



SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION PROJECT

**Fyffes Pen Primary and Infant School
Additional Classroom Block**



Fyffes Pen, St. Elizabeth

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

Overview/ Impact

The Fyffes Pen Primary School has been in operation for over 110 years. The facility, which recently merged with a nearby basic school, is now known as the Fyffes Pen Primary and Infant School. According to **Mr. Mordant Mitchell, Principal at the institution**, *“At inception, the primary school started like most schools in Jamaica, where it was housed at the Dober Moravian Church. Over the years, the improvement in enrollment, attendance, performance and outreach, resulted in the need for additional classroom space at the school.”* Mr. Mitchell spoke about the then conditions stating that, *“Three to four different classes were sharing one hall space, where chalkboards were the only partition. We didn’t have a separate mode for traffic, so if someone was going to one class, they had to pass through almost all the classes. And so, even if it was a visitor, assessor, teacher or even me as the principal, we always had to walk through almost all the classes. The hall was also the route to get to the tuck shop, which meant that everyone had to pass through that area to purchase lunch. We had grades one to four occupying the hall as their classroom space, which meant all those classes were affected.”*

Before: The hall at Fyffes Pen Primary school that was once partitioned by chalkboards for classes.



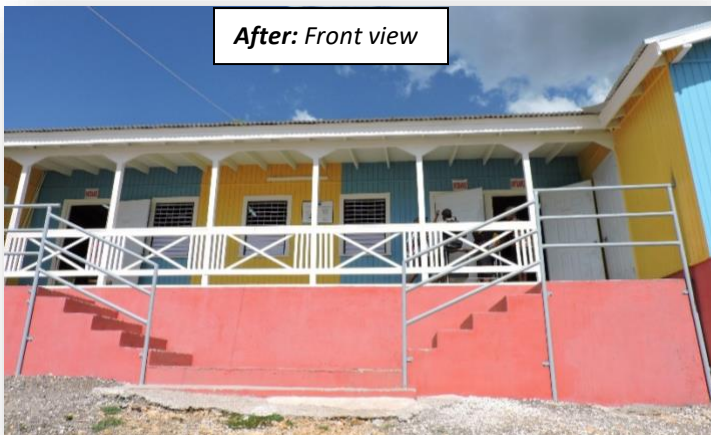
Though the need was evident, “*The school was unable even to fathom financing anything of this nature.*” Mr. Mitchell emphasized that, “It would have to be some external assistance and I am sure the *****Ministry of Education (MOE)** could not do something of this magnitude at this time.”

Thanks to the continuous support of our donors - Helping Hands Jamaica Foundation who partnered with local implementing partner Food For The Poor Canada - the students and staff at Fyffes Pen Primary School now have the additional classrooms they needed. The project, which saw the team of volunteers participating in the construction of the new classroom block, was well received.

After: Front-Right view: The newly-constructed classroom block that is utilized by the primary students at Fyffes Pen Primary and Infant School.



After: Front view



After: Back view



The principal said that, *"When you look at other rural institutions in situations where they too are lacking space and we were gifted with such a gift, for Food For The Poor and Helping Hands Jamaica Foundation to bless us in such a manner, is something that we will always treasure."*

Mr. Mitchell went on to say, *"The impact is one that is totally positive in every account, from the community, to corporate areas in St. Elizabeth, particularly Black River and of course, the teachers and students. Students say that they are now more relaxed because they have more classroom space. They can make their displays and have them mounted and safeguarded. And for that, I think each student is now able to give their classroom their own signature look. We got a safe structure with smoke detectors so, in the event of a fire, we will be alerted immediately. The indiscipline that we had from students is no longer present since we got our new classroom block. Can you imagine having four (4) classes in one room divided by chalkboards? The noise level, just from the students speaking moderately, was so unbearable to the teachers that were furthest away and even teachers who were not sharing that same hall space. Students would also run under the chalkboard, being mischievous. You can just imagine one teacher writing on one side of the board and another teacher writing on the other side of the same chalkboard. It was very distracting, and I can understand why our grades would have not been what it is like now, now that we have our new classroom block."*

He continued, *"Coming from other schools, I am accustomed to having one long room being shared by different classes at the same time and as a student, I grew up in a similar environment. When I came to Fyffes Pen Primary three years ago and saw that it was a similar situation, I knew I had to work hard to improve the classroom setting. I wrote to Food For The Poor and I was so happy with the quick response. Not just stating that they had received my request, but also declaring that they would assist us with getting a new classroom block. The response and getting the actual building happened before anyone's' expectations, even my own. It was something great for me, it's a great achievement and one that has added a lot to the whole foresight and leadership of the school. I had planned to reach out to other institutions for help but due to the quick response from the organization, I didn't have to write to any other entity."*

Another major improvement highlighted by Mr. Mitchell is that, *“From the Christmas 2019 exams, where students would have only spent one term in the new classroom block, I have seen that they have shown marked improvements in their grades. They have improved tremendously. Students are more academically inclined because of their spacious and comfortable classrooms, thanks to Helping Hands Jamaica Foundation and Food For The Poor. Their attention skills have improved and what I have also observed is that, the behavior of the students have also been enhanced. So, what we have had from the new injection of classroom spaces is just a greater school. The ethos of the school has improved and the respectability that the school has gained over that short period is something that I will always remember for the rest of my life.”*

In explaining how the new facilities have improved working conditions, the principal said, *“It may be a short time to make the assessment, but the teachers are certainly more comfortable. There is a serious international migration of teachers currently happening and Fyffes Pen is not on the list. It means then, that our teachers are now feeling happy because they have their own classroom, keys and they can work in comfort. What is also great is that the teachers feel this level of worth and belonging, where they are more interested in the preservation of their classroom space.”*

Mr. Mordant Mitchell, (left) stands in front of the sign installed on the new classroom block. Sharing in the moment are the three (3) teachers who now utilize the new classrooms. From right are Mr. Kingsley Walters, Ms. Denise Miller and Mrs. Josseth Richards-Morris.



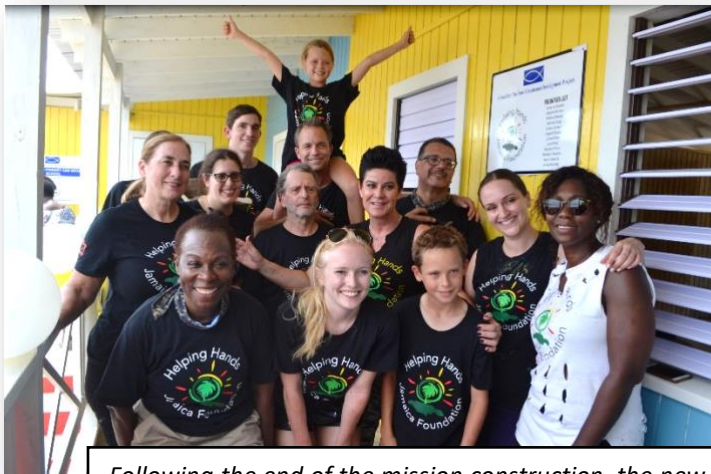
With the new block, the school has said goodbye to having classes outside under trees. *“This is great because outside, the elements would have always disturbed us, such as when vehicles are passing on the road. One of the great things about this project done by Helping Hands Jamaica Foundation and Food For The Poor, was the construction of an elevation and wheelchair ramp. It would have been challenging for students to access the new block, particularly students who are disabled. Added to that, the link-way is properly railed, which makes it safer for students to access the new classrooms.”* Mr. Mitchell shared as he spoke of the importance of a safe school environment.

The additional classrooms are now used to house grades two, three and four classes. The principal mentioned that, *“The number of students in those classrooms is about half the school population, which is approximately 50 – 60 students. In addition to the three (3) classrooms that we got, there are also two other rooms. One we are hoping to set-up as an archive area, where students can do their research, etc. and the other will be used as a storeroom. Those two areas are too small to be utilized as a classroom. We were told that a bathroom would have been included in the construction, but we have sufficient bathrooms on the property now, hence the decision to make better use of those two areas as an archive and storeroom.”*

Mr. Mitchel was pleased to share that, *“Since we got our new block from Helping Hands, we have been able to use the hall as a common area for general assemblies such as devotions. We are now able to schedule the use of that area for lessons, which requires the use of the projector. We are now able to make use of that space for larger gatherings without having to disturb classes or having to move chalkboards. The classrooms we got from the organization have allowed us to use other spaces that were available at the school more effectively and efficiently.”*

In closing, Mr. Mitchell expressed his appreciation by saying, *“This project at Fyffes Pen is greatly valued and we want the donors to know that we are cheering them on as they continue to bless other communities in Jamaica and across the world. I have never seen a construction project completed in such short time; I was taken aback by the quick transformation of the school.”*

What stands out most is the professionalism of the team at Helping Hands Jamaica Foundation and Food For The Poor. I have never seen another team of workers so kind, understanding and thoughtful. School was in session during the construction phase and I cannot believe that with the magnitude of construction that went on, we have not had any reports of anyone being injured. Most of the work was not done to disturb students. I was so happy with the teams' professionalism and thoughtfulness. Helping Hands Jamaica Foundation and Food For The Poor are now like family to Fyffes Pen school and will always be. Reminiscing on to the day the mission team was here, I saw that it wasn't just a project but a bonding with the community. Even after the mission ended, donors contacted the school to check up on us and our students, calling some by full name and that is remarkable."



Following the end of the mission construction, the new classroom block was officially handed over on June 27, 2019 to the Fyffes Pen Primary and Infant School. Sharing in the occasion were the team from Helping Hands Jamaica Foundation, Food For The Poor Canada & Jamaica along with the government representatives and community members.

Mrs. Josseth Richards-Morris, a senior teacher, has been teaching at the institution for the past 27 years. Highlighting her passion for the years of service, she stated that, *“Aside from the fact that I live walking distance from the school, my passion is when a student I taught, excels in life. When my past students see me on the streets, they walk up to me and say, ‘miss you taught me’, even when I don’t remember their faces, it’s a very rewarding feeling. I do have a love and passion for children.”*

Mrs. Richards-Morris mentioned that, *“Though in the latter years, I had my own classroom, I remember years gone by, I was also one of the teachers who taught from the hall. It was really challenging, in terms of the noise level, because chalkboards were the only partition we had. Teachers had to be shouting for students to hear, which didn’t really help the situation. Sometimes, we had to go outside under trees because it was hot in the hall. So, when it wasn’t raining, we had the lessons outside. If it was raining, I gave them lessons directly from the textbooks because in those instances, students would be contending with noise from the neighboring classes as well as noise from the rain.”*

In her new grade two class, which currently caters to 15 students, comprising of six (6) males and nine (9) females, Mrs. Richards-Morris said, *“We can now display our charts/learning materials as well as the students’ work. Back then, we had challenges displaying the charts because the hall was also used by the community. Whenever there was a community event, we had to take down the materials to accommodate the events and then remount them for school the following day. In addition to that, this new classroom is very spacious and instead of only doing seated work, I have adequate room to do activities that I would normally have to do outside.”*

Mrs. Josseth Richards-Morris now has a comfortable and spacious classroom to easily attend to her students without noise nuisance, thanks to our donors, Helping Hands Jamaica Foundation.



Speaking about the day she officially moved into the new classroom, Mrs. Richard-Morris said, *"It was a moment of 'wow', coming from the hall, we have more space now, we are no longer clustered nor do we have to worry about poor ventilation."*

Mrs. Richards-Morris conveyed her gratitude by saying, *"We are grateful for what Helping Hands Jamaica Foundation and Food For The Poor have given us. On behalf of the board of governance of Fyffes Pen Primary School, my other colleagues, students, parents and the community, I just want to say a, big thank you for making us feel at home in our own classroom. Thank you!! from Fyffes Pen Primary School Gratitude is a must."*

Another teacher who has experience working from the hall, is Ms. Denise Miller, who has been at the school over 18 years. She currently teaches grade four, where there is a total of 18 students in her class consisting of 11 males and seven (7) females.

Reiterating the concerns of those who worked from the hall, she said, *“My main challenge was the noise level. Whenever another class was in session, my students could not hear what I was saying because, the only barrier was a chalkboard at the time. My students couldn’t concentrate in those instances. I was always quarrelling with the other teachers because when they start to teach; I couldn’t hear my students either. There was always quarrelling back and forth.”*

She followed up by explaining that, *“I took my students outside for sessions like reading, but there was no seat outside, so it wasn’t comfortable. Due to the constant disturbance during class time, I normally have to offer extra lessons after school for one hour. During that hour, I try to teach my students as much of what they would have missed, during the regular class time. Students were a bit hesitant at first, but when we explained that the extra lesson is needed because they had examinations, they complied. Sometimes, the extra lessons were not only for the students to catch-up on what they missed, but we had to put in more work because I saw that they needed the additional assistance with their academics. A fee is required for extra lessons; however, it wasn’t a hard and fast rule that students had to pay for the lessons.”*

Giving further details about the advantages of having separate and spacious classrooms, Ms. Miller said, *“Grade four is project based, especially for core subjects, which means that students are required to do lots of project designs. In the hall, there was no space to display the projects completed by students and that too, was also a main challenge in my class back then. Having the work showcased is essential as it helps to reinforce the lessons taught.”*

With a proud laughter, Ms. Miller stated that, *“All my charts are exhibited all the time. I remember back then, whenever we had a function, which is normally held in the hall, all the charts would have to be packed away and all the benches would have to be pushed aside. But here, in our new*

classroom, we no longer worry about those things. My class is in intact and I don't have the challenge of pulling down and putting up charts, etc."

In addition to teaching, Ms. Miller has firsthand experience of learning in such an environment. She disclosed that, *"I am a past student of Fyffes Pen Primary School, and I must declare that I am very much elated, this is quite an improvement from my time as a student. For one, we have adequate and comfortable space to accommodate more students."*



Ms. Denise Miller is joined by one of her students for a photo opt inside their new classroom.

Ms. Miller expressed thanks for the new and improved classroom block by saying that, *"Students are more comfortable and happier. It doesn't just show in their work but also in their expressions. They do say, 'miss I am happy to be here, or I am able to do my work in peace'. I would like to say a, 'big, big thank you' to Helping Hands Jamaica Foundation and Food For The Poor. My students, parents and I are very grateful for this classroom. I have noticed that the students' work has improved, because the environment is conducive for learning and they are more comfortable now. I remember when we officially moved in September 2019, we were so excited."*

Mr. Kingsley Walters, who has been working at the institution for two years, is the most recent of the three teachers to join the team.

Coming from an institution where he was accustomed to having his own classroom, Mr. Walters said, *“I came on board when classes were still held in the hall and it was a horrible transition. I am not used to having to share a classroom partitioned by chalkboards, but I had to adjust. I found it difficult to project my voice when talking to my students because I didn’t want to disturb the other classes. Sometimes, I had to take the students outside for lessons, even though we would have preferred to be in the classroom. For example, when we were doing drama class, which had to be held outdoors. I dreaded those times. But then again, I felt somewhat relieved sometimes, because I knew that we would not be disturbing the other students and teachers.”*

He went on to share similar concerns regarding the disturbance of lesson time. *“If someone was passing, we had to stop working, which meant that at times, we weren’t able to complete our lessons in the scheduled class time. Like most teachers, I had to have lessons before school started in the morning and after school is dismissed in the evenings. Regular school time is 8:30am – 3:00pm, so we had classes about an hour in the morning and again in the evenings after dismissal.”*



Mr. Kingsley Walters is joined by one of his students as they give a ‘thumb-up’ as a stamp of agreement that the new classroom is very comfortable.



Mr. Walters was happy to showcase his new classroom. Here he is making notes on the whiteboard, in preparation for his next lesson.

Mr. Walters was very pleased to state that, *“It’s a whole difference now being in my own class. Having my own space, I don’t have to worry about disturbing anyone else. The students have their own area because in the hall, I remember students who sat to the back of my class would be playing with students from the other class under the chalkboard. But now we don’t have that to worry about. In addition to that, there were times when I would be teaching, and it affected the other teachers and I felt bad when they complained. I wished that I would have my own space to do away with those situations and thanks to you (donors), today (Jan.16, 2020), I can finally say I have my own classroom. When I heard that we would be getting additional classrooms from the organization, I was so happy.”*

Having a total of 21 students comprising of six (6) females and 15 males, Mr. Walters mentioned that, *“I am from this community, so as a resident I can say having these developments at Fyffes Pen Primary and Infant School speaks volumes and it says that the school is progressing. We have since seen an increase in the student population, which is great because I have more students this term, 2019 – 2020, than I had in the previous year.”*

With a smile of satisfaction, he added, *“The first day we moved into our new classroom was very exciting both for me as well as the students. I think we did less work on that day as we basked in the excitement. I have seen an improvement in the students’ behavior, and I am able to better monitor them. They are now more attentive, which means we get more classwork done.”*

Mr. Walters ended by expressing praises, *“To the sponsors who donated the lovely classroom space to our school, I want to say, I don’t think you realize what you have really done for us. We are more than grateful; we are eternally grateful. Thinking about the past and where we are now, I am seeing a bright future for this school. Even when we get visitors, they are so impressed to see the improvements at Fyffes Pen Primary and Infant School. A very big thank you on behalf of the students, teachers and the community.”*



Shaiquen James, is a 9-year-old grade four student from Ms. Millers' class. In sharing her views about her new classroom, Shaiquen said, *"I am happy being here, more than when I was in the hall because down there, I usually have a lot of noise, but it is quieter in my new classroom. I can get to focus on my work more, especially my favorite subject, which is Language Arts. Thank you (FFP and donors) very much."*

-END-