



TERMS TWO AND THREE 2025

I had intended to write an update at the end of term two. Yet I find myself already in the middle of term three! In these past months school life (and our life) has been as busy, and as packed full of challenges as it always seems to be. Thank heavens for Ben!



Ben having a discussion with some of the students

When I have had to be away, or been busy with other jobs, he has made it all much easier. The daily life of a school is, to be honest, one storm in a teacup after another. The children and the staff need someone with a calm head and a positive outlook to keep everyone moving forward and smiling as they go. Ben is unruffled and experienced, he even takes our more unusual challenges in his stride.



Parents having lunch after a meeting at the school

He has a really great way of collaborating with the parents and is getting the best out of them. There has never been such an active parents committee.

This means that, regardless of my schedule, the school is continuing to work smoothly, and we are maintaining our forward progress.

REBUILDING

We rebuilt another classroom in term two. Further reducing the need for doubling up on classes and lessons. The older children, who need more serious academic time, now don't have to take any book-based classes outside.



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The walls on this building were still sound. The roof needed to be replaced, as did the windows, door and other metal fixtures. All the metal on this building, as well as throughout the school, had been hacked out and stolen for scrap value.



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The outdoor class area, now just used for casual activities, with the repaired 'Rhino' classroom behind.

We are still desperately short of school furniture. Children never needed to take books home in the past, we had drawers and shelves for all their exercise books and writing materials. Now storage space is very limited, and the children must take their books home each night. As you can imagine, their living conditions mean that it is hard for them to look after their books well.

Also, generally, they don't have school bags. But their parents have made them bags from maize flour sacks. Simple, inexpensive and does the job in an area where it rarely rains.



Inside the newly repaired Rhino classroom

We will get cupboards and shelves again, but getting enough tables and chairs is more of a priority right now.



All these photos are taken in the repaired classroom. They also show the home-made school bags, apart from the lucky boy in the last photo who has a 'proper' school bag!

Now, at the tail end of term three we are rebuilding another classroom. Our once beautiful classroom that doubled as our dining hall, had a thatched roof that went up in smoke far too easily. The thatched roof will sadly not be making a comeback. Not only was it comparatively expensive, but thatched roofs also need to be replaced every 8 to 10 years. Ours had already started to leak excessively.

This time it will have a less lovely but far more practical iron sheet roof like all the other buildings. The fire damage in this building was extensive, it has required renovations to the walls, and we have had to completely replace the concrete floor. For some reason, this was one building that didn't have its metal windows stolen, just the door.



Supplies being packed for the building work, removing fire damaged concrete and the frame for the roof.



Progress on the inside, the almost finished classroom (the floor has yet to be laid) and beginning work on a new toilet block.

We couldn't have restored either of these classrooms without the continued support of the little German charity Isiolo Tumiani, and our dear friend Katrin who organises it. They gave us a generous lump sum early in the year that enabled us to repair the Rhino class and to continue restocking the school with textbooks, learning equipment and furniture, plus a further donation this term to rebuild the dining hall class.



Katrin (4th from left) with friends and family in 2024, having just hiked Ololokwe, the sacred mountain of the Samburu people.

Their first donation this year also helped us to cover our regular expenditure on basics such as food and staff wages. In the past we have always managed this through monthly donations topped up with donations made by visitors to the school, and by ourselves. Until these last few years Kitonga and I have been one of the larger financial donors to the school. However, since the attack Kitonga has been fully engaged in the pursuit of justice and security for both the school and the community, and he has not been working. This means there have been no visitors to the school or added support from us. The donations made by Isiolo Tumiani have therefore been a lifeline keeping the school going, as well as helping to get it rebuilt.

WATER

We are still fetching water from the spring by hand, but there is piped water on the way.



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The kids help with water collection, they only use small containers, but there are a lot of children, so it all adds up.



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Bringing water to the school from the nearby spring and tipping it into buckets for washing the classroom.



School cleaning is a communal activity, everybody takes part. Water is also collected each day for washing hands, for drinking and for use in the kitchen.

One of the projects that Kitonga has been working on for years, to bring piped water to people's homes, has already reached many families in the area. The collection of homes around the school (and of course the school itself) are the next in line.

However, there is a deeply frustrating and sad side story to this success. Grandma Daniel lives alone (apart from a succession of grandchildren that she takes care of) her husband having died long ago and her children being somewhat unreliable. She has lived, for as long as anyone can remember, in one of the areas that has recently received piped water. She has a small area of land which, during the rainy season, she cultivates for vegetables and maize. However now that she has piped water, she will be able to cultivate this bit of land year-round.

A few weeks ago, she was threatened by some men from the group who attacked the school and other places back in 2023. They told her that they were going to take over her land and that she had better move or they would 'burn her out like they did Kitonga'.

Threats to this vulnerable grandmother, about her now more valuable land, forcefully remind us of the importance of continuing to speak out for others who can't. I was also very impressed that she took this complaint to the chief and then took the even braver step to travel into Isiolo to report the incident to the police.

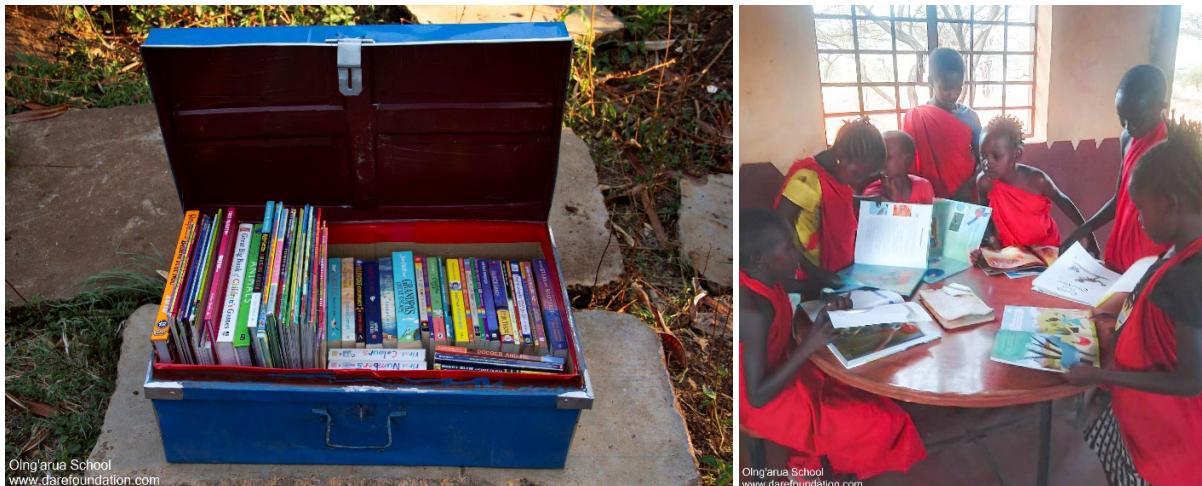
With the rampant corruption in the police and judiciary we know that, realistically, we may not win all our cases and not all who committed crimes in 2023 will see justice. But I begin to see that even by engaging in the fight we are helping others to find the strength, and hope, to begin to defend themselves.



Grandma Daniel speaking at a meeting in the school assembly area.

BOOK BOX LIBRARY

The lack of school furniture, specifically cupboards in which to safely keep our lovely books, has been a problem. We have gradually been rebuilding our collection of books, with thoughtful choices and generous donations from our friends. In our dusty environment it is important to keep the books in closed cupboards, it takes a lot to get a book out to our school, and we need to do our best to keep them in good condition once we have them.



In term two we came up with an innovative interim solution. The Book Box Library. We pack a selection of books into a padded metal box, and it is taken out to the school by motorbike (as is everything and everyone). Once these books have been read, they are sent back to Isiolo (where I store all the things that we can't currently keep at the school) and we pack up a new selection to send out.

When I was a child, growing up in a remote part of the west coast of Scotland, a library van used to come to all the villages every 2 weeks. You would step inside and find a world of wonder. I see the same excitement I used to feel, on the faces of our children, each time a newly filled book box arrives.

ART AND CRAFT

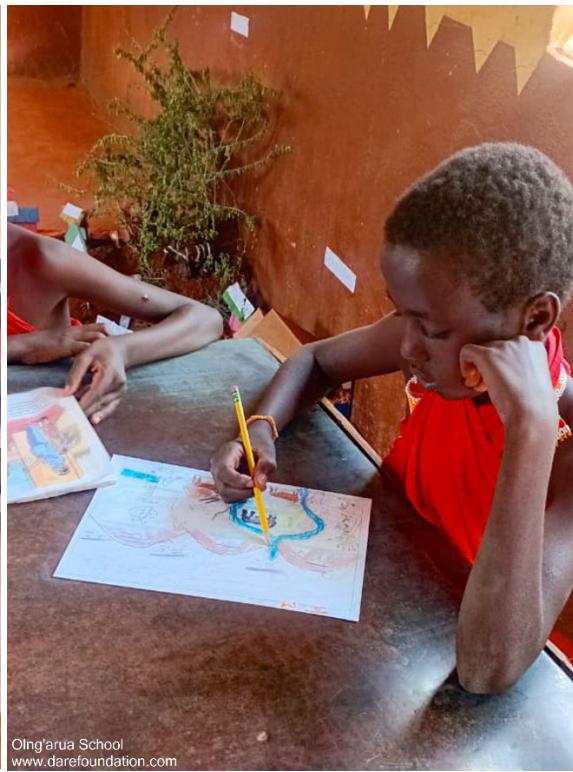
Ben also encourages the artistic program at the school, much as I did. I felt great pleasure all this year, organising art and craft supplies for school. It was just like the old days!



This term we organised for all the class groups to work on practical and creative projects to be displayed on Parents Day. It has been the main theme of the term, and the kids are really into it.



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These unusual plants made from paper were a big hit! Having time in the daily curriculum for art, music, dance and other creative activities is one of the things that makes Ong'arua school so different from all the others.

Over the course of this year, and very much because of Ben's help and guidance, I have slowly been feeling pride again in our school. Pride for what it is now, and not just because it has survived.



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Yes, that is a violin (sort of) instrument that was made in class. It doesn't sound great, but it does teach the principles of a string instrument. Mostly though, it was just a really cool thing to make!



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Women singing blessings on the newly restored Rhino classroom

CHALLENGES

All schools in Kenya must be registered with the Kenyan Education Department and comply with a set of requirements. Obviously, when the school was burned down, we no longer did comply with many of those requirements. However, they provided us with provisional certification to allow us to keep running as we rebuilt. This enabled us to keep teaching and working with the kids.

The new curriculum has a new program for examinations. The first important one come at the end of Grade 6, and it is needed for children to progress from primary school to junior secondary. We have our first Grade 6 class starting in January next year.

We cannot take our children through their Grade 6 assessment (November next year) until we have full certification from the Education Department.

There is one final thing we need to do to qualify for full certification and that is to have one more classroom. What's more, we are going to need it by March next year in order to get all paperwork processed in time. If we don't our Grade 6 kids will have to be held back in primary school for another year.

So, for all those of you who have asked me over the course of this year, '*Emma, what is the next project you need help with?*' This is it. We need to raise the funds to rebuild the final, and most damaged, classroom. And we need to do it soon.

To do this we need approximately \$14,000 (which currently seems to be around £10,000 or 12,000EUR). Any contributions to this fund will be greatly appreciated. If you want to help, go to the website for PayPal (<https://darefoundation.com/help-dare/donate/>) or email me for bank details.

With love from Emma, Kitonga and all the staff and students at Olng'arua School

