

The Friends of the Margaret Junior School

(Registered no: 1114202)

ANNUAL REPORT for 2023

Background.

The Friends of the Margaret Junior School was established as a registered charity in May 2006. The original objects of the Association were to “advance the education of the pupils at the Margaret Junior School, Masaka District, Uganda, by providing and assisting in the provision of facilities for education at the school.” In 2011, the Charity Commission agreed to an amendment to the constitution to include support towards ex-pupils, who were successful in gaining a place at secondary school or further education. The main activities of the Association are the raising of funds from individuals and other bodies, which are then transferred to the School Committee in Masaka, Uganda, in pursuit of the charity’s objectives and for the benefit of the school’s pupils and ex-pupils. Decisions as to expenditure are taken by the school committee after discussion with the Trustees.

Trustees.

Trustees are elected annually by the members of the Association at an Annual General Meeting. The present Trustees are: Freda Bass, Roger Ford, Hilary Procter, Nicholas Stokes, Margaret West (Chair) and Maria Woodward. In undertaking their duties, the Trustees have taken due regard to the guidance published by the Charity Commission.

Membership.

Membership is open to anyone willing to pay a minimum of £10:00 per annum. At the end of 2023, the Association had 32 paid-up members. This figure shows a slight but welcome increase during the year. Not all of the charity’s supporters are paid-up members and we are grateful for the supporters and sponsors who have continued to contribute over many years. We would particularly like to thank all who regularly contribute through standing orders and who use the Gift Aid facility, which contributes a significant sum to the charity’s finances .

Activities.

The solid support and regular contributions provide the Friends with a firm financial base, which allows the Head-teacher and Committee to plan for a more confident future, rather than cope on a day-to-day basis. Both the UK and Uganda continued to struggle with the after-effects of the coronavirus pandemic. Life in Uganda has slowly begun to recover and all educational facilities remained open throughout most of 2023. Short closures were required following an outbreak of Ebola in parts of the country. Unfortunately, the school nurse contracted the virus but subsequently recovered well, following a period of quarantine and hospitalisation. The school was also affected by a local outbreak of measles, which sadly led to the death of a pupil. This was a harsh reminder of the disparate medical provision in our respective countries. One legacy of Covid has been an increase in the cost of living and families continue to struggle with the rise in prices for fuel and basic commodities.

The new vocational training centre is now operational and was named in honour of Sarah Kasujja, the school’s founder. The Education Authority has agreed to meet staffing costs for 10 years and local grants have allowed for the provision of metal work equipment and machinery. The Friends contributed towards the cost of sewing machines and shoe-making equipment.

Farming has also been added to the curriculum. During 2022, we were able to send money to the school, so that they could purchase some pigs. This was made possible by two of our supporters, who asked for financial donations instead of wedding presents. The pigs have done well and there have been lots of piglets during the year. As well as teaching the pupils about animal husbandry, the local veterinary officer has extended the classes to involve parents, instructing them in up-to-date methods. Sales of the piglets to the District Council provided funding for building toilets for the teachers, while the Council distributed the piglets to local farmers. Just one example of how the school is involved in the local community.

At home, the Christmas Appeal was successful in helping the school raise funds to replace much of the playground equipment, which had been put to good use over several years. As 2024 starts, work has commenced on the alterations and replacements. We were able to start our fund-raising programme again during the year and enjoyed a successful garden party in July, followed by a quiz later in the year. Thanks to everyone who participated and supported these enjoyable events. We are always open to new ideas for raising funds.

Currently, the Bursary Scheme embraces 39 children: 24 primary, 14 secondary, and one former pupil, who has now started at university, reading Civil Engineering. The Trustees would like to thank the individual sponsors and the local Lions Clubs in Shropshire, Cheshire and Staffordshire, who have supported this scheme. There are many more children who would still qualify, there being 349 pupils registered at the end of 2023 : 98 of whom were orphans and 5 disabled. Two previous students graduated in 2023 both gaining law degrees from Makerere University in Kampala. Both are currently practising in Magistrates' Courts. Two other students will graduate in Spring 2024.

The Trustees would like to thank all our regular donors and will review future sponsorships in the light of developments.

Financial Review

The purpose of the charity is to support pupils and ex-pupils of the Margaret Junior School and in 2023 expenditure on the school and pupil sponsorship amounted to £47,500. This was less than in 2022 but contrasts with the £7,600 sent in 2006 when the charity was first established. Since its opening, in 2003, the school campus has developed and grown in ways which could never have been anticipated. From its original two classroom home-built building, the school now is able to accommodate over 300 pupils in a range of purpose-built facilities. In addition to paying sponsorships, the money has been spent on general funds and teachers' salaries, as well as funding a much-needed maintenance schedule.

Administrative costs remain low, at less than 1%, allowing all the money raised to be spent on the school and its pupils. Supporters can remain confident that the Trustees will continue to strive to ensure that money donated goes directly to support the school and its pupils. A Reserve Policy has been established by the Trustees and a sum of £4000 is set aside for this purpose. This is the amount required for one semester at the Junior School.

Future Plans

Since the "Friends of the Margaret Junior School" was first incorporated as a charity in 2006, priority has been given to building up the infrastructure of the school. This has resulted in the purchase of the land; the installation of a supply of clean water; the building of pit latrines and two four-classroom blocks; the provision of basic hostel accommodation; a multi-purpose examination room and a vocational training facility. The transformation from the modest beginnings in 2003 is a significant achievement and the Trustees would like to thank all our supporters, many of whom have been involved since the school first opened 20 years ago. Additionally, other buildings have been erected by the parents and local community to enhance the educational, administrative, washing and cooking facilities. These are significant achievements. This highlights the standing that the school has achieved in the local community.

The Vocational Training Centre is now operational with two workshops up and running. We hope that it will be possible for the school committee to bring the computer workshop on stream in 2024 but that will require significant funding.

The Trustees are mindful that the current arrangements are not sustainable in the long term and we will need to address the future funding of the school and look for a greater contribution from local resources in Uganda. The recruitment of younger Trustees is something we would like to achieve and closer links with other similar charities will also be considered.

The Trustees would like to thank all our donors, sponsors and members for their loyal support for the school.

Margaret West
Chair of Trustees.

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