

A Seat in the Classroom, A Future Beyond It

During my recent visit to 20 schools in Pakistan, it was clear how much the physical environment affects a child's education. Some schools showed what is possible with the right conditions. Solomon Convent School stood out as a safe, welcoming, and well-organised environment where children were keen to learn and older students stayed on to complete their education. One child said, "The school is so much nicer than my home." Wouldn't it be great if every child could say the same?

Sadly, however, many schools operate in buildings poorly suited for learning, with overcrowding, broken furniture, and unreliable electricity - conditions that make it hard for children to engage.

Few of us would send our children to classrooms without proper desks or chairs. Yet at some schools many children still sit on the floor to learn. Even here in the UK, schools can offer refuge for those facing difficulties at home. How much more important, then, must it be for the children of poor sweepers, brick-kiln workers, and day labourers? A safe classroom, a working light, a proper desk, and committed teachers may seem like small things, but together they can transform a child's future, offering dignity, security, and hope. Starfish Asia is working hard to make these transformations a reality. **Because every child deserves a seat in the classroom, and a chance to dream beyond it.** - Rob Bavington, CEO



Inside you'll find...



The Great Starfish Trail - Every Step Counts

The Great Starfish Trail is back! And this year we'll be raising funds to help make improvements in the schools that are struggling with their physical environment. From **13th-28th June** volunteers will be taking on a number of individual challenges. For more information, or to get involved please visit:

<https://donorbox.org/great-starfish-trail-2026>

Donate



- ★ Voices from the Children: What school is really like.
- ★ Schoolbook deliveries bring joy to over 11,000 students.
- ★ New seminars empowering girls to face the threat of abduction.
- ★ Welcome from the new Chairman of the UK Board of Trustees.

Voices from the Children

What is School really like for the children you support?

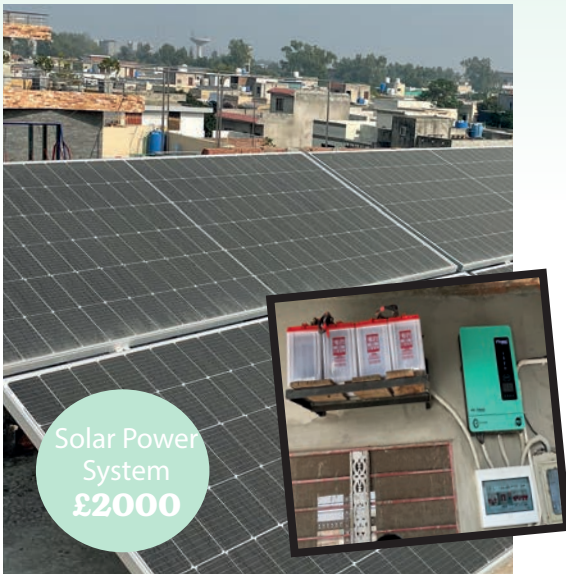
In a recent conversation with students from our partner schools across Pakistan, we had the chance to hear directly from them—about what they love, the challenges they face, and their hopes for the future. Despite attending a range of schools from rural villages to larger cities, one message came through clearly: **children value their education**. One student shared, *“We like coming to school because we can study and our teachers help us when we don’t understand.”* (Meerab, Voice of Children) We were also encouraged by their ambitions to become doctors, nurses and teachers.

But they also spoke with quiet honesty about what is still needed: reliable electricity, safe drinking water, better facilities, and spaces where they can learn and grow. Starfish Asia is working hard to tackle these ongoing challenges with practical solutions.

“I come to school because I want to be a good person. I have lots of friends and the teachers are nice”
(Jidoun, Risen Hope)



POWER for Every School



Solar Power System
£2000



“When the electricity goes off, it becomes very difficult to read and study” (Radiant Way)

Many small schools in Pakistan face daily power cuts in overcrowded classrooms where temperatures can reach 40°C, leaving children without lights or fans. Out of the 44 schools we support, 16 now benefit from solar power, providing reliable lighting and cooling. The difference is immediate: a more comfortable learning environment for students and teachers, and significantly reduced running costs for the schools.

In 2023, **The Kingdom of Heaven School**, with over 700 pupils, installed solar panels and cut electricity bills by 40–50%. And still the benefits go beyond cost savings. Principal Pervaiz says: *“During load shedding, teaching was extremely difficult and office work was constantly disrupted. Now, with solar power, we have electricity all the time. Teachers can work effectively, and the children feel comfortable.”* While not every school is currently suitable for solar installation, many more could benefit. Each new system helps hundreds of children learn in comfort and continue their education without disruption.

A SEAT for Every Child



“We don’t have enough good chairs and desks - some are broken.” (Radiant Way)

As with any furniture, continued use leads to damage and as student numbers increase, there can be shortages or simply not enough space. Starfish Pakistan recently provided **The Shine Education School** with new desks and whiteboards, and the classrooms have been transformed. *“Before, many children had to sit on the floor, which made learning challenging for both students and teachers. After receiving the desks, our classroom environment has completely changed. The children are so happy, comfortable, and excited to learn.”*



Set of 10 chairs
£30

HYDRATION in the Heat



“We need clean drinking water in our school.” (Voice of Children)

With temperatures often rising above 40 degrees in the height of summer, access to clean, cool drinking water is essential for students’ health and concentration in the classroom. **The Holy Shepherd Grammar School** in Karachi is enjoying a brand new water cooler. Principal Danish wrote: *“This thoughtful support has made a meaningful difference in the daily lives of our children, ensuring a healthier and more supportive learning environment for them.”*



Water Cooler
£150

More than a Makeover

The Lord will guide you always;
he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land
and will strengthen your frame.
You will be like a well-watered garden,
like a spring whose waters never fail. - Isaiah 58 v11

In communities where families are living in poverty, daily life is hard. But Isaiah reminds us that God has promised to provide our needs and restore our souls. Coming to a decent, comfortable building everyday helps combat the downtrodden narrative that characterises their lives as a minority. Often small improvements can make a BIG difference, and also demonstrate God's love for His people:

- A fresh layer of **paint** can brighten a dull classroom, covering the concrete walls and creating a blank canvas for creative minds.
- **Repairs** to cracks in the walls, broken windows and doors can lift the environment and demonstrate that extra bit of care.
- **Ceiling fans** provide much-needed relief from the intense summer heat, making the classroom more comfortable.
- Decent, functioning **toilet blocks** ensure safe hygiene and dignity for the staff and children, encouraging higher attendance.
- Indoor **games equipment** gives children the chance to play, even if they don't have a suitable outdoor space.



Our new school building makes us feel very good - everything is cleaner and better now." (Mirab, HSGS)

Can of
Paint
£10



"Thank you for the books, uniforms, and everything you have given us, Your support has made our school better." (Radiant Way)

Thanks to the generosity of donors and trusts, 11,489 sets of books have been distributed so far. 8,141 primary-aged children across 43 Starfish-supported schools took delivery in May. Due to delays in printing, and priority given to government schools, the remaining books will continue to be distributed as they become available. We're also delighted to have been able to supply 22 additional schools with books for 3,321 students. THANK YOU!



Bringing Learning to Life

Phela Taleemi Basta

In addition to the basics, our desire is to introduce new tools to the classroom to enhance learning and make it more interactive. In April, 16 teachers from six schools were invited to a training session with an exciting resource called the 'Pehla Taleemi Basta' (First Learning Backpack). This educational kit, developed by the Teachers' Resource Centre (TRC) in Pakistan, consists of a folding cloth bag, filled with materials designed to promote early numeracy and literacy. Caroline and Rafaqat introduced teachers to the contents, including puppets, flashcards, magnets, magnifying glasses and threading tools, and guided them in how to deliver interactive and engaging lessons.

Evidence has shown that the use of PTB across both rural and urban schools has resulted in a positive transformation. We're excited to see it in action over coming weeks!



Jolly Phonics



On 18th April teachers from Amazing Grace School, Mission School System and New Life School were introduced to the 'Jolly Phonics' approach, which teaches independent reading and writing by using simple sounds to formulate words. Participants were presented with teachers' guidebooks so they could see in a practical way how the approach will be used.

There was a real energy during and after the training session, with teachers and school leaders expressing commitment to bring change and teach their students to read and write effectively. Some had even started implementing what they had learned the very next morning! The next step will be to visit each school to provide additional support and observe how it is going.

Empowering Girls to be Strong and Safe

"Sometimes it is hard to come to school because people on the streets make us feel uncomfortable."

Following a recent high-profile case of alleged kidnapping and forced conversion, Starfish Pakistan began a series of events to help raise awareness amongst teachers and young girls, and develop good strategies to protect against such incidents. There were 11 dates planned between 29th April and 15th May, covering 20 schools and including around 1000 students and 100 teachers.



"This seminar encouraged and empowered our girls to speak openly about their personal concerns." - Zafar Daniel, Amazing Grace School

Christian author Anna Townsend has published a book highlighting this topic. She is currently offering a 5% discount to Starfish supporters who purchase any of her books via <https://ko-fi.com/anna3369/link/shop>. Please enter the discount code STARFISH at the online check-out to take advantage of this offer. In addition, for every copy of **Our Sisters** purchased using the code, £3 will be donated to Starfish.



Reflections

Jacob Bavington, son of Starfish Asia CEO, recently accompanied Rob on a visit to Pakistan:

"One of the most important parts of my trip was gaining a deeper understanding of Pakistan's culture and context. There is so much unrest, yet life goes on as normal. The bureaucracy is also very complex, but people somehow manage in the very archaic system. This perspective was important when visiting schools and projects. Oftentimes it felt like a solution was obvious, but in the chaos even 'straightforward' ideas became difficult. A lot of the challenges schools face also stem from the culture, such as boys dropping out early because their fathers do not value education, or great teachers moving away when they get married and then staying at home.

It was amazing to see the drive and passion many project leaders have for serving marginalised communities, and 'the proof is in the pudding' when visiting the better performing schools. Unfortunately, some projects lacked that sense of purpose and appeared to be more inward-looking. But I was comforted by how Starfish Pakistan navigated these challenges and pushed them to change for the better. Progress may be slow at times, but it is steady and I am hopeful for the futures of the projects as well as all the children.



Jacob at the Ananias Home

I'm reminded of one of my dad's favourite quotes from Mike Wakely: 'Without us they can do very little, but without them we can do nothing'. Overall the trip left me motivated to be better in my own life and made me very proud of everyone involved."



With a student at St. Pauls School, Mian Chanu

Welcome to the New Chairman

We are delighted to welcome Colin Wrigley as the new Chair of the UK Board, having served as a Trustee for five years. Colin first came to Pakistan in 1982 as a CMS Mission Partner, teaching Maths at Karachi Grammar School, before becoming Principal. Over the years, he has managed both high-fee and low-fee schools in Quetta and Karachi, giving him deep experience of Pakistan's culture and educational landscape. Married in Karachi, with a son born there, Colin has a long personal connection to the country. He is passionate about developing staff management skills and hopes this will be a focus during his time as Chair.



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