



An Open Letter from Brummana High School Principal David Gray

Date: Thursday, 28 January, 2021

The lockdown continues. Lebanon has experienced a torrent of Corona Virus cases and a rapidly increasing number of deaths daily since Christmas and the country has been in total lockdown (according to the UK's BBC, one of the strictest in the world), since the middle of January.

Very sadly, one of our own teachers passed away during January and this has sent shock waves through our school community and particularly through her own Arabic classes in our Primary school who were suddenly one day confronted with her inexplicable absence. As a young teacher she was taken from us very prematurely. May her eternal soul rest in peace.

Behind the creeping spread of the virus which has confined us to our homes leaving the school physically empty with the only sign of life leaves blowing in the school yard, lies the spectrum of poverty. Economic collapse, the devaluation of the Lebanese Lira, 45% unemployment and rampant inflation in the shops have led to a rise in impoverishment for around 60% of the population who struggle to feed their families and are desperate for help from food banks set up by local and international NGOs. The impact of the awful explosion on August the 4th 2020 in Beirut was such as to demoralise the people and pile woe upon woe.

Yet, for all this, hope springs eternal and our young people at school, initially in the summer, set up a food drive to cater for those who had suffered from the blast, and later in the year gathered food and clothing for the hungry and the homeless as the winter approached. Their values of individuality, respect for others, tolerance, and peaceful resolution, instilled through our Quaker school, are pillars of strength which will carry them through life, enable them to lead others responsibly and, we hope, help them to rebuild their broken country.

Our campaign to raise much needed funds for students whose future schooling was imperilled by the loss of homes, business and livelihoods, suffered by families after the explosion and from the economic meltdown of the past year, yielded 130 Thousand US Dollars from donors across the world who recognised our plight and to whose generosity we are indebted. As a result education and so, for those lucky ones, the key to their survival and prosperity, has been secured, for a number of children at our school. Although our tuition fees are modest in a country where government education is only provided for a very few, many, many families simply do not have the ability to educate their children, to their lifelong detriment. As a school which has for over a hundred years been a beacon of hope to the country producing past presidents and prime ministers as well as leaders in all sectors of society, in Lebanon and abroad, we continue to need help to provide education for children who otherwise will be denied this precious gift.

Our accountants have confirmed a deficit of 1.4 Million US Dollars for the year 2019/2020, the first time the school has recorded a deficit in 20 years and this in spite of having 1250 children currently being educated at Brummana High School.

Since last March, apart from a short period of hybrid learning, we have been largely online and have run a full academic programme for children from age three up to 18. We have trained and continue to train staff in online interactive teaching techniques on TEAMS and students on developing greater proficiency in the uses of ICT. We run an online counselling, advisory and pastoral care service for all students and for staff and have run a series of workshops to support and train parents and students on learning from home, on mental health issues, and on dealing with the lockdown. We have promoted competitions, achievements, and initiatives through our website and social media channels and run exercise classes, professional meetings, professional development days, and hosted seminars on wellbeing and on dealing with post traumatic stress, all online. Some of our students who have left the county, continue to learn with the school by attending our online classes from the USA, Australia, the UK, Europe, and other parts of the Middle East. We are effectively running the school as normal, except that no one is there and much of the interaction, which is an essential part of life, is missing.

We carry on. No obstacle is too large. The children are our hope for the future. They are tomorrow's leaders. Today they need us. Tomorrow we shall need them.

David Gray, Principal