

Dear Editor

### Marcham School

We have recently learned that the local authority has turned away six local children from attending Marcham School's Early Years Unit. All had hoped and expected that they would join the Early Years class in September 2008. It has been suggested that they should seek alternative facilities outside of Marcham. This is bizarre and very disappointing – for the children, for their parents, for Marcham Primary School (which would be happy to accept them), and for us as active and caring members of the Marcham community.

With many of these children already in Marcham pre-school playgroup, it is such a logical and natural step that they should progress to their local Marcham School in due course and therefore that they should be admitted to the Marcham Early Years unit.

The school was encouraged to have a joint partnership with the Pre-School and so the Pre-School moved into a room within the school building in September 2007. As a result, the children are seeing other children in 'Big' School and have already made friendships. The potential for disillusionment, disappointment and psychological disruption could well result from turning these children away. Marcham is a caring community and no-one wants this for any of these children. Marcham wants all village children in the village school if that is their choice. Our own children attended Marcham School in the past and we are well aware of the benefits of attending and supporting the local village school.

Consider the future of these children in the community. How easy will it be for these children to be equally accepted into other village activities, for example, cubs, brownies, when they have been dissociated from the school and therefore other village children who will be in friendship groups by then?

Many of the parents involved are already fully committed to village activities and to the school, for example, school governors, Parish Church Council, pre-school committee and Toddler Group committee. They all work with dedication in practical, helpful ways. Marcham does not want to lose such vital people.

It follows, of course, that if we lose any of these children with supportive parents, that we will also lose their younger siblings. This is not good for the future of Marcham School or the village community.

The admission policy appears to be that only those children living close to the school will be admitted, whilst others not quite so close, within the same well-defined village, will be turned away. There is only one school in the village. For those others to have to travel a significant distance outside the village makes no social, educational or environmental sense.

We strongly request that you re-consider your admission policy as a matter of immediate urgency and allow these children to enter the Early Years unit at Marcham.

**DENISE AND JIMASHER**

Dear Editor

### Insufficient places at Marcham Primary

By now you may have heard that not all applications for children to attend Marcham Primary School for their Foundation year starting in September 2008 have been successful. Apparently 15 places were available however these were over-subscribed and at least five children from within the Marcham catchment area have been denied places and received offers of placement at other schools, our daughter being one of these children, despite our living in the village and 0.37 miles from the school.

I understand that this situation was not anticipated by the Council who had forecast the 15 places offered to be sufficient; there was surprise when these were oversubscribed. Taking into account the recent expansion in the village through new housing and also births (I know of a lot of young pre-school children in the village) I should not have been surprised at this outcome. Of additional concern is the likelihood that this situation will repeat itself again next year and in subsequent years, especially as more housing and expansion occurs.

As a village I believe it is incumbent on us to bring this to the council's attention and to press them to revise their strategy for Marcham School, we should encourage them to facilitate the school to expand in ways appropriate to providing not only places for our children but to also provide adequate facilities in order to maximise the quality of the education they receive in the form of classroom space and also teacher to pupil ratios.

I encourage parents currently in the same situation as ourselves, parents whose children are due to start school in the next two or more years, and all other interested members of our village and surrounding catchment area to seriously consider how they might ensure security of places at Marcham School. One effective measure is to write to the council stating your concerns and pressing them to consider the future for our children; contact addresses (by email) are:

Attention: Michael Waine, Oxfordshire County Council Cabinet Member for Schools Improvement, (michael.waine@oxfordshire.gov.uk) and in order to add weight, cc your letters to:

- The school (office.3235@marcham.oxon.sch.uk) and also to
- County Councillor, Ian Brown (iainbrownconservatives@yahoo.co.uk) and
- MP, Ed Vaizey (vaizeye@parliament.uk)

If we do nothing then we will only have

ourselves to blame should we be caught out by this scenario again.

**RACHEL GAISFORD**

Dear Editor

### Rejected Applications for Foundation Year at Marcham C. Of E. Primary School

At the end of February my wife and I were rocked by the news that our son was one of a small handful of children that were not granted places at the village Primary School because they lived more than just 539 yards from the School. This came as a nasty surprise, not only to us and the other parents, but also to the large number of parents in the village with babies and toddlers.

This decision by the School and/or Local Authority means that these children are effectively being excommunicated from our village community and that feeling of separation will follow them for the rest of their lives. Strong rhetoric, I acknowledge, but these small children will be removed from the friendships that they have already started to forge and will quite possibly face the rest of their childhoods feeling divorced from their peers and, quite likely, strangers in their own village.

Marcham is not a town with three or four alternative schools and where large numbers of children from local communities attend different schools. We're talking about a very isolated group of children who are now faced with leaving the village everyday to go to a school in a town about which they know precious little and where they will always feel outsiders - being, quite possibly, the only children in their year not to come from the town. They will have very little in common with the rest of their class and they certainly won't be able to share out of school experiences in the same way as the rest will.

When they come home in the afternoon, the new friends they have made at school won't be next door or in the next street, they'll be miles away. When they go to the playing fields or playground they won't have a network of local school friends to knock a ball about with or to ride on the swings with. It is quite likely they won't even be able to share the memories that so many of us have as children in a close knit village community because they won't really feel a true part of it. And who could blame them?

And this decision doesn't only affect them. It also condemns their younger brothers and sisters to the same disenchanting fate.

Since we heard our son's fate we have been fortunate to receive support from Viv Hutchinson, the Headteacher, the Parish Council, Iain Brown, Ed Vaizey, the County Council and many villagers and it is our fervent hope that by the time that you read this letter the Board of Governors and the LA will have been able to find a solution to this year's problem.