

COUNCIL: 28 MARCH 2024

DEPUTY LEADER & EDUCATION STATEMENT

Universal Free School Meals

Universal Primary Free School Meals have been rolled out to Reception and Years 1-4 in Cardiff schools in line with Welsh Government expectations. A recent successful bid for additional capital funding from the Welsh Government for kitchen works and catering equipment has enabled the rollout of the programme to continue. Year 5 pupils will receive Universal Primary Free School Meals from 8 April 2024 and Year 6 pupils will receive them from 3 June 2024, which will ensure that the rollout is completed by September 2024 in line with Welsh Government expectations.

Secondary School Places 2024

Offers of secondary school places were issued on 1 March 2024. With 17 of 18 secondary schools in Cardiff now part of the Council's co-ordinated admissions system, the improvements that have been made to ensuring that applicants receive an on-time offer are highlighted by the following KPI data:

- 100% of applications received online for the second year running.
- Children securing their first preference for a community secondary school place was up to 88% from 86% last year and 82.4% in 2021.
- Children securing one of their preferences applying for a secondary school place (community or co-ordinated) was up to 95.1% from 93.8% last year and 92.3% in 2021.
- Children securing one of their top 3 preferences for a community secondary school place was up to 98.7% from 98% last year and 91.7% in 2021.

The only duplicate offers remaining in the system will be with St Illtyds Catholic High School which manage its own offers outside of the co-ordinated admissions system.

Overall, there was a significant decrease in catchment refusals this year, with Cardiff High School seeing a 74% reduction, with only 20 catchment pupils refused compared to 78 last year. Similarly, there was a 45% reduction in the number of catchment applicants refused this year for Fitzalan High School, with 43 catchment pupils refused compared to 78 last year. There were 12 catchment refusals for Ysgol Gyfun Gymraeg Glantaf. Of these, 10 pupils have received an offer in one of the other two Welsh Medium High Schools and 2 pupils currently remain without an offer. There are 18 places remaining in Welsh Medium High Schools in Cardiff (6 at Ysgol Gyfun Gymraeg Plasmawr and 12 at Ysgol Gyfun Gymraeg Bro Edern).

Whole School Approach to Emotional Health and Well-being

Good progress is being made with rolling out the implementation of the Whole School Approach to Emotional Health and Well Being, with a focus on schools with secondary-aged learners. As of 7 March 2024, 91% of Cardiff schools with secondary-aged learners are completing a self-evaluation tool. Progress with primary schools/primary special schools is also gathering pace, with 51% now in the process of completing the self-evaluation tool. An event showcasing the Whole School Approach to Emotional Health and Well Being was held on 18 March 2024 for schools with secondary-age learners in Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan in order to share good practice and provide opportunities for schools to meet with partner organisations that can support emotional and mental wellbeing within their school.

Ein Dinas: Ein Hiaith / Our City: Our Language Website

The [‘Ein Dinas: Ein Hiaith’ / ‘Our City: Our Language’ website](#) is an exciting and innovative joint initiative by the Council’s Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP) and Bilingual Cardiff Teams. The new website, which has been referred to as ‘a one stop shop’ for all things Welsh in Cardiff, aims to encourage everyone to explore all the various and increasing opportunities to learn and use the Welsh language in the capital city.

Last month, a competition was held to name the dragon that is the main character of the website. Hundreds of entries were received from the city’s schools and Annabel (Year 1) from Whitchurch Primary School was announced the winner by the Leader of the Council in his St David’s Day message to the city. Annabel named the dragon, Tesni, and explained that she chose the name because it means warmth of the sun, and the dragon on the website looks so warm and friendly. It was a real privilege to present Annabel with her prizes – a Lego dragon and a red dragon hand puppet – at her school’s St David’s Day Eisteddfod. In addition, her class will have the opportunity to visit Cardiff Castle for a guided tour where Tesni the dragon lives.

Whitchurch Primary School has already secured the Siater Iaith: Cymraeg Campus Silver Award and will be assessed for the Gold Award in the Summer Term. I would like to commend the school’s staff and pupils for their dedication to the Welsh language and wish them all the best with their Gold Award assessment later this year.

Ysgol Gynradd Groes-wen Primary School

Earlier this month, I was pleased to attend the official opening of Ysgol Gynradd Groes-wen Primary School, located within the Plasdŵr development in north-west Cardiff. The £9million primary school is the first of its kind in Cardiff and Wales, providing a dual language stream and a Welsh-medium stream. The dual language stream will consist of 50% Welsh and 50% English, known as a 50/50 split. In addition, there is a 96 place part-time nursery provision, which is supported by a Cylch Meithrin offering wrap around provision. The Cylch will also operate an afterschool club for pupils. The new school supports Cardiff’s aspirations to grow the Welsh language and develop bilingualism within a modern learning environment, which ensures that children and young people receive the best possible education.

Fairwater Campus

A ground-breaking ceremony was held on 8 February 2024 to mark the start of construction of the new Fairwater Campus. The £110m project is the largest in scale and investment of the education developments being delivered as part of the Council and Welsh Government's Band B Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme in Cardiff. The development will include the construction of three new build schools for Cantonian High School, Riverbank School and Woodlands High School, which will all be located on a single site. I was pleased to join the former First Minister, Mark Drakeford MS, and the Leader of the Council at the event, alongside the Head of School and Chair of Governors at Cantonian High School, and the Executive Headteacher and Chair of Governors of the Western Learning Federation, which includes both Riverbank School and Woodlands High School. The development will be Net Zero Carbon in line with Welsh Government standards and will set the standard for future Cardiff school projects. Each of the three new school buildings will be highly energy efficient and powered from renewable energy sources.

Ysgol Cynefin

The Council has selected Kier Construction as the preferred bidder to design and construct new accommodation for Ysgol Cynefin, which was formerly known as The Court School. Ysgol Cynefin translates to 'habitat school' and was chosen by the school and key stakeholders to encompass the relationship between people and the natural world, and how connecting people to surroundings can shape a sense of identity and wellbeing.

The £23m project will increase the capacity of the school by relocating and providing new build school facilities across two sites in the city – one to the south of the existing Fairwater Primary School site and the other to the south of Pen Y Bryn Primary School in Llanrumney on the former St Mellons Church in Wales Primary School site. The new school will grow from 42 to 72 places, with 36 pupils on each site from the 2025-26 academic year, helping to meet the city's demand for primary age specialist provision. Both sites will also boast a range of comprehensive facilities including multi-use games areas, sports and soft play areas, sports pitches and horticultural areas. The project will provide state of the art facilities that will enhance teaching and learning for the most vulnerable children in the city and will be completed by autumn 2025.

Edible Playgrounds

The Edible Playgrounds programme continues to spread its branches across more Cardiff schools, transforming primary school playgrounds, introducing food growing areas, trees, green infrastructure and natural play and learning features. A total of 7 schools (Fairwater Primary School; Holy Family Roman Catholic Primary School; Oakfield Primary School; Rumney Primary School; Springwood Primary School; St Paul's Church in Wales Primary School, and Ysgol Glan Ceubal) have benefited from the Edible Playgrounds programme in 2023/24, which has seen nearly 30 Cardiff schools participate in the programme since it began in 2019. In 2024/25, we hope to see more schools benefitting from edible playgrounds, with the programme extending to secondary schools and more partners in sustainability becoming involved.

Liquid Trees Project

As part of the Council's work to promote sustainability, environmental awareness and climate education in the city's schools in line with our One Planet Cardiff strategy, Cardiff is the first Local Authority in the UK where algal bioreactors or 'liquid trees' have been offered to all schools. The Curriculum Team is working with Our Classroom Climate as part of the 'liquid trees' project in Cardiff schools, which is teaching children and young people about carbon capture to combat climate change. The 'liquid trees' have been designed by Our Classroom Climate as part of its climate education programme. They are algal bioreactors, which are not only simple to maintain and manage, but they also have the capacity, subject to optimum conditions, to capture CO2 up to 400 times faster than traditional trees. Pupils can also watch the algae improve the air quality in their classrooms and know that they are playing an important part in tackling climate change. More importantly, these 'liquid trees' are a great, hands-on, interactive educational tool that helps to put environmental education quite literally at the heart of the classroom experience in Cardiff.

Rights Respecting Schools Gold Award

I was invited to join St Joseph's Primary School for their celebration of attaining the Rights Respecting Schools Gold Award, which is a testament to their unwavering commitment to embedding children's rights at the heart of their educational ethos. The innovative approaches taken by pupils and staff, including their engagement with the School Senedd, participation in Super Ambassador Special Missions, and advocacy for global citizenship, exemplify the profound impact of integrating the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child into every facet of school life. It is clear that the school not only champions the rights of its pupils, but also empowers them to become advocates for social justice and fairness, both locally and globally. St Joseph's Primary School's achievement take the number of schools attaining the Gold Award in Cardiff to 20, with 32 others at the Silver Award level, making Cardiff the best in the country.

Cardiff Commitment

The Cardiff Commitment Team is working with Cardiff & Vale University Health Board to develop supported employment pathways for Children Looked After from Eastern High School. In response to this work, I am pleased to confirm that the Council's Flexible Supported Employment Pathway scheme, which is delivered by the Cardiff Commitment Team in partnership with the Post 16 ALN Team and Education Catering Service, has been shortlisted as a finalist for two national awards – the Public Sector Catering Awards 2024 (in the Training and Apprenticeship award category) and the Springboard Awards for Excellence 2024 (in the Disability Champion award category). The winners of both awards are due to be announced next month.

The Cardiff Commitment Team has also launched Shape My Street project for the second successive year. This is a collaborative project between the Welsh School of Architecture, Cardiff Primary Schools and construction partners, which explores how creativity and design skills contribute to shaping communities and how the social value commitment of contractors can be utilised to support projects in schools.

Junior Chef Academy

The Junior Chef Academy, delivered by Compass Cymru in collaboration with Cardiff and Vale College as part of a Cardiff Commitment-led initiative, provided a 10-week intensive programme for students from Cardiff West Community High School to develop culinary skills and an understanding of careers in the hospitality industry. This initiative forms part of a broader hospitality sector project at Cardiff West Community High School to help provide career and work related experiences for students. The programme combined theoretical knowledge with practical skills and covered a range of areas, including knife skills, salads and healthy eating, bread, meat, fish dishes, poultry and desserts. It culminated in a graduation event held on 6 February 2024 at Cardiff City Stadium where those budding young chefs who participated in the programme were able to showcase their new skills by designing and preparing a three-course meal that was served to an audience of more than 40 guests, including parents, carers, college and school representatives and local authority dignitaries. Each graduate was honoured with a certificate, a set of chef knives and a goody bag with the generous support of Compass Cymru. The programme was also sponsored by Brakes who provided the food and chef whites.

Passport to the City

As the annual Schools Lego League approaches, over 30 schools in the city are preparing their students for the final competition in June 2024. Students are engaging with the Curriculum Team to hone their engineering and coding skills for a series of challenges that promote creativity, teamwork, and problem-solving. This initiative emphasises the importance of STEM education and fosters innovation among students.

The Curriculum Team is also connecting students with local heritage, such as in the Gabalfa area, including visits to Glamorgan Archives to explore the community's history. Working in collaboration with Unify Creative, students are designing a mural that blends past and future aspirations for their community. Similarly, in Llanishen, students have partnered with Cardiff University's Geography Department to influence the new Local Development Plan to help create a child friendly city that reflects their needs. In addition, the Curriculum Team is working in collaboration with UCAN Productions to support eight visually impaired students as they seek to achieve an arts award.

The Passport to the City Team, in partnership with IoN Gym and Riverside Warehouse, is offering workshops to promote physical fitness, discipline, and excellence. The team also collaborated with the Community Volunteering Team and St Mellons Hub to provide a week of free activities and workshops for children and young people during the school half-term holiday last month. These initiatives highlight the Council's commitment to providing diverse and enriching experiences for children and young people in Cardiff and supporting them to contribute positively to their communities and beyond.

Councillor Sarah Merry
Deputy Leader & Cabinet Member for Education
22 March 2024