

AT SCHOOL IN MALAWI

PRIMARY

A typical village Primary School like St Martin's at Malindi has 1405 pupils on the roll, 704 boys and 701 girls (an indication that the education of girls is much more widely valued than was once the case).

It may have an official staffing complement of 26 but there are only 15 teachers in post. There is a serious shortage of teachers in Malawi, partly due to HIV/AIDS. Rural schools find it particularly difficult to attract staff if they do not have a teacher's house to offer.

The school has only ten classrooms and some groups are taught outside. There are 16 pit-latrines.

Prior to 1993 parents had to pay fees for Primary education and when fees were abolished numbers of children attending immediately doubled. There is still a huge shortage of classrooms throughout Malawi.

Most of the classrooms have no desks or chairs, the pupils sitting on the floor. If there are textbooks, the teacher may have the only copy or several children will have to share a copy. Educational resources are limited to the blackboard at the end of each room but the school is one of few to have a small library, thanks to help from a UK school.

Primary teacher's starting salary: £90 per month

SECONDARY

Secondary education is not free and many parents cannot afford the fees for Secondary school even though they are only £10 per term. Only a third of children move on to secondary school.

Classes are smaller but many classrooms lack desks and chairs.

At age 15 63% of Malawian children can read and write (76% of boys, 50% of girls).

THE FUTURE

Things are improving slowly. A government school feeding scheme encourages more children to attend school especially in the 'hungry months' before new crops are harvested. More teacher training colleges are planned. The importance of Science and Technology is recognised though only 8% of the population has access to electricity.

MACS

In its educational work MACS continues to build classrooms and teachers' houses. One current project is a science lab for a secondary school in Nkhotakota. MACS supplies textbooks, educational resources like the new Chichewa-English dictionary and sports equipment.

A number of trustees are willing to visit schools to talk about Malawi. Contact richardgbarton@yahoo.co.uk