

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

We have continued to deliver support for all schools in Rhondda Cynon Taf. We have worked effectively in areas as diverse as reading recovery, substance misuse education, support for numeracy, community dimension, 16-19 consortium development, improved transition. Improving outcomes from Welsh as a second language.

Cost-effective support and challenge for our schools is achieved through the deployment of innovative partnership between our school improvement team and the advisory service (ESIS) shared with three neighbouring councils. This has meant we are able to mine a rich vein of talent that would not have been accessible if we worked alone.

This year's successes have included:

- Healthy Schools Scheme;
- Positive outcomes from the Scrutiny Working Party's programme of review of school improvement support,
- Practical engagement with ELWa's geographic pathfinder and facilitation of the secondary review
- Continued productive outcomes from the primary review
- Restructuring of support for school governance and liaison
- Innovative
- Roll out programme of support for substance misuse education for all schools
- Engagement of more school clusters with the PESS initiative and introduction 5x60 initiative
- Successful recruitment and support workers to all clusters for the development of the community dimension of schools
- Development of the reading recovery and numeracy support programmes

The uniquely effective partnerships have secured transformational developments for which we are justly proud in Rhondda Cynon Taf.

STANDARDS

In 2006 the academic attainment of pupils and students once again illustrated the culture of continuous improvement that drives our schools. Improvements trends continued positively in all key stages. The following press releases convey something of the pride, which was felt as achievements were celebrated.

Rhondda Cynon Taf - WJEC GCSE results 2006

24th August 2006

There is very good news for the thousands of pupils across the County Borough who will find out this morning how they have fared in their GCSE examinations.

This year, pupils across Rhondda Cynon Taf have achieved their best ever A* - C grade GCSE results, with 57.4% of all entries achieving these grades, a 2.8% increase on last year.

Pass rates in the A*-G range remain very high in Rhondda Cynon Taf with over 97% of entries achieving a pass grade in 2006, a 0.3% improvement on 2005's figures.

Meanwhile, more than one in seven pupils in Rhondda Cynon Taf achieved the top A* or A grade.

Overall, almost 23,000 young people were entered to sit a WJEC GCSE examination in Rhondda Cynon Taf this year.

“My congratulations to all those pupils – and their teachers – who have worked so hard to gain their GCSEs this year. I now wish them all the best for the future,” says Cllr Mike Forey, Cabinet Member for Education and Lifelong Learning. “Although we experienced a slight dip on pass rates last year, 2006’s results demonstrate that Rhondda Cynon Taf’s impressive long-term upward trend is continuing.”

Rhondda Cynon Taf – WJEC ‘A’ and ‘AS’ level results 2006

17th August 2006

It's that time of year again, as hundreds of pupils across Rhondda Cynon Taf collect their 'A' and 'A/S' level results.

Even more pupils sat A and A/S level examinations in Rhondda Cynon Taf than ever before – with over 4300 separate exam entries.

At 'A' level, over 70% of passes were at the higher grades of A-C. The overall pass rate in Rhondda Cynon Taf of 97.1% is slightly better than the overall figure for Wales. One in every five passes is at the top A grade.

The overall pass rate at 'A/S' level was again higher in Rhondda Cynon Taf than for Wales as a whole. The percentage of A grades also increased on the County Borough's 2005 figures.

"Over the past ten years, the overall pass rate has risen and there are more passes at the top grade," says Cabinet Member for Education and Lifelong Learning, Cllr Mike Forey. "I am delighted at the achievements of pupils in Rhondda Cynon Taf this year, whose hard work, commitment and dedication is reflected in these results."

"I would like to extend my congratulations to all those pupils and teachers who have worked so hard this year to achieve these improved results," says Service Director for School Support and Improvement, Steve Lamb, "I now wish these pupils all the very best for the future, whether they are going on to higher education courses or beginning their careers in their chosen fields."

Jane Davidson, Assembly Member for Pontypridd, added her congratulations to the schools, pupils and parents of Rhondda Cynon Taf on an excellent set of A level results, saying:

"Today is a real day of celebration in Wales and these results are excellent news for Rhondda Cynon Taf. I was delighted to hear that 97.1% of our local pupils who took 'A' levels have passed. This in itself is a real reason for celebration, but even more so when I hear that these pass rates are higher than the Welsh national figures. I was also pleased to hear that the percentage of pupils achieving grade 'A' has gone up by 0.8%. I congratulate all involved on their tremendous achievements and want to pay a personal tribute to the hard work of all those students, schools and long suffering parents."

INNOVATION

Often in partnership with other agencies, but always driven by the enthusiasm of improvement officers, advisers and teachers, a range of successful initiatives have been implemented or developed this year. These are celebrated for the affect they have had on the development of our children and young people as they reach towards the goal of fulfilling potential.

These initiatives have included:

- 'Catch Up!' – this is a reading recovery programme developed with Oxford Brookes University and funded by a Strategic Intervention Grant from the Basic Skills Agency. It is now in its fifth year and has been implemented in 101 schools. The project targets children from the main stream in transition between Key Stages 1 and 2 whose reading skills are not confident. Progress has been rapid and sustained due to the training programme for reading support assistants and teachers. Pupils typically achieve an improvement of up to two years in reading age but there are accompanying improvements in confidence and commitment.
- During 2006/07 a numeracy intervention programme called 'Spotlight' has been launched in 60 schools. This is a programme to support children with gaps in their mathematical understanding, developed by the Dfes and funded by a teacher-training grant from the Basic Skills Agency. Teachers and Learning support assistants will undergo a series of training events over the year to improve the quality of mathematics teaching within the project and back in the classroom. The project targets children from mainstream whose mathematical understanding is not confident. The project works on developing practical and mental strategies and the use of a wide range of mathematical vocabulary. The results from the pilot programme in 05/06 were impressive and we are sure this will be replicated in this larger project.
- The Get Sorted team has been restructured this year to increase the capacity of the team. Two new Education Support Officers will join the team in November. This increased capacity will allow Get Sorted to target resources at strategically identified areas, such as parental participation, special schools and hard to reach young people.

The implementation phase of the Get Sorted Transition Project has been completed a full year ahead of schedule. The commitment and enthusiasm of staff has enabled Get Sorted to respond to the momentum created by the primary sector and we are currently in the process of evaluating this implementation phase. The introduction of SAFE across RCT this year will support the maintenance phase of the Transition Project. As Get Sorted Transition Project lessons have been incorporated into the SAFE Programme. It is envisaged that ongoing support within Year 6 of the primary sector will be in line with the needs of individual schools, who will continue to receive the support they

request. Get Sorted has trained 30 new SAFE Officers to and will be observing Officers delivering the SAFE programme across RCT. This will allow Get Sorted to monitor the provision, uptake and consistency of the SAFE and offer support to both schools and officers. SAFE support folders have also been produced and distributed to primary schools. These folders contain general information about SAFE, the organization and structure of a SAFE celebration event and useful contacts.

Ongoing service evaluation is operational to ensure we are achieving our targets and meeting the performance indicators set out in the RCT Substance Misuse Action Plan. SPSS is currently being utilised to assess progression in knowledge and skill acquisition, and the development in confidence of benefactors.

Get Sorted has been commissioned by Fframwaith to research the current situation regarding bullying in RCT. Consultation with parents, young people, school staff and other professionals has taken place through face to face meetings, interviews and focus groups. A report has been produced and will be disseminated at our Anti-bullying conference planned for November 2006. Links have been established with potential partners including VALREC, Stonewall, NSPCC, NCH and Children in Wales, and Jane Davidson AM is confirmed to speak at the conference. More information on Get Sorted can be found on: www.getsortedwales.co.uk

- RCT is one of the 6 geographic Pathfinders in Wales. The 5 consortia are working towards confederated structures, creating wider choice for learners and new pathways
- The establishment of 'vocational satellite centres' in each consortium will extend level 1 vocational options for students. Areas developed to date include: Construction, Business, Care, Catering and Hair and Beauty. Further developments are likely to include Customer Care, Business and Retail, and these will be developed in 2007 in conjunction with Coleg Morgannwg and the Economic Development Unit in RCT CBC
- Significant strides have been made to broaden the use of Virtual Learning Networks .To support this 8 schools and the college will be producing blended learning packages supported by the University of Glamorgan in 10 subject areas this term. These can support independent learning, and be used across the network
- The number of students involved in the Duke of Edinburgh Award qualification continues to grow-RCT had the largest increase in new users across Wales in 2005

- A series of Secondary School Improvement Teaching and Learning pilots took place in the early part of 2006. These focused on developing innovative teaching and learning practice in the classroom. Some particularly innovative work was undertaken by Ferndale Community School with Ysgol Hen felin; Tonyrefail Comprehensive School Tonypandy Community College and Treorchy Comprehensive School. The School Improvement Group will be highlighting these over the next six months
- Sioned Cox from Ysgol Gyfun Cymer was the 2006 RCT/Griffin Mill Student of the Year. Sioned, who is now at Southampton studying for Medicine, won a new Peugeot 207 for the year.
- Innovative developments in Welsh language provision in our English medium schools were launched during 2004/05. A partnership between the Welsh Language Board (Bwrdd yr Iaith Gymraeg) and Rhondda Cynon Taf meant that an immersion project was established in the Porth cluster of schools. A bi-lingual project was established in the Bryncelynnog cluster complementing a similar project already in existence in the Treorchy cluster. Up until now this richness of language learning opportunity has only been available in the Welsh medium schools. What is obvious already is the potential for implementation to support modern foreign language learning as well. This is an area we have targeted for attention in the near future.
- Funded by the Welsh Assembly Government and in partnership with the Sports Council for Wales, we have implemented the PE and School Sport (PESS) initiative with five of our comprehensive schools and their associate schools. The aim of such initiatives is to raise standards in physical education and provide further opportunities for young people to engage in many different forms of physical activity. This is being achieved by providing professional development opportunities for teaching staff to enhance subject knowledge and raise confidence, and working in partnership with other agencies (sports development, Dragon Sport, 5 x 60 initiative) to promote physical activity exit routes. Furthermore the importance of healthy lifestyles and diet is promulgated. More information on the PESS initiative can be found on: http://www.rctednet.net/schoolsupport/schoolsupport_pess.asp
- Partnership with the Arts Council of Wales has continued with the further expansion of Brass playing across the county into the Taf Ely area. The opportunity to learn these instruments, as well as a wide range of others that already exist, has been seized enthusiastically by our children and young people.
- We have considerably expanded our provision of out-of school activities by adding a Jazz Band, Guitar ensemble, Youth Chorus and Beginner String Club. This has all been possible by the use of new facilities at the University of Glamorgan.

WELFARE

In January 2006 the Education Welfare Service became the responsibility of the Early Years and Family Support Team

The service is committed to improving support to pupils and their families and will build on the work started in the last academic year by offering pupils and their families in the primary sector the opportunity to take part in a variety of strategies aimed at improving school attendance. These will include the ongoing assembly and classroom talks on the issues of truancy and the importance of attending school regularly. We will also be taking the "Building Safe Relationships" workshop into more primary schools and will continue to support the work of the Community Safety Partnership with the annual "crucial crew" events.

A small amount of money has been made available to us from the WAG, which will be used to train staff to deliver parenting support and this will be done through the setting up of parenting groups for those parents whose children cause us concern predominantly due to unsatisfactory school attendance. We will begin with one group in a selected pilot community school area targeting the primary age pupils in the cluster group. This is seen as a pilot preventative measure in order to develop good habits in families from an early age as possible. If effective, we aim to extend our work with parents to other areas in due course.

A computerised attendance package to monitor attendance in a selected number of primary schools is being piloted with a view to expanding it to all schools if it proves to be successful. The WAG is partly funding this initiative, which involves the EWS and SIMS department working closely together.

One of the most common reasons that children give for not attending school is bullying. The EWS is being commissioned to undertake a short piece of work to help schools further develop effective and proactive anti bullying strategies that take account of the guidance and expectations in the "Respecting Others" circular.

Education social workers will continue to work closely with those families where there are more complex issues with EWOs working with pupils in the secondary sector. The service received approximately 7600 referrals during the academic year 2005-06 with the primary sector continuing to reveal a steady increase in attendance concerns.