

## Mistley Kids Club - report to the Annual Parish Meeting

Last year the report was all about Covid bubbles; this year we are more interested in testing regularly to keep our most vulnerable children safe, and maintaining a service with fluctuating staff levels when people test positive. It does at least feel like a step towards normality!

We continue to have high demand for our services. Mistley is the centre of a network of support that reaches out into the surrounding area - we have 406 children currently on our books, a quarter of them local. 174 have special needs, more than a third of whom come from Mistley. We continue to have a great mix of mainstream and special needs kids - our club creates a real family atmosphere.

We are quite a large employer - there is a core staff of 18 people after school, around half of whom are from Mistley, and a looser group of around 30 or so who we bring in during the holidays; often people who work in school or care settings themselves. All our management team have qualifications in Childcare and specialist areas such as epilepsy and gastrostomy training, and we encourage all staff to do continuing professional education.

The big change for us this year - apart from reacting to the changes in Covid rules - has been the setting up of a monthly Saturday club, offering respite care to the families of some of our special needs children. This enables families to have some time away for themselves, or to enjoy some time focussing on other children in the family - vital for everyone's mental health. The funding from this comes from Essex County Council, Essex Community Foundation, Essex Activate, and Colchester Catalyst.

Funding is always a worry for us, and is particularly so during the current financial climate. About half our income comes from grants, largely from Essex County Council and Colchester Catalyst, with the rest from fees. We are particularly vulnerable to high inflation, with food and petrol costs spiralling, and are very grateful indeed for donations from both private individuals and organisations - the Jack Petchey Foundation, the Rotary Club, and many others provide support that allows us to bring a little extra joy into the children's lives; perhaps a trip to the panto, having a mobile zoo come in to visit, or to help get extra activities for our big summer party.

We look forward to continuing to run a service to the community next year, still supported by the County, in what may be a difficult financial climate.