

Just before Christmas last year, Mr Lewis challenged us to create a bond with both the charity 'Child Action Lanka' and the culture of Sri Lanka itself. He suggested that we do this by teaching rugby, a sport we knew well, to orphans and street children. Along with the members of staff, seventeen of us volunteered to embark on this exciting new challenge. Although we were raring to get out there, the process started here, at Tonbridge as we wanted to take out funds to support those we would be visiting. Fundraising efforts were very successful and included the sale of wristbands and a 12 hour sponsored run.

Soon after the end of the Summer Term, we travelled for a day via plane and then, once in Sri Lanka, by coach, eventually arriving at an orphanage in a place called Batticaloa. We had been told what to expect, but the reality of being there made it all the more powerful and rewarding.

It was a deeply moving trip, and one of the most memorable moments has to be when the orphans, who had very little in this world compared to ourselves, gave up their beds so that we could sleep on them for the nights we stayed there. When we eventually departed, we had many fond memories and we had, we hope, served the orphanage to the best of our abilities, having helped complete the structure of the school, and left a fresh hole in their bathroom floor ready for use!

Next, we headed for Kandy. Here we received the most unbelievable welcoming feast thanks to Child Action Lanka. This was where we taught most of the rugby. The children came from Kandy but also from places like Kilanochi and Nuwrelia. Before we left we also managed to find time for a touch rugby fixture against the local U18 side whom we beat, not least because we were cheered on by all the children we had taught.

As we reached the final day of this exhausting yet very fulfilling experience we were met with the more recognisable sight of a hotel. Whilst we felt we deserved a night of comfort as we had put in so much effort over our time there, we also felt a degree of guilt at the comparative luxury that we were fortunate to experience compared to the harsher conditions experienced every day by the children we had worked with.

None of us would dispute the fact that our attitudes to life and its values have been entirely recalibrated in Sri Lanka and we returned home from, what was, the most innovative and valuable 'pre-season tour' anyone could ever have wished for.

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