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# FOOD FOR THE POOR

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## LOWER BUXTON PRIMARY INFANT DEPARTMENT Construction Project



Orange Hill, Brown's Town P.O., St. Ann, Jamaica

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***"As often as you did it to one of the least of my brothers  
and sisters, you did it to me."*** *Matthew 25:40*

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### **Overview/ Impact**

Located in the parish of St. Ann, which is referred to as *'The Garden Parish'* for its bauxite, agriculture, livestock production and – perhaps most notably – its tourist attractions, <https://jis.gov.jm/information/parish-profiles/parish-profile-st-ann/>, is the Lower Buxton Primary and Infant School. Formerly known as the Lower Buxton All Age School, the institution is situated approximately 7 kilometres from the main town of Brown's Town in the parish.

- ❖ **Principal at the school, Ms. Opal Brown, gave a brief feedback about the economic background of the community. She said, "Most residents from Lower Buxton fall in the low-socioeconomic status. This is attributed to the fact that a large majority of members merely depend on a little farming, considered as 'back yard' farming, as a means of providing food for their family. Even in instances where some families cultivate crops for sale, they have more than one child attending school, and so, financially, they struggle to provide their children with an opportunity for education at times."**

Ms. Brown, who was employed as the Principal for the school in September 2015, mentioned that the infant department was established exactly one year after, in September 2016. "The initiative for an infant department came about as a need to fix the problem with children attending basic school irregularly or not at all in some cases."

She expounded on the matter by stating that, "There is a basic school in the community where parents would have to pay tuition for their child to attend. I think the basic school charges a rate of approximately JA\$3,500.00 per term. However, parents could not afford to keep their children in school. As a result, students would not attend school until they were six years old. Occasionally, the child started at the basic school, but due to the parents' inability to afford the fee, the student would be in and out of school. So, many students attended school either inconsistently or for the first time at the grade one level."

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The effects of students being introduced to formal education only at the entrance of grade one presented further issues, as explained by Ms. Brown. "It was identified that students who didn't get the early childhood start had more difficulty adjusting and struggled to fulfill the grade one syllabus."

Thankfully, administrators at Lower Buxton Primary could offer the children from Lower Buxton and surrounding communities an early childhood education at no cost. At its inception in 2016, classes were held in a room. "At that time, we didn't have a designated building for the infant department. We started out with twenty-six students in a small room. The space was not enough to comfortably accommodate all the students...we didn't even have a sick bay. We sectioned the one room into two...one for the four-year-olds and the other for the five-year-olds. Two chalkboards were placed at each end of the room and benches were used as partitions. So, the students sat back to back, meaning while the four-year-olds faced their chalkboard, their backs would be towards the five-year-olds and vice versa. This strategy was done to lessen the distraction between classes," Ms. Brown added.

Thanks to Canadian donors, Kisko Products and Helping Hands Jamaica Foundation, a brand new, self-contained school building was constructed for the students and staff for the Lower Buxton Primary Infant Department in August 2017.



Donors and friends from Kisko Products participating in construction of the new infant department at the school in August 2017.



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Representatives from Kisko Products, Food For The Poor Canada and Jamaica, and the school community, all gathered to witness the symbolic ribbon cutting at the official opening of the new infant department at Lower Buxton Primary School.



Completed Lower Buxton Primary School Infant Department



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The completed project includes an office, kitchen equipped with refrigerator and a four-burner stove, sick bay, staff bathroom, student bathrooms, three classrooms with security grills at windows and doors, a covered corridor, installation of play equipment and security fencing.

Since moving into the new building on April 9, 2018, after the Easter break, “we have noticed that the children are more comfortable, not having to contend with the primary school students. Teachers are also more comfortable. Having everything under one roof, classrooms, staff and student’s bathrooms and kitchen...it just makes this facility even more perfect. When the infant department was housed at a section on the primary block, their classrooms were separate from the bathroom, which is separate from the kitchen and office. A well appreciated component is the sick bay, which we have never had before, not even for the students from the primary school. We have a bed that is kept in the staff room and if a child feels ill, that’s where they stay until their parents come to get them. If a teacher is sick, the same bed is used,” Ms. Brown shared.



Sick bay not yet fully occupied as administrators are in the process of setting up the area.

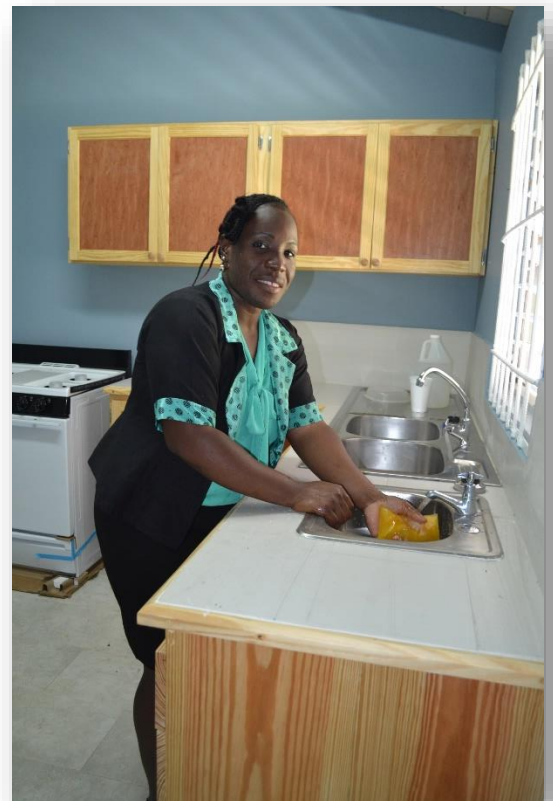
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With a current student population of thirty, Ms. Brown explained that, “we don’t have enough students to get two teachers from the Ministry of Education (MoE) whose student – teacher ratio is 20 students to 1 teacher. So, we now have one teacher and a caregiver. In addition, because of the current population, the kitchen is also not yet in full use. We would have to pay another cook if they were to use the kitchen at the infant department, but with the population being 30 we are not able to access a cook from the MoE. We are happy that a refrigerator came with the kitchen because it is now being used to store the juices and water for the students. We are hoping to get an increase in the student population, which would mean that the Ministry would provide us with another cook.”



Kitchen equipped with  
sufficient storage  
cupboards, stove,  
refrigerator and sink.

Here, Ms. Janie Taylor,  
Caregiver, is proud to  
utilize the kitchen  
facilities.



Describing the daily operations of the institution, Ms. Brown disclosed that, “the Ministry of Education pays the utility bills for both the primary and infant department. However,



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while the MoE provides a grant to assist with school supplies such as chalk, charts, papers, etc. for the primary block, they do not provide a grant for the infant department. This is because we are still going through the official certification process to be recognized by the MoE as an Early Child Center. Once we receive that certification we will be able to access grants from the MoE to assist with school supplies. The only source of gifts for the infant department is from Food For The Poor (FFP) and Donors. For this, we are very thankful. We have received books and stationary, which we are extremely grateful for because it helps us in the execution of lessons. Sometimes, stationary as simple as a crayon is appreciated because some parents cannot afford this item and so whatever we get from Food For The Poor we use it for the babies. We buy markers and cartridge papers for the infant department using a portion of the grant we receive for the primary block.”

Expressing her appreciation, Ms. Brown said, “the infant department was started on the good faith that Food For The Poor would be able to assist by providing a building. We are in a better position to assist the community because most people cannot pay for education for their children. Parents are very appreciative of the fact that they can send their children to an institution where they are not burdened with tuition fees and their children still receive optimal care and a comfortable and suitable environment. They are happy for the building. They say, ‘Thank God for Food For The Poor for blessing us with a new school. Having this school does well for the community because parents/guardians know they are registering their children in a safe environment where they can play and learn. At the community-based basic schools some of these things are lacking. On behalf of the community, I want to say a big ‘thank you’. The gratitude we feel is unending.”

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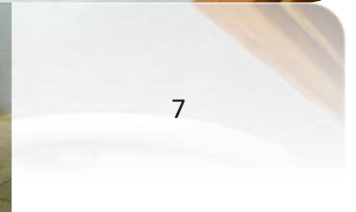
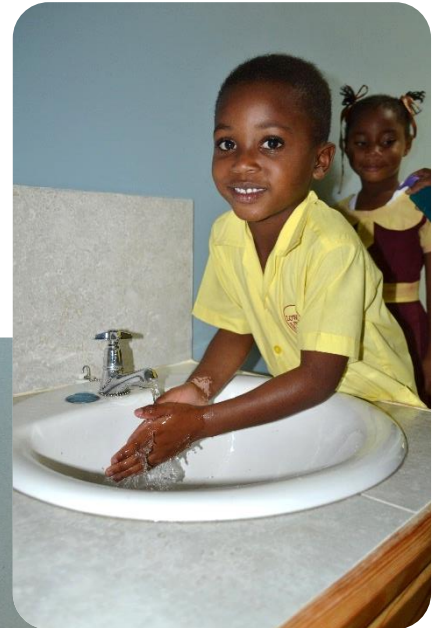
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- ❖ Ms. Nodia Wisdom has been teaching at Lower Buxton Primary for the past seventeen years. For the last two years, she has been the Early Childhood Teacher at the Infant Department. She said, "I am so excited about this building and couldn't wait for it to be built. I love being in my new classroom. The space is great and I just love the facility."

Speaking about the previous situation, Ms. Wisdom mentioned, "Prior to this, we were using one facility and we had to assemble the students, by gender, to use the bathroom. Males would use it together and females together. The facility was built for the primary students who are bigger children. This means that the toilets and wash areas were too high for the infant students. We had to lift them and most times we placed a block in front of the areas so the children could stand to reach the bowl and basin. I am so happy for the bathroom. It is very spacious and the children can manage by themselves because it's age-appropriate and child-friendly."



Bright smiles express just how these students are enjoying their new hand wash basin in their bathroom.





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Thanks once more to our donors, Kisko Products and Helping Hands Jamaica Foundation, the thirty students at Lower Buxton Infant Department now have 3-bathroom stalls, one of which is shown (left), shower (right) and double hand wash basins.



Highlighting the advantage and importance of having individual classrooms, Ms. Wisdom commented, "In the past, all students were in one big room even though the age was different and syllabus was different. Sometimes, all students did the same activities regardless of being a different age because it was difficult to cater to both sets of students separately when they were all in the same room. Now, with separate classrooms for the various age groups, each set of students, engage in activities suitable specifically for them. The space is much better."

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She went on to say, "I am extremely grateful that we also received a security fence in addition to having safety grills on the windows and doors. In the past, when we had our items out, such as play dough, pencils and crayons, when we returned the following morning, they would be missing because the room wasn't locked. Now, the bigger children can't just come on the property and so we no longer get negative complaints from parents about their children being exposed to the primary students. Previously, we had to carefully and keenly monitor the students to ensure they were not bullied by the bigger ones."

Ms. Wisdom and her sixteen five-year-old students now have their own classroom to freely move around and interact comfortably with each other.



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Expressing gratitude, Ms. Wisdom said, "A big thank you, to all the people who have worked so hard, contributed so much in time, effort, and money and all that you have given to ensure that this building is up and running and the children of Lower Buxton can have a much better place of learning where they are comfortable. Learning is at their door step, so they don't have to travel to Brown's Town or other schools outside the community because they have a facility that caters to their learning needs. So, I want to say a 'big thank you', to the Food For The Poor family and donors. We appreciate everything that is given to us and we promise that we are going to care for our environment. We are going to ensure that we take care of our furniture and new school."

❖ **Similar sentiments were shared by Ms. Janice Taylor, Caregiver, employed at the institution for the past two years. She said, "This building is truly a blessing from God...it's more spacious, comfortable and the children have more ventilation compared to the past when we were in a very hot and clustered room."**

"I am most thankful that we have our own secured building, with fencing. When we were at the primary school everything had to be scheduled to ensure separation between the primary and infant students. They had different lunch times, play time and even bathroom breaks. Now that we have our own secured building the entire school can function on the same time for the activities and we don't have to worry about any incidents between students."

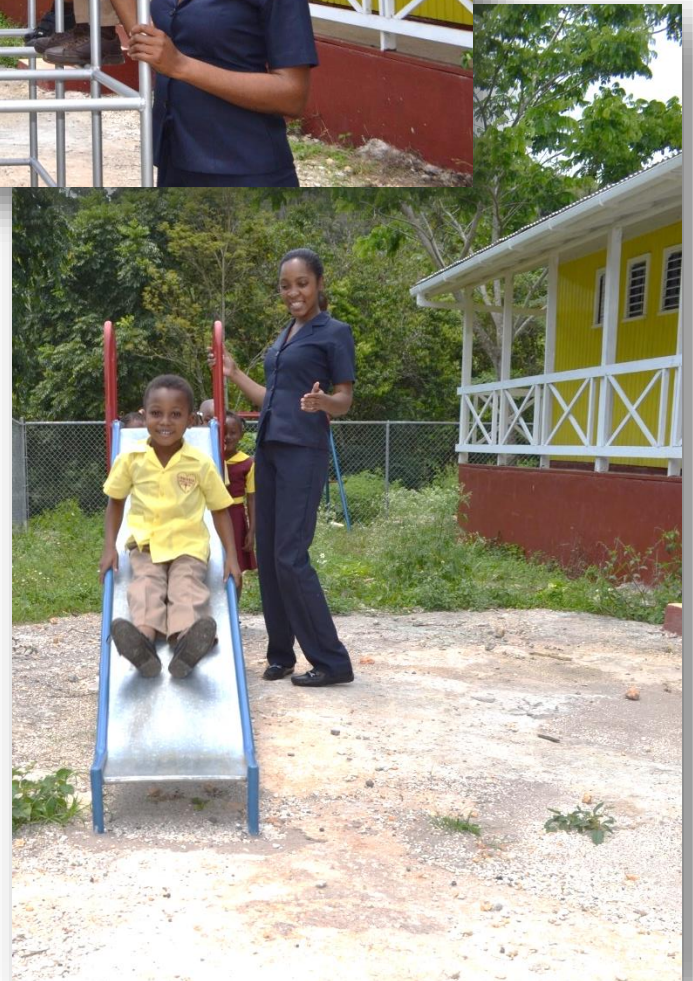
In addition to the perimeter fence, another well talked about component by the teachers is the play equipment, to which Ms. Taylor mentioned, "In the past, we would just play ring games outside because we didn't have play equipment. Having a variety of equipment will help to develop their gross motor skills and cognitive abilities. The children love when I take them outside and they get to use the different equipment. They are just excited."



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Carefully monitored by Teacher, Ms. Nodia Wisdom, these students show how they have been having fun while playing on the newly installed equipment.



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With spacious classrooms, teachers are better able to display various learning corners such as this counting corner. Additionally, students are better able to interact with the items now that they get a more hands on approach.

Ms. Taylor further added, “We couldn’t move around as easily as we can now. Food For The Poor and donors make us stand out as teachers because we now have our own space and we can carry out teaching more effectively.”

Her words of appreciation were, “We thank FFP, donors and all those who made this possible for us. We really needed a better school environment because we were clustered and in a hot room. May God bless you (FFP and donors) richly, and I hope you will continue to help many others in need.”

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*\*The Ministry of Education (MoE) is the government entity responsible for the management and administration of public education in Jamaica. The Ministry was first established in 1953, as the Ministry of Education and Social Welfare. Currently, the MoE carries out the Government of Jamaica's mandate of ensuring a system which secures quality education and training of all citizens of Jamaica to optimize individual and national development.*

<http://www.moey.gov.jm/about>

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