



Phoenix School Sylhet: A model school for children with autism

The opening of Phoenix School Sylhet this November is the culmination of a 5-year project in Bangladesh to share outstanding practice and transfer key skills for the education of children with autism.

The project started in 2015 with a vision of sharing our expertise to enable children with autism to be educated and to develop their full potential and to live fulfilling lives. Working in partnership with APASEN and the Bangladesh government that vision has resulted this year with the opening of a model school and day care centre. There has been substantial progression from the first visit by **Stewart Harris, Executive Headteacher** of Phoenix School London, to Bangladesh to gather initial information about need, current practice and provision in Dhaka and Sylhet.

The Bangladeshi diaspora is very strong in East London as are the links between our school community and Sylhet. Parents of children attending Phoenix School London have been very supportive of our plans to start a school for children with autism in Sylhet. We believe that the Phoenix School Sylhet will have a significant effect on our school, families and in turn on our children's learning. It is an initiative that will have positive outcomes across both communities.



The first visit to Bangladesh in November 2015.

From the outset, there has been engagement with local practitioners, parents and Bangladesh Government agencies to build our rigorous and locally relevant approach to planning and implementation. We have been careful at every stage to set clear objectives for each follow up visit and in so doing have ensured steady progress towards today's successful opening of this educational and day care provision.

In 2017, with the support from APASEN, **Veronica Armson, Associate Headteacher** of Phoenix School London, with a group of our London schoolteachers, provided a training and shadowing programme in four Sylhet Schools for children with autism. We identified where new resources, improved environment and change in practice could be of benefit to pupils.



Visit to Sylhet by Veronica Armson, Shelina Mannan and Jubeda Begum - April 2017.

The collaborative approach continued with an intensive programme of meetings in Dhaka with the Bangladesh Government's initiative, NAAND (the National Academy for Autism and Neurodevelopmental Disabilities). Invites were sent to the Bangladesh Ministry of Education staff to London where we provided them with a practice briefing at Phoenix School.

Working with APASEN in London, we raised funding to continue our work and in 2018 APASEN identified a property in Sylhet that we felt would be an ideal location for a school and Day Centre. That property is now the Phoenix School Sylhet and APASEN Day Centre, which is run by APASEN in partnership with Phoenix School London.

A return visit to Sylhet in February 2019 took place so there could be focus on recruiting teachers and assistant teachers from the local community. There was a tremendous local interest in these roles and we appointed some excellent staff for the school. The staff began their training with a training plan that included an online-accredited Open University course.



Veronica Armson and **Stewart Harris** then provided further guidance and support on a follow up visit in June 2019. During this visit, we met parents and children in the school, and after we left, our school staff in Sylhet visited the families at home. This gave them the opportunity to assess the children and ensure they were ready to begin their new school journey in July 2019.



The Phoenix School Sylhet team February 2019.

The playground at Phoenix school Sylhet.

As well as providing the recruitment and training for Phoenix School Sylhet, the London school has also been involved in advising the new school and providing resources. There has been close partnership working with APASEN to deliver the considerable work needed to provide the amenities and environment needed to promote the pupils learning and wellbeing.



Practice, training and further developments have continued since July 2019. Team management, team teaching, occupational therapy strategies and sensory initiatives have all been part of the programme. Throughout July and August 2019, three teachers and a speech and language therapist provided training and guidance to our Phoenix Sylhet staff.



Staff training August 2019 & Phoenix School Sylhet - the new completed building.

From September 2019, a weekly online communication protocol between Phoenix School London and Phoenix School Sylhet has been set up to help teachers with teaching practice and management skills. It has been so exciting and rewarding to see how the building has developed from an unused building to an excellent learning environment for young children with autism.

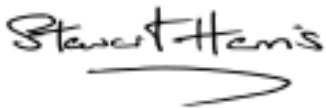
The official opening of Phoenix School Sylhet School will take place on **16th November 2019** and will be an opportunity to celebrate the hard work, co-operation and partnership of all who have been involved.

We want to see Phoenix School Sylhet continue and flourish becoming a model school that offers advice and training for other specialist services across Sylhet and Bangladesh.

Of course, this will need ongoing funding, as does our vision of spreading further our outstanding teaching for children with autism. Ensuring that more children with autism in Bangladesh have the education and help, they need to enable them to live fulfilling lives.

The financial plan has been refreshed for these developments and to ensure the financial management and accountability needed for any funding we secure. Our financial plan is available from either of us to potential funders wishing to consider making a contribution to this inspiring and deserving endeavour.

We hope you are able to take the time to consider this.



Stewart Harris
Executive Headteacher
Phoenix School London



Veronica Armson
Associate Headteacher
Phoenix School London