



A few years ago I was involved in mediation in an African country after severe fighting had driven many people from their homes. A sports stadium had been turned into a refugee camp. Rows and rows of white tents, packed together, stretched into the distance. It had become a town of 25,000 people.

In the middle of the camp was a clear area, under some trees. Crowds of children were sitting in the hot sun. I went close to see what was happening and found that a local church had created a school, so that the children should not miss too much education just because of war. Each class had up to 250 people in it, writing on scraps of paper with just a blackboard as a teaching aid.

The church is still a massive provider of education in the UK with about a million children going to some kind of church school. St Anne's is just one example, but it is a special one because of the quality of its staff and the standards it reaches through the hard work and good discipline of its children.

What makes a church school special? Lots of things, most of them impossible to measure. But some can be identified. It puts children first, as do many schools, but a church school does so, because our faith makes it clear that in putting children first we are doing what God wants. Secondly, in being a safe place to explore the great challenge of education and in seeking to ensure that children are educated not just taught. They must be able to make up their own minds about faith, but based on knowledge not rumour, and to learn to be those who will make a difference in this region. All this comes because in church schools we believe that every child is created in God's image, and is uniquely special whatever their gifts and abilities.

This school is very special, and it produces special people, both staff and children. My prayer is for the presence of Jesus to guide and inspire everything that happens here.

+ Toshi Dunsin