

# BibleLands

## ..... Overseas Partner Fact Sheet.....

### Swiss Evangelical School, Mejdolanjar

#### How it all started

The town of Mejdolanjar, with its 20,000 inhabitants, lies close to the Syrian border, about 30 miles from Beirut. In 1956, the mayor of this Muslim town asked Sisters from a Swiss-German Christian mission organisation, *Christlicher Hilfsbund im Orient*, to begin a school here. It is still called "the Sisters' School" by locals.

It began as an elementary school, with just 30 children, but gradually grew to incorporate an intermediate section. For a few years during the Lebanese civil war of 1975–1990, the intermediate section was forced to close when some of the students began carrying weapons to school. This section reopened in 1994.

Although the school is popular, with up to 600 students attending in the late 1990s, this number has fallen in recent years, due to a reduction in income. The economic crisis in Lebanon and widespread unemployment means that parents are increasingly unable to pay the low school fees and the government is several years behind in its payments to the school.



#### Key facts

Founded: 1956

Location: Bekaa Valley, Lebanon

First Grant from BibleLands: 2002

BibleLands' Annual Grant: £13,500 p.a.

#### Current Activities

The 330 students are aged between 4 – 16 years. Most of the children are from families on a low income, and all of them are Muslims. More than half of the students are girls, since many of their mothers and grand-mothers were once at the school themselves. They know that, because of the spirit of acceptance and freedom at this school, their daughters will be treated fairly and will receive a good education.

The school teaches the usual governmental curriculum and one of the most popular lessons is Computer Studies. Until recently, this was taught on a blackboard, with just four old computers. Children were unable to put the theory that they were taught into practice, until BibleLands gave a grant for 12 new computers. The school told us: *"When the new computers arrived, we could feel a sense of 'electricity' in our school. Everybody was excited, the Director sent messages into the town, the teachers happily worked overtime and the pupils were eager to practice what they had learnt before the next lesson. The happiest face, of course, was that of our computer teacher, who can now teach his subject with the equipment that he needs."*

One of the main aims of the school is promoting religious tolerance. As the only Christian school in the Muslim town of Mejdolanjar, it has a unique role to play. Whilst all the students are Muslim, most of the staff are Christian. The school does not teach the Bible as a subject, as it is illegal to teach the Christian faith to those of another religion. However, a Christian atmosphere is nourished through the staff and leadership; through the Christian groups who sometimes visit the school; and through the library books and monthly video showings, which both incorporate Christian themes. In a town where religious beliefs range from the nominal to the fundamental, this school's focus on religious understanding and mutual respect is vital. As result, a new generation of citizens who have learned tolerance and co-operation is being formed. Christian and Muslim can live peacefully side by side in a multi-religious country.



*A kindergarten student*



*At its 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebrations in 2006, the school thanked its Founders and Partners in Switzerland and Germany, as well as BibleLands, its Partner in the UK*

The school does not simply provide an academic education but also cares for its students in a wider context: for example by visiting each child at home. This allows the school to get to know the children's parents and wider family. In their final year, each pupil receives a home visit. These visits often act as career guidance sessions, providing invaluable advice for the students, who would not otherwise be aware of the options available to them. The visits also allow staff to keep in touch with older brothers and sisters who have left the school, as well as beginning new relationships with younger siblings who may soon attend the school.

The school is held in high regard in Mejdolanjar. Local people often say that it has achieved a big *fadi* (merit) for the whole town, not only because it has helped many poor children but also because it has helped to dramatically raise the educational standards of the town and increased religious tolerance in the local area.

Lebanon's recent history has been deeply unsettled. Just as the country was emerging from civil war, she was plunged into renewed turmoil by the assassination of Prime Minister Hariri in 2005 and war with Israel in 2006. However, successful parliamentary elections in 2009 led to the formation of a coalition government which, it is hoped, will usher in a period of stability, unity and co-operation. The latest news, prayer points, and other information are all available from *BibleLands*.

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