

Newsletter No.16

April 2010

Dear All,

I should have been heading towards Tangiers a couple of weeks ago, for a literary festival on the subject of searching for an environmental ethic – or indeed an ethos. But of course the flight was cancelled. And although I should have loved to have gone, and although many had a chaotic miserable time of the volcanic ash, for me it translated into some lovely extra, unexpected time. It's an interesting lesson. In order to tackle the carbon issue, the fuel crisis AND pollution we are going to have to make various choices to simplify our lifestyles. Instead of being afraid of those choices and what we might lose, perhaps we don't realise how much there is also to gain.

This newsletter:

- A. A special feature about why the first Hindu state primary school has been declared as the most ecological school in England.
- B. Cardinal Wiseman Tea and Bags for Life.
- C. Our colleague, Mary Colwell, joins Catholic Primary Schools in Bristol as they reflect on caring for creation.

Next time we'll let you know about Emmaus House, a Catholic Retreat Centre in Clifton, Bristol, looking to work with local schools to run retreats on the environment (and they have five gardens so it should be inspiring!) And also a rather useful Church of England document, which we think that many faith schools might find inspiring.

A. State-funded Faith School “the most ecological in England”

A faith school has been evaluated as the most ecological school in England. It is the Krishna Avanti Primary school, the UK's first state-funded Hindu school, based in Harrow, North London, and I hope its story will be inspiring to the Catholic schools on this list. I visited Krishna Avanti in early spring: it was the kind of place you can't help talking about for days – it's the kind of place that you cannot imagine any parent not wanting desperately to send their child to - and it's no surprise that it's five times oversubscribed this year.

First, its environmental credentials: Seventy percent of the heating comes from ground source heat pumps; the timber structure and hardwood larch cladding are environmentally managed; there are sedum (grassy) roofs to help with rainwater harvesting; and it has a sophisticated building management

system monitoring heating, oxygen concentration and natural light. All leading to a UK BREEAM Schools 'excellent' rating with a score of 75.91%. This is currently the highest rating score of any school in England (though there is a state primary in Wales which beats it).

Second, its Eco-friendly Ethos

Hinduism teaches the equality of all living things. The children's diet is entirely vegetarian and delicious, with an emphasis on locally grown, organic, freshly prepared food. It is the UK's first vegetarian state school, and it is the only school in Harrow that has its own kitchen - the food is so good that all the children choose to eat there rather than bring their own. The children also learn about food – they grow it (each class has a patch of garden) and they learn about cooking it. The grounds have vegetables, flowers and fruit, as well as places to play and to walk.



Above: a view of the Krishna Avanti Primary school and grass roof

Third: Its Thinking

There was a great deal of consultation with the community to see what a Hindu school in the UK should be. But everyone was agreed that if it was truly Hindu it should be truly environmentally gentle. And it should teach that gentleness to the children.

Fourth: The Beauty

Oddly, beauty does not seem to be a BREEAM criterion, but for us at ARC it's critical that it must be part of the planning of buildings that will be here, and loved

and kept, for years. And the Krishna-Avanti school, a real oasis in north London suburbia, is certainly beautiful.

The history of the school

Krishna-Avanti started in 2003 as a simple idea, backed by a great deal of enthusiasm. In 2005, after two years of consultation with the local council, I-Foundation was given an £11.1 million pound central government allocation, and began raising the additional £2.4 million from the Hindu community that was needed to make it an excellent, eco-friendly, beautiful site, with a marble temple at its heart.

The foundation – I-foundation - discovered an appropriate site, in Harrow in North London, which is the most religiously diverse borough in the country, with 48,000 Hindus. It had previously been used as a football field “but the players were frustrated at the poor changing facilities, so it was part of the deal that we helped them build some great changing rooms at their new location.” Planning permission was granted in 2007 and in 2008 construction started, and that same year a reception class was taught at a different site, which meant that in September 2009, with everything finished on time, Krishna Avanti School could open formally with two classes of 30 children each: reception and year 1. Each year a new reception class will come in, so that by 2014 there will be a full complement of pupils.

Krishna is one of the names of God, and means “all attractive”. Avanti is the name of the place where Lord Krishna is said to have gone to school. The name is designed to inspire a simultaneous attachment to both God and education.

The day at Krishna Avanti

The day starts at 8am with morning worship of about 10 minutes, focusing each week on a verse relating to the Bhagavad Gita. Classes follow the national curriculum – at this age concentrating on numbers, literacy, music and art. At morning break the children say a little prayer, eat fruit, and play for 20 minutes. At some point in the morning they have a short yoga class with deep breathing and meditation. They wash hands for lunch, which they eat sitting cross-legged on the floor – which is good for their digestion. The dinner staff are involved in the teaching, organising structured, constructive play during the lunch break.

Pupils from Woodlanders Primary School, a special school nearby, come for lunch once a week.

They are actively sharing good practice - a team of teachers and strategists from the Netherlands were there in February; they would welcome engagement with other British schools.

Over-subscribed

The school started off with fewer children than it had places (there were 23 children in the first year out of 30 places) with parents uncertain about what the school would involve. This year it was three times over-subscribed: for next year it has already been five times over-subscribed. If they decide to rely on selection by catchment area rather than instituting a lottery over a larger area, they now would have to only accept children living within half a mile of the premises: which at least ensures that most pupils will be able to walk to school.

Not all pupils are from Indian families; some 10% of pupils are white, a mix that gives a "slightly different flavour to the school".



Yoga classes at Krishna Avanti

What people say

"It's a wonderful school. Our only regret is that Harrow beat us to it."
Mike Freer, councillor from the neighbouring borough of Barnett.

"My son learns about not being wasteful. Sometimes he will turn off the tap at home. Don't waste Krishna's energy, he tells me. Another thing I like is how they learn about the closeness with nature. In his own way he understands the principle of an ecological environment." Shri Radhika volunteer, and parent of a child in the reception class.

"We didn't know if it would work: but failure wasn't an option," Nitesh Gor, chairman of the trustees.

More details: <http://www.arcworld.org/news.asp?pageID=394> - which includes links to some fantastic photos.

Later on we might even have a little Youtube video on it – which I'll tell you about.

And if you would like to hear a wonderful story about a Hindu festival where some 40 million Hindus worship at the Sacred River of the Ganges, you can listen to Radio 4's Today Programme:

http://news.bbc.co.uk/today/hi/today/newsid_8648000/8648306.stm

B. Cardinal Wiseman School launches ethical tea and “Bags for Life”.

In our last newsletter we told you about Cardinal Wiseman Catholic School & Language College winning the Sustainable Schools Award for 2009. Leonie Alldrick, the Language College's Administrator, has been in touch to tell us about the school's latest achievements. Not only has the school been working to create its own brand of ethical tea, but the students have also produced “Bags for Life”.



Students promote their bags for life at Cardinal Wiseman.

Leonie writes: “We are very excited to introduce Cardinal Tea. We have been working with A F Blakemore and Aroma Tea and Coffee Merchants to develop a blend of tea to be sold at selected Spar Stores. The pupils will be looking at other ways of marketing Cardinal Tea and we are hoping to gain support of local businesses to increase the sales. 100% of the profits from Cardinal Tea will be donated to projects in Malawi. Enterprise projects such as these incorporate a varied cross section of the curriculum and are invaluable to our pupils, helping shape them for their future careers”.

“Cardinal Wiseman Young Chamber's current project is to create a Bag for Life. The students have been working with Pyramid Design in Leamington Spa to create a bag that will appeal to a wide range of clients as well as reinforcing the importance of reducing plastic bag use. A proportion of the profit will be given to projects in Malawi supported by Cardinal Wiseman and a proportion of the profit from each pink bag sold will be donated to Breast Cancer Campaign.”

On 22 April the School held an official launch at the Chamber of Commerce in Coventry to celebrate their ethical “Cardinal Tea” and their Bags for Life. The

pupils will give presentations to the President of Coventry and Warwickshire Chamber of Commerce – and there were lots of opportunities to try out the new tea. Do take a look at their website: www.cardinalwiseman.coventry.sch.uk which gives more details about the projects Cardinal Wiseman supports in Malawi.

C. Mary Colwell, ARC's Catholic Programme Advisor and leading lay activist on Catholic eco issues, visited St Bede's Catholic College in Bristol and took part in an evening reflection of caring for creation. She sends this report:

“On March 25th six Catholic Primary Schools in Bristol met at St Bede's Catholic College in Lawrence Weston for an evening of music and reflection on the theme of caring for creation. It was a lovely evening; the children's songs were chosen to give an uplifting and spiritual angle to a subject that can often seem dispiriting. The hymn “Let All Creation Sing” set the tone of the concert that was imbued throughout with celebration and praise “Let all creation sing of your mighty power, your majesty, your wonders on the earth.”

There was also a strong and positive environmental message for everyone – that we all have the power to make the right choices and live in the right way to protect this beautiful planet. “Sent by the Lord am I, my hands are ready now, to make this world a better place, in which your kingdom comes” are the opening words to “Sent By The Lord Am I”, which urges us all to live in harmony with the earth.

There were fun and insightful reflections from Fr Tom Finnegan, and I gave three short talks and showed films on the wonder of life on earth and what we can do to look after it. The evening finished with everyone singing along to “What a Wonderful World” by Louis Armstrong, set to pictures.

Keep sending us your stories!

Best wishes,

Victoria Finlay, Communications Director (ARC)

and Nicki McHugh, who is also now coordinating a programme on Faith Schools and Water (in the context of drinking, awareness, hygiene and sanitation), so although the focus is specifically on developing countries, do let her know about anything that seems appropriate. For more details, please visit:

www.faithschoolsandwater.org

If you'd like to stop receiving this letter then let us know, or – much more encouraging for us – if you think there's anyone who'd like to hear these stories, and contribute, then ask them to register and we'll add them to the list.