

COUNCIL: 21 SEPTEMBER 2023

DEPUTY LEADER & EDUCATION STATEMENT

Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC)

As Members will be aware following the update sent by email on 12 September 2023, RAAC inspections in our schools have concluded and no RAAC has been found in any of the city's Local Authority maintained schools, which will be reassuring for parents, pupils, staff, and governors.

School Buildings Investment

I am pleased to inform you that we have successfully completed four major school projects for the start of the new school term. The following projects handed over were:

- Fitzalan High School (new build)
- Ysgol Gymraeg Groeswen Primary School (new school)
- St Mellons CiW Primary School (new build)
- Cantonian High School (temporary school ahead of new build)

Despite the school closures that have been required at Cantonian High School, the completion of these four schools has been a tremendous effort. The new buildings will transform the teaching and learning environments for thousands of pupils for years to come. In addition, they have all been delivered in a climate of increasing costs and rising interest rates.

GCSE and A-Level Exam Results

This year marks the second year that learners have undertaken summer exams marked and graded by exam boards since 2019. The national picture across Wales is that the results fell broadly midway between those awarded in 2019 and 2022. This means, for each subject, results at national level are higher than they were in 2019, and lower than they were in 2022 where additional measures were put in place. I am pleased to say that the results were yet again above the Welsh average. A summary of our achievements is below:

GCSE

- 29.3% percent of GCSE results for 2023 are graded A* to A in WJEC examinations, compared to the Wales figure of 21.7% percent.
- The percentage of GCSE entries resulting in C grades is 70.9% percent, which is above the Wales figure of 64.9% percent.
- For entries graded A* to G, the 2023 figure for Cardiff is 97% percent, compared to the Wales figure of 96.9%.

A-Level

- 42.1% percent of A-level results for 2023 are graded A* to A, compared to the Wales figure of 34% percent.
- The percentage of A-level entries resulting in A* to E grades is 98.4%, compared to the Wales figure of 97.5%.
- For entries graded A* to C, the 2023 figure is 85.1%, compared to the Wales-wide figure of 78.9%.

Universal Primary Free School Meals

The roll-out continues with all pupils from reception to Year 2 successfully receiving universal free school meals by June. From the start of this autumn term, Year 3 are now being offered free school meals. It is planned that Year 4 pupils will receive free school meals from 20 November 2023, which is currently on track with Welsh Government's expectations. It is worth acknowledging that the roll-out to date has been achieved by the work of officers, school kitchen staff and school leaders across the city despite many challenges.

Food and Fun

Welsh Government's Food and Fun funding support enabled another successful year of Cardiff Education's multi-award-winning school holiday programme, Food and Fun. The initiative, now in its eighth year, helps ease the financial pressures on many families across the city during the school holiday period by providing healthy nutritious meals alongside an exciting programme of educational, skills and sports provision as well as sessions in nutrition education.

This summer the programme was held in 27 schools (two Welsh-medium primary schools, one special school, one Pupil Referral Unit, three English-medium secondary schools and 20 English-medium primary schools). In Cardiff, we again extended the programme to include communities beyond the traditionally funded targeted areas. More than 1,700 children accessed the provision this summer, with over 30 citywide partners providing enrichment activities to enable them to learn new skills, socialise and have fun.

Food and Fun also supported the Flexible Supported Employment Pathway. This enabled pupils from Specialist Resources Bases at Cantonian and Llanishen High Schools to gain valuable hands-on experience in a commercial school kitchen during the summer term, enabling transition into paid employment through the Food and Fun initiative.

Following on from the work undertaken with last year's Vegetable Pilot, this year the programme again worked with local growers, Food Cardiff, Cardiff Council and the city's school meal supplier, Castell Howell. The work was expanded to the Welsh Vegetable in Schools Programme to look at scale, variety of vegetables, replicability and to further interrogate financial mechanisms that might work to bridge the gap between conventionally grown imported vegetables and vegetables grown sustainably in Wales. The initiative supports our commitment to supply two portions of vegetables in all school lunches and the drive to increase local food production and distribution; reduce carbon footprints; benefit local economies, ecologies, and communities; and connect learners with the origins of the food they eat.

Again, I want to express my sincere thanks to everyone involved in delivering a successful programme this summer, which has provided much-needed provision during the summer break.

Cardiff Commitment

Last month, Cardiff Commitment hosted a number of workshops for partners to discuss the opportunities and provision needed to inspire the next generation of young people to develop the skills needed for the jobs of tomorrow. Over 150 partners attended the workshops.

The Cardiff Commitment team has also been working with Eastern High and their cluster primaries to develop a Green Skills Project with Year 6 pupils over the summer term. This month, over 275 pupils on their first day at Eastern High School took the initiative with Cardiff Commitment partners such as Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water, Wates Group, LCB Group, VVB Engineering, Wardell Armstrong, and Morgan Sindall to explore sustainable solutions and prove that the future is bright and sustainable. Other exciting projects included the commencement of a social enterprise project at Greenhill Special School, which involves growing shiitake mushrooms hydroponically in a shipping container. Partnership working with John Lewis provided work experience over the summer for five young people who have experienced care. This September, as part of the scheme, the young people will participate in a supported interview process, providing an opportunity to truly explore the John Lewis Partnership and start a meaningful career.

In relation to the Additional Learning Needs Supported Employment Pathways programme, this month, a cohort of 16 pupils will start the full-time pathway in partnership with Cardiff and Vale University Health Board and BBC studios. There is also work ongoing with the schools catering service in Llanishen, Cantonian, Cardiff West and Eastern High Schools to provide further opportunities. This summer saw all 10 pupils in the 2022/23 cohort graduate at Cardiff and Vale University Health Board be successful at gaining and sustaining employment.

Finally, a joint bid with iungo Solutions, Coleg Y Cymoedd, WJEC and partners from the Semi Compound Conductor Cluster has been secured from Innovate UK, which will enable us to better connect and support pupils in Year 12 to transition in the jobs of the future within the industry.

Passport to the City

Passport to the City is a programme with the goal of raising aspirations for all by providing opportunities and access to all the world class amenities Cardiff has to offer. During the summer, the programme delivered a suite of exciting opportunities, including the ION Gym programme, which provided access to exercise sessions. Free access was provided for over 100 young people to The Hundred cricket matches at Sophia Gardens, which allowed young people from some of the city's most vulnerable groups to watch both women's and men's cricket. Dungeons & Dragons sessions were also provided in collaboration with our partners Geek Retreat and Exceptional Beasts. In addition, the programme provided access for both families and young people to this year's Family Fun Fair at Cardiff Bay, as well as bespoke tours of the BBC studios.

Welsh Network of Healthy School Schemes National Quality Award

The Welsh Government's Healthy Schools Scheme and the National Quality Award consists of seven core areas of school life that directly affect the health and wellbeing of children and young people. These include food (nutrition) & fitness (physical activity); mental & emotional health and wellbeing; personal development & relationships; substance use & misuse; environment; safety; and hygiene. To achieve the National Quality Award, schools are required to go through a lengthy and rigorous process, which recognises the hard work of staff, pupils, and their wider school community. To date, 14 Cardiff schools have achieved this prestigious award, and I am pleased to confirm that St Bernadette's Catholic Primary School is the latest school to be awarded national recognition for its work to promote health and wellbeing throughout its school community at the very highest standard.

Councillor Sarah Merry
Deputy Leader & Cabinet Member for Education
21 September 2023