhis have greened it you begin to imagine the possibilities at the school.*" Neil and colleagues are preparing a **Landscaping Masterplan** and, with their help, we intend to advance the transformation in 2008.

Arup Associates was invited to submit the Druk White Lotus School project for the prestigious **Aga Khan Award for Architecture**. A Master Jury reviewed 343 submissions and selected finalists, including our project, for On-site Project Review. Dr Aydan Balamir, Associate Professor of Architecture at the Middle East Technical University in Ankara, was appointed by the Jury to travel to Ladakh in April to conduct the Review. Dr Balamir commented, "*The visual effect of the complex, both from a distance and from within, is poetic. ... The building is designed for a long lifespan and easy maintenance. The granite walls and exposed concrete lintels, all accomplished with exquisite craftsmanship, look almost eternal, whereas the timberwork will need upgrading in due course.*"



International News

We would like to express our heartfelt appreciation for the contribution made by the Rt. Hon. the Lord Weatherill who was a school patron for many years. Lord Weatherill sadly passed away on 6th May 2007.

The US Public Broadcasting System commissioned a New York film company, kontentreal, to make a documentary series about sustainable architecture and they decided to devote one episode to the school. A film crew visited in April and Chief Architect, Jonathan Rose, visited the school for two days en route between Beijing and London to be interviewed on site. The documentary is due to be premièred at the Rubin Museum of Art in New York in December and screened on US television early in 2008.

Local employer **JetAirways** continued its support by transporting from London to Shey eight trunks containing school books, children's clothes and other 'goodies' donated as a result of our appeal in a previous newsletter. JetAirways local staff handed the trunks over to the Principal during the 800th anniversary celebrations in July.

Many people used their talents in interesting ways to raise money for the school. For example: Rik Williams created a new website; Michel Guinet & Corinne Barbier from Tahiti visited the school again in March to continue developing the preventive dental care programme; Richard Adolph completed the London Marathon and Ushma Vaidya completed the Ironbridge Half-marathon; Ecole de Lille and Ecole Active Bilingue in France and St. Christopher's School and Alton College in England all held fundraising events.



Capital Fundraising

We have raised over two-thirds of the capital required - leaving only £554,000 / US\$1,108,000 / €831,000 to complete the renewable energy facilities, site landscaping, the Library, Residences 3 and 4, and the Secondary School. The largest contributions during the year came from individual donors, and we thank them sincerely for their generosity and support.

We continue to raise construction funds in many ways and are placing an increasing focus on the United States. Druk Foundation, in the US, organised an event in Los Angeles in May at the Museum of Design & Architecture, at which folk singer Donovan sang. His song, "Gentle Heart", was performed subsequently by Druk White Lotus children for guests at the 800th anniversary celebrations in Shey.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

- **make a donation** to help complete the school or to finance much needed educational resources
- **match funds** raised by parents towards another school bus
- **sponsor** a child or teacher
- **organise or take part in** a fundraising event
- **sell** on eBay and donate 10% to 100% of the final sale price
- **click** on www.everyclick as your search engine
- **make a legacy** or bequest in your will
- **ask** your employer's payroll department to use "Payroll Giving" to deduct regular charitable donations from your gross pay before tax
- **offer** small musical instruments to equip the music room.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

- December 2007: Screening a documentary about Druk White Lotus School at the Rubin Museum of Art, New York
- January 2008: Public Talk by His Holiness Gyalwang Drukpa in London
- Spring 2008: Gravity Challenge at Cowdray Park in East Sussex, England

We would like to sincerely thank all the individuals, trusts, schools and corporate donors who have not been specifically named in this newsletter and who have supported the project in so many different ways.

**Druk White Lotus School,
Park Hill House, 1 Park Hill,
Bickley, Bromley, Kent BR1 2JH,
United Kingdom**

**Tel: +44 (0)20 8468 1339
email: info@dwls.org website: www.dwls.org**

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