

## *The chance to dream in Nepal... and Kent*

***Education has the power to make dreams come true. It opens up new horizons of opportunity, enabling children to strike a path to a future they imagine and wish for. That's why a new project at Russell House is so exciting***

One of the privileges of working in a family school like Russell House is seeing children flourish, growing in confidence and independence. We see first-hand how education shapes and changes lives. How amazing then, to be able to bring that opportunity to children in Nepal and to share experiences between our two schools.

Our community at Russell House is funding a new school in Ishma, a rural village of about 1,600 inhabitants located in the foothills of the Himalayas. It will provide education to around 200 children in the village, where before there was nothing.

The thrill that rippled through our school hall when we launched the project was unmistakable. Our partner charity, United World Schools, described the country – its beauty, mountains and treacherous roads – and why it's difficult for some children to access an education there. Most exciting were photos from Ishma, where the foundations for our school were already under way.

Pupils were introduced to Surya from Nepal who described how, as a child, he got up at four in the morning to take the goats to the field and collect water before heading down into the valley to school, which started at 10am. Sometimes he never made it, more attracted by fishing in the river than completing the journey to school.

"I was one of the children who walked three hours to school," he explained. "My mother believed education was important. She wanted me to learn to read, write and count – and therefore to dream. She dragged me to school and left me there. Even then, sometimes I climbed out of the window at the back and went home! Then my mother heard about studying in the capital, Katmandu. I walked 28 hours to take an exam allowing me to study there and that is the reason I am here with you today."

Surya recently met with the community of Ishma who were really keen for a school to be built in their village. Most of the villagers are involved in agriculture and their homes are typically without running water and have little electricity. Their children currently do not have a school they can go to. Many of the adults didn't go to school, but they know how important it is.

With our support, the community started building the foundations in the lush green valley as soon as the rains had passed in September. By the time you read this article, the school will be open and, for the first time, around 200 children in the village will be going to school, learning to read, write and count, enjoying art and science, Nepali, English and maths lessons and starting to dream.

It is a life-changing project for the local community. We think that our involvement will be a life-changing experience for our children, too, here in Kent. The learning opportunities are as exciting as they are varied. It is a project in global citizenship, opening our children's eyes to other people's lives in a way they can relate to.

Before Surya left us, our children drew pictures to welcome the new pupils to their school and recorded a welcome video: "Hello, we are Russell House. Good luck! Hope you have a good day at school – and don't climb out the window!"

Funny, exciting and tangible. This is the start of a project that will enrich many lives.



Russell House pupils during the recording of a video to welcome children to their new school in Ishma



In the verdant valley, lush and green following the monsoon rains, foundations for the new school building are well underway



Russell House children drew pictures of themselves to say hello to the new pupils of Ishma