

Cerci says merci

In just a few short years a school for children with special needs in Maputo, Mozambique, has expanded from a single room, where students watched television all day, to a purpose-built facility providing specialist care, education and support. This rapid transformation is thanks, in part, to £10,000 from the Halcrow Foundation.



Established in 2002, registered local charity Cooperativa para a Educação e Reabilitação de Cidadãos Inadaptados (CERCI) works with children ranging in age from six to 15 years. Their needs and level of disability also vary – students' conditions include Down's syndrome, Asperger's, autism and severe learning difficulties.

The majority of those attending CERCI's school are unable to contribute towards school fees, severely curtailing the school's ability to operate.

Project managed by former Halcrow employee Baghi Baghirathan, the Halcrow Foundation's funds cover running costs for the year.

With the support of a trained, specialist team, providing speech, occupational and physical therapy, the children are flourishing. The school is split into three classes based on the level of disability and each group has made considerable progress.



Intensive physiotherapy has been introduced for those with severe physical disabilities, and two children who were previously unable to walk are now able to do so unassisted. A girl whose movement had been restricted to lying on her stomach can now sit up on her own. Children with moderate levels of mental disability and other disorders are making huge strides in developing their speech, vocabulary, emotions and fine motor skills.

For children with relatively minor disabilities, the goal is to enable professional and social integration with their peers. Motivated and eager to acquire new skills, the majority of this group are now able to read, write and do basic mathematics.

From 20 children at the beginning of 2009, CERCI's school now caters for 28 students. The support and treatment they receive is helping these vulnerable young people develop to the best of their ability; saving them from a life of hardship on the outskirts of society.

