

School Report

2004

70 percent A*-C at GCSE 2004 • 95 percent A level success rate 2004



“The most improved school in Wales”

Welsh Curriculum and Qualifications Authority, 2004

In 2002 we were the second “most improved school” in Wales. In 2003 we were *the* most improved Welsh school, in a table that tracks performance over several years. That was on the basis of our 2003 53% A*-C GCSE results. In 2004 the A*-C rate increased for the fifth successive year – to 70%. Over a quarter of the year groups gained 10 or more GCSEs at A*-C.

This success is a tribute to the hard work of our students, the family support they receive, and the dedication of teachers. Science, for example, increased its A*-C rate by 10 percent and over half the entry gained a C or higher in English. All 25 pupils passed GCSE music, and every entrant passed in GNVQ Hospitality and Catering and ICT. At the same time KS3 SATs results were the best for many years in Maths and Science.

At A level, we again achieved a very high pass rate, with the proportion of A-C grades the highest for several years. AS results remain inconsistent; many pupils find year 12 difficult, but find their feet in year 13. The AS/A structure is unsatisfactory and needs reform.

Intakes

The school continues to grow in size. We admitted over 250 pupils in September at year

7. We enrolled 120 students in the co-educational sixth form. This represents a significant increase and reflects a higher staying on rate as GCSE results have improved.

Co-education

Progress made by the Vale in preparing for consultation with parents over co-education stalled during the year, despite a helpful consultants’ report received late in 2003. Governors are keen for the politicians to press ahead with the development of options and a crucial canvass of parental opinion. Many believe that the present system of boys’ and girls’ schools is anachronistic and impedes children’s social and educational development. We would like to hear what present or prospective parents think about co-ed.

Senior management

During the year were some key changes in the leadership team as a result of the retirement of a Deputy Head and the Head of Sixth Form. Two new Assistant Heads have been appointed – one an internal applicant. However, we were unable in two attempts to appoint a Deputy and we will make another attempt to fill this post early in 2005.

Governors have approved a scheme under the Freedom of Information Act and a new Complaints Policy. School policies are kept under an ongoing review. During the year we focused particularly on teaching and learning, departmental monitoring and performance management policies.

Sixth Form

The joint Barry Sixth Form is a continuing success in offering a wide range of options to students at 16-plus as well as providing a more adult, mixed-gender environment in which to study and socialise. We work closely and increasingly amicably with Bryn Hafren’s staff.

Self-evaluation

Self-evaluation is critical to school improvement. Governors are developing a self-enhancement tool that will enable scrutiny of their effectiveness and improve their partnership with staff.

Congratulations

We are delighted that Cllr Emlyn Williams, a very experienced governor, was elected Mayor of the Vale, and that our governor colleague Cllr Tony Hampton has been elected to chair the Welsh Joint Education Committee.

Finance

Russell Grant

Schools in the Vale of Glamorgan continue to receive less money per pupil than any other schools in England and Wales. This is because of the way in which the Welsh Assembly Government determines the Vale council's revenue support grant. As a consequence, our limited budget places a restraint on the ambitions of staff and governors alike for the school's development.

In 2003 – 04 the council gave us £150,000 less than we needed to balance the books. Again, in 2004 – 05, our budget requirement of £4.3m was far short of the £3.8m allocated by the council. As in previous years, we have been able to find different forms of extra income and grants to help meet the shortfall. But for the first time ever we have been unable to set a balanced budget, and there is an estimated shortfall of £180,000.

The governing body has effectively had to borrow this amount, and promise to repay the Vale over the next three years. A rise in pupil numbers in 2005 and 2006 should help but we will also have to be even more resourceful in

The budget shortfall for 2004-5 is £180,000

finding extra cash to repay the deficit.

Over the last ten years there has been a cumulative funding shortfall of approximately £1.5m. Just think what this implies in terms of lost resources and extra teachers. The way in which the Welsh Assembly Government and the local council blame each other for the shortfall in funding for schools must be challenged. More than ever government settlements have become a game of smoke and mirrors.

Delivery and monitoring

The governors' Finance Committee works closely with the head and his team to ensure that value for money is achieved from the school's limited resources. The Committee has delegated powers, which include the regular authorising of financial commitments and expenditure. This strategic oversight is assisted by skilful day to day financial management by the Bursar and her staff; external audits regularly pay tribute to their efficiency.

We continue to operate our own bank accounts to ensure that we are fully in control of the school's money.

Every effort is made to identify and secure grant assistance to fund specific initiatives

Curriculum

Kath Beaudette



Above
Drama Munchkins
Above right
Hospitality and Catering students

in an attempt to balance the budget. Whilst the uncertainty of this is an inefficient way in which to fund the school, our limited financial resources dictate such an approach in order to be able to deliver the school development plan.

In recent years, in order to provide up to date computers that the information technology curriculum demands, we have leased rather than purchased equipment. This method of financing maximises the budget available by spreading the financial commitment over more than one year and further ensures that the school keeps pace with advances in technology and curriculum demands. Currently we have repaid all our leasing obligations. However, we continue to build up reserves by means of fund raising social events and the letting of the school's premises out of school hours. This should mean that we can enter into further leasing obligations as the need arises and respond to technology-led demands.

Our overall financial priority is to ensure that staffing levels are maintained to be able to deliver the school's development plan. In spite of our financial restraints, we have never made teachers redundant and it is our policy never to do so.



Curriculum development continues apace, driven primarily by the school development plan. A practical document which identifies specific tasks, this is shaped by strategic priorities agreed by teachers, senior managers and governors together.

There are three key priorities.

The first is to enhance student attainment in Years 7-9 through building key skills more firmly into classroom learning. How well we do this will be closely examined in our next school inspection.

The second is to develop courses that help students to be successful in years 10 and 11. We want to make sure we offer an effective mix of subjects so that school work is attractive to both the vocationally oriented and the academically talented. We want all pupils to be achievers, to view their school days as the time when they were given the maximum opportunity to prepare for life. The school's mentoring scheme, matching students with teachers who monitor their progress and support their learning, continues to be effective.

The third priority is to develop the curriculum in the Sixth Form. Increased student success at GCSE means that more pupils want to stay on at school. Governors are committed to the support the Sixth Form offers – encouraging learning and study skills while offering focused personal and social guidance. Elements of the Welsh Baccalaureate are being extended to offer extra study support to Sixth Formers.

The 2004-5 school year will see further curriculum development based around the effectiveness of teaching and learning, establishing accreditation procedures in key skills at Key Stage 3, and a new coaching initiative with Barry Town FC that will both enhance sporting provision in school and help students develop wider "lifestyle" skills.

A safe route home?

Matthew Griffiths

The school enjoys a close and successful working relationship with the Vale council. We are therefore concerned by the Vale's handling of an issue critical to the safety of pupils who enter and leave the school site via the playing field next to the Cwm Talwg woods. This route is essential given the hazardous route along the main road between Tesco and Weycock Cross.

For several years we have been trying to resolve a dispute between ourselves and the new Welsh school over access across this field. This is a long and involved saga, that has got more complex since we realised in the summer of 2002 that the new school's governors had failed to sign up to what we had believed to be a joint agreement allowing their use of the playing field but safeguarding its attachment to Barry Comprehensive.

As a response to the Welsh school, the council some time ago produced a scheme for a new path, fenced on both sides, around the outer edges of the field. This would prevent our pupils walking over or around the pitches.

We have repeatedly expressed the view that the design of the path poses unacceptable dangers to pupils and other users. In the meantime, we have maintained access to Conway Drive for our pupils.

The most recent version of the scheme does not take account of our concerns about safety. Fenced on both sides, it would seal users into a narrow unlit dog-legged passage. Anyone confronted by a stronger, faster and bigger attacker would be seriously at risk and have no easy escape. Children and others could become potential victims of assault.

In March last year we proposed an alternative scheme for a path to the Vale and were promised joint discussions with the Welsh school. The promise of talks evaporated, but we were surprised when in the last week of the winter term the head was told that the Vale intended, without further consultation, to build the path in the new year.

STOP PRESS Following an approach to the Vale's leader, we have now been promised that the proposal has been halted pending discussions with governors.



Open Evening

Staffing

David Kennett

The school's high reputation has encouraged a flow of impressive applicants for teaching vacancies at all levels, including new entrants to the profession.

Our main area of concern as governors has been that we have been unable to fill the two vacant Deputy Head posts. This places considerable pressure on the head and his four assistants.

During the early part of 2005 we will attempt to strengthen the senior management team. Some leadership tasks are being taken on by well qualified middle-managers; this shares the load, at the same time as offering a degree of professional development.

We continue to manage our budget in order to keep down class size, especially for year 7 and year 8 pupils. Smaller teaching groups improve student learning. Governors are sure this policy has contributed to the school's acknowledged success in maximising opportunities to succeed.

It is a great pity that despite the school's successes, we get less and less money in real terms each year to do our job. The blame lies with the Assembly Government. We will do everything to protect teaching jobs – but doing so means drastic cuts in money for books and equipment.

Meanwhile morale amongst teachers and support staff is reflected in low levels of sickness absence and the high level of commitment shown to extra-curricular activities.

Pupil welfare

Pat Beard

Governors continue to receive guidance on the changes in legislation and government policy that affect pupils' welfare. These often relate to children with special educational needs, disabilities or behavioural problems. We work closely with teachers to ensure that the school does its very best for pupils.

Governors have sometimes been concerned that children who neither shine nor cause problems have not always had their efforts acknowledged. A new system of recording and reporting ensures that children who attend regularly and are well behaved will automatically get a good report.

The continued application of positive discipline measures throughout the school has resulted in a teaching and learning environ-

Attendance for the year was 90 percent

ment that is more enjoyable for pupils and teachers alike. Visitors to the school in the past year have often commented on the calm and orderly atmosphere in which the school operates.

Attendance and punctuality remain a strategic priority for the school. Pupils need to be regular attenders if they are to get the best, not only out of formal lessons, but the wide range of social, sporting and extra-curricular opportunities the school offers.

We continue to develop alternative provision for children who are not responding well to the school environment, with flexible approaches to delivering learning opportunities.

Finally, the school maintains its close working relationship with the Amelia Trust Farm. Governors from the Pupil Welfare group visited the Trust in the summer term, and were impressed by the greatly enhanced facilities there, and by the creative ways in which staff work with children from different age groups.

Sport

It is impossible to find space to name all those pupils who have excelled at county, national and international level. This report can only offer a brief insight into student success.

The school was extremely successful in athletics during the summer term. For example, the year 7 triathlon team were overall winners of their competition, and five pupils gained honours in the county championships. Jamie Jones represented Wales in his sprint and long jump events. Our year 7 rugby team reached the Vale final, as did three of our football teams. Year 9 footballers were county champions and Wales Schools' cup finalists.

There have been some exceptionally good rugby and football team performances since September, and some excellent cross-country performances. Meanwhile the PE department is developing inter form competitions in variety of sports and organises extra-curricular clubs on a weekly basis. Many teachers outside the PE department help to run these.



Sumo wrestling became part of the curriculum during the year!

GOVERNORS

Parent Governors Tracey Batt, Pat Beard (Special needs governor), Lyn Cosgrove, Mary Dyas, Lorna Tinsley, Alvine Westerland

Co-opted Governors Kath Beaudette (Chair, School Improvement), Russell Grant (Chair of Finance), Matthew Griffiths (Chair), David Kennett (Vice Chair and Chair of Staffing), Nick Paulakis

Teacher Governors Jason Hicks, Brian Williams

Non-teaching staff Governor André Desrosiers

LEA Governors Cllr Tony Hampton, Cllr Emlyn Williams, John Williams, Graham Ellis, Chris Britten

Headteacher David Swallow

Additional committee/working group members John Doel, Steve James, Caroline Oxenham, John Stacy Marks.

During the school year 2003-4, John Doel, Steve James, John Stacy Marks and Tina Webb also served as governors. David Kennett was acting chair and Kath Beaudette acting vice chair from October 2003 until May 2004.

The Chair of the Governing Body can be contacted through the school, or via the Clerk to the Governors, Janice Davies, at the Vale of Glamorgan Council Education Department. Minutes of the Governing Body can be inspected at the school. Our address is: Barry Comprehensive School, Port Road West, Barry, CF82 8ZJ. Our telephone number is 01446 411411.

ANNUAL MEETING FOR PARENTS 6 PM 3 February 2005

All parents are invited to come to the Annual Meeting, which provides an opportunity to discuss any matters concerning the school's management and performance with the head and governors. If enough parents are present, the meeting can pass resolutions which the governing body has to consider at its next meeting.

If *you* have a particular question you would like to ask, why not fill in the form below? You could also offer comments on issues in this report.

Annual meeting for parents, 3 February 2004

My/our question/comment is:

Please return this slip to the Chair of Governors, Barry Comprehensive School, Port Road West, Barry CF62 8ZJ by 27 January 2004.