



## Pupil Numbers (Pupils on Roll)

In the educational world there is little emotion on the part of Local Authorities associated with the viability of schools: if the school roll is not big enough to warrant a sustainable budget then the school must make alternative arrangements, closure being the obvious one. Small pupil numbers result in a low level of income with no means of funding a suitable staff roll, producing poor pupil outcomes, leading to an even lower pupil roll (as families opt for alternative provision) and a rapid downward spiral into oblivion.

Over a decade ago, a low, future pupil roll was recognised as the most significant threat to the future of Mugginton Primary School.

The challenge then, was to attract more pupils who would traditionally not have included Mugginton as an option in the increasingly rich mix of possibilities. It was accepted that, if families were determined to walk to their local school, then they were unlikely to be tempted to consider Mugginton no matter what it had to offer, but once pupils were put in a car to get to school, the school would then be added to the list of possibilities.

The attack, therefore, was two-fold:

- To provide an education at a level of excellence unparalleled in similar schools to get on the *non-walk to school* list and
- To embark on a marketing campaign to get Mugginton “known” in the wider area.

As anyone in education can confirm, the first is a difficult exercise involving exceptional commitments from all stakeholders over a sustained period. Thanks to a series of outstanding professional practitioners who have worked tirelessly over this past decade, this ongoing project is bearing fruit. Among a stellar set of outcomes in 2018, the Key Stage 2 maths progress was the best in the entire county, unfortunately a difficult feat to repeat. The 2019 metrics were way above both county and national averages indicating that the very high academic standards are being maintained. And the school curriculum does not stop there; it is filled with rich and varied experiences for the pupils both sporting and cultural as the school calendar will confirm. It is truly a comprehensive school. Neither is it in any way selective – there are pupils from all walks of life and with a full range of abilities.

Mugginton now has an unrivalled reputation that stretches far and wide. Some pupils travel more than 10 miles to avail themselves of the unique product the school has to offer. Far from low numbers being a threat, the management of high numbers is now a real challenge – but a very welcome one. The school no longer engages in explicit marketing; the dedicated marketing committee has been subsumed into the school improvement committee but this was not always the case. In the past marketing efforts have included adverts in the educational press, event specific posters, actively promoting the school in local newspapers with OpEd pieces and just about anything anyone could think of.

Even with historically high pupil numbers overall, the variation in numbers in present year groups is very variable, which means managing this aspect of school operations is a challenge. At the end of the 2019/2020 school year, 12 year 6 pupils will leave with another 5 departing as a result of changes in domestic circumstances – a total of 17. If the historic pattern of 4 pupils entering Reception in September 2020 materialises (5 have registered Mugginton as their first choice), the school will suffer a net loss of 13 on the roll with all the attendant consequences for budgets. One way to mitigate this situation is to boost overall numbers at times when large net losses are anticipated. Had numbers not been boosted during 2019/2020, consequential budget restraints would seriously compromise the ability in the future to offer the quality education that pupils have come to expect. Even with the high numbers in the school in spring 2020, the budget for 2021/2022 is likely to be considerably smaller than the for 2020/2021.

This aspect of school operations has been discussed with school stakeholders at the regular Mugginton Forum who are aware of the complex challenges it presents.

While the school would appear to be particularly full in the Spring of 2020, decisions on entry have been taken to protect the long-term viability of the school.