

Minister pays tribute to Ethiopian school founder

By [Alf McCreary](#)

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A minister from Northern Ireland who has raised almost £2.4m to help educate underprivileged children in Africa has paid tribute to the late founder of the Ethiopian school he helped to fund.

Asfaw Yemiru died earlier this month, in his late 70s. In a lifetime of service to education, he founded the Asra Hawariat School in the capital Addis Ababa, which over the past 60 years has educated 120,000 children who would otherwise not have had any schooling.

His work was recognised internationally, and an obituary of Mr Yemiru in an edition of *The Economist* notes that he was awarded the World Children's Prize in 2001.

It notes: "He also felt touched by luck or the blessing of God. When he was desperate for money, which was often, something turned up. Once he was given the unclaimed prize money from the National Lottery. Another time Winchester College sent him money."

The headmaster of his old Wingate school also helped to wipe out his debts.

The Reverend Tim Kinahan, the rector of Helen's Bay, first met Asfaw when he visited Ethiopia over 50 years ago as a volunteer teacher in the school.

He said: "In the early days the classrooms were built by the kids themselves by what was at hand, including wood from eucalyptus trees they had cleared and broken bricks from a local factory. The earliest classrooms had shelves which were used as bunks by the orphans, until dormitories could be built. From the 1990s the orphans were placed with local foster families."

Almost 60 years after its foundation the school is still going strong.

He added: “It has been through tough times, navigating the collapse of the Imperial regime of Emperor Haile Selassie, the Red Terror, the Stalinist dictatorship, and the civil war during which the school became a field-hospital for the war wounded and a transit camp for demobbed soldiers.”

During most of this period, Rev Kinahan has headed the Asra Hawariat School Fund, which he established in Northern Ireland on his return from his first visit to Ethiopia.

He said: “So far the fund has raised almost £2.4m. Much of the money, though not all, has come from people in Northern Ireland, including donations from individuals, from schools and churches, from Rotarians and from everyone in between.

“This generosity was inspired by the remarkable work of this truly remarkable man Asfaw Yemiru.”

The Reverend Kinahan added: “His vision and determination changed the lives of thousands of Ethiopians for the better.”



Rev Tim Kinahan