

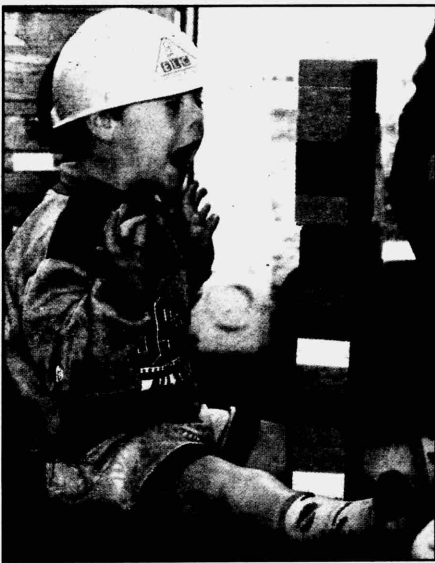


# Sutton Coldfield NEWS

Friday, July 19, 1996

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## STAR ROLF BACKS SCHOOL APPEAL



■ REPORT by NIGEL PIPKIN

THE balloon has gone up on an £800,000 appeal to transform a Sutton Coldfield special school for children with severe learning difficulties.

This major appeal – backed by the *Sutton Coldfield News* – has the support of television megastar Rolf Harris.

He has signed as patron of the 'Muriel's Dream Appeal' launched on behalf of Longmoor School.

And we hope that our readers will also rally round to help raise money for this special project.

Rolf, known to millions for his appearances on the BBC's *Animal Hospital* programme, said: "The facilities at Longmoor School are already extremely good, but I hope with sup-

port 'Muriel's Dream' can become a reality and will enhance the education provision for these very special children."

'Muriel' is Muriel Castle, the school's head teacher, who hopes to realise her ambition before she retires next year.

The school, in Coppice View Road, caters for 40 children, aged two to 11, with severe learning difficulties, some of whom have physical and behavioural problems as well.

Their special needs are such that many of them require personal equipment, such as walkers, standing frames and buggies.

### Support

Bids will be made to the National Lottery and educational trusts but the appeal also needs the support of the local and business community – which is where our readers come in.

The hope is to increase the size and number of rooms and to build a multi-purpose sports hall for use by the pupils and community groups.

There will also be rooms to accommodate medical facilities, a soft play room and disabled toilet facilities.

Muriel said: "It's a tall order but it is something I want to do for the school and the children.

"It has always been my dream to help them by purchasing more equipment.

"We know that the education authority is doing all that it can, but resources are very limited.

"I want to create a purpose-built school and that won't be cheap."

"I would like to see the project through so that when I retire from the job I love, I have left them something that they would not have believed possible – only in their wildest dreams – and dreams sometimes do come true!"

Yesterday 300 balloons were sent skyward – 100 for each of the school's three years – to mark the appeal's 'lift off'.

• Muriel's Dream – pages 14 and 15.

**And so does  
your Sutton  
Coldfield News**



Plenty to smile about – Longmoor pupil Molly Patterson.

Picture by MARTIN RYAN

**"You can improve every single child, no matter what their handicap."**

# Muriel dreams of a brighter future

■ REPORT by NIGEL PIPKIN

LESSONS for the 40 children at Longmoor School are carried out in five small classes.

But these young pupils, aged two to 11-years-old, have severe learning difficulties and multi-handicaps.

Their profound problems mean many of them require bulky personal equipment such as standing frames and buggies which take up valuable space in an already cramped school.

For a child to stand up and walk can take five minutes, in expert and caring hands, of being helped into a walker.

But their difficulties are not just physical.

Many have behavioural problems as well, such as autism, and each child has to have an individual education programme drawn up to deal with their specific needs.

The school was built as a junior training centre, not as a primary school for very special children.

Under that regime, the children, often older, were cared for in different ways with the aim to improve social skills, help their manipulative skills and to behave acceptably in public.

But education has moved on. Longmoor, like all other schools, has to address the National Curriculum.

Head teacher Muriel Castle has helped bring the school along in the past three years but her dream is to make Longmoor the best educational facility of its type in the city - hence the 'Muriel's Dream Appeal'.

Muriel's belief is simple: "You can improve every single child, no matter what their handicap."

"To achieve that you have got to get the facilities right."

"These children need space more than anything else."

The expansion plan, which already has planning approval from Birmingham City Council, would increase the size and number of rooms.

A multi-purpose sports hall would be added for use by the Longmoor pupils and community groups.

## Improvement

There would also be rooms for medical facilities, an essential soft play room and disabled toilet facilities.

All this would be a massive improvement in a building where the school hall is 'multi-purpose'.

"That means it is cluttered with a lot of day equipment and PE equipment which takes off from its size," said Muriel.

"For children who need frames to walk - well, we can't get a class in with walkers."

"It is not very good for PE, to have a sports hall would enable the children to benefit and enable them to expand their activities."

"And it would be wonderful to have a sport hall with showers."

The present lower junior classroom is in the old heavy wood-work-type room.

The upper juniors are in the old domestic science room.

"The actual individual classrooms are so small we can't use some of the modern teaching methods that we would want to use," added Muriel.

The hope is to have rooms off classrooms so that teachers can work one-to-one with the children.

"Our children are very easily distracted. If you are teaching new skills you need quiet so you can maximise the concentration level."

The school also desperately needed a music room because the children could learn a lot through music.

"Again it has to be held in a room where people are constantly passing through which is absolutely useless," said Muriel.

Current legislation urges that schools build partnerships with parents.

It is hoped a small resource room can be turned into a parents' room.

"It would be more comfortable for them to wait and chat and make themselves a drink, and when they chat they help one another," she said.

Muriel said it was important people understood a special needs child could be born to anyone.

"The majority of people don't realise it can happen to them," she said.

"For parents it is a very, very great trial and for many parents it takes years and years to come to terms with and I don't think some ever do."

That was why it was important to give these special children all the help they deserved.

## Rolf pledges to help as honorary patron

TELEVISION star Rolf Harris said he was very pleased to support the Muriel's Dream Appeal.

"I am delighted to be involved and took great pleasure in accepting the position of honorary patron of the appeal."

"I do hope that as many people as possible will find the time to support his most worthwhile appeal for children who are less fortunate than most."

"The facilities at Longmoor are already extremely good, but I hope, with the people's support, that 'Muriel's Dream' can become a reality and will enhance the education provision for these very special children."