

HEADMASTER'S REPORT.
PRIZE DAY.
THURSDAY, 27th MARCH, 1980.

ABERDARE BOYS' COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL.
PRIZE DAY, 1980.

Mr. Chairman, Dr. Morton Davies, Dr. Marilyn Davies, ladies and gentlemen, boys.

This evening I welcome you in the Main Hall of what used to be one of the Authority's best designed and equipped secondary schools. Indeed, the very spaciousness and attractiveness of this Hall serves as a mocking reminder of what was once an excellent building. On Prize Day last year I voiced the hope that some of our pupils would be restored to the former Rhydywaun building once the damage done by the January fire had been made good. However, the second fire on April 8th made it impossible for this hope to be fulfilled. It is difficult to think without bitterness of the events which deprived so many children of this valley of the many facilities previously available on this site.

The bitterness of recollection, however, in no way diminishes the welcome I extend to you to-night. A special welcome, of course, goes to our guests, Dr. Morton Davies and Dr. Marilyn Davies. We trust they will enjoy themselves with us this evening. Both were pupils of the former Aberdare Grammar Schools and, no doubt, later this evening will find ample opportunity of renewing acquaintanceships with many of you in the audience and reviving memories of their earlier days in Aberdare.

But now for my report for the period under review, that is, from March 22nd, the date of our last Prize Day, to the present.

The disastrous fire of April 8th had the effect of ensuring that the Authority's controversial proposals to accelerate Comprehensive reorganisation into a single-sex School System were implemented. In addition, during the Summer Term a considerable amount of time was taken up in planning alternative accommodation for 292 pupils to be re-housed at this site. What was done, despite the irritation of delays and occasional lack of material, was remarkable and enabled us to make a very smooth start here from the new academic year in September, 1979.

Thanks to detailed preparation, the new academic year at the Upper Comprehensive school also began and continued very smoothly. All boys joining us from Y Gadlys School had already been interviewed individually, so that their social and academic needs could be assessed and met as far as possible. It is pleasing to report, as I did last year, that there has not been one incident of friction arising among boys formerly from three different schools as a result of the merger. I attribute this to the policy of mixing the pupils as broadly as possible, socially and academically, within a banded system and, of course, to the good sense of the pupils themselves.

However, as I predicted, several former Y Gadlys Senior pupils initially found it difficult to adjust to new teachers and methods again after having had many other changes of Staff at re-organisation in September, 1978.

The September intake of 142 Form 1 pupils brought the school roll to 912. The new entrants at Rhydywaun soon settled in well at their school. Again, parents are to be congratulated at the general high standard of appearance and dress of their boys. All boys are in the prescribed uniform. The attendance of parents at the Form 1 evening and, later, the Open Day is also to be commended. On the latter occasion more than eighty attended during the day, some even changing shifts to be able to attend. They saw their children in their normal working conditions and expressed general pleasure at the manner in which the boys had settled down and were making progress. I am especially grateful to parents of the pupils at Rhydywaun for the appreciation they have shown of some of the accommodation difficulties we experienced at the Lower Comprehensive School for much of the Autumn Term. As part of the liaison established with the contributory Primary schools, the former headteachers of our Form 1 boys were again invited to visit us to see their pupils in their new surroundings. I shall also arrange for some of our Staff to visit the Primary schools during the Summer Term.

During the period under review there have been relatively few staff changes in a teaching complement of 56. At the end of the summer term four

members of staff retired. They were ; — Mr. T.J.Evans (Geography), Mr. D.D.Davies (Biological Subjects), Mr. D.C.Phelps (French), and Mr. G.P.Walters, (Teacher in charge of the Lower Comprehensive). Their long and loyal service to teaching was suitably acknowledged by staff and pupils. We wish them a long and happy retirement. Their replacements were respectively : — Mr. Gareth Pugh, Mr. Wayne Davies, Miss Jean Rawlings, and Mr. Leonard Whitmarsh. Other members of staff who left were Mr. T.Lewis (Mathematics), Mr. E.C.Morgan (P.E.), and Mr. P.A.Davies (Geography). Teachers appointed to replace them were : Mr. B.Roberts, Mr. M.Powell and Mr. J.Rawlings.

The members of staff who commute between the two schools are again to be thanked for their general co-operation in ensuring punctuality of arrival in arranging their movements between sites. This, of course, is essential to the smooth running of the school. Staff teaching here at the Lower Comprehensive also have the additional inconvenience of moving from room to room in weather that is often inclement. There is no covered way to afford protection, and the staff room is sited in the Youth Wing.

Academically, the school's performance has again been generally satisfactory. At the 'A' Level examinations of the W.J.E.C. the letter grades A to E represented almost 70% of the total entry, a favourable result in which the percentages for the three top grades of A,B,C were above the national average. Twelve pupils gained A grades, and in the special papers there were three distinctions and five merits.

Some boys who gained very good results were as follow:

Neil Davies	A,A,B.
Martin Luke	A,A,B with a Merit in the Special Paper
Gareth Griffiths	A,B,C with a Distinction in the Special Paper.
Peter Williams	A,B,D.
Neil Rushmere	A,B,D.

These boys received Awards from the School Kenshole Trust Fund.

At 'O' Level there were 735 entries over a range of 28 subjects. Here results were once more generally satisfactory. The Autumn examination results improved on these again. The few subject areas which continue to disappoint are being carefully examined.

The C.S.E. entries, which included for the first time candidates from the former Secondary Modern School at Rhydywaun, were generally of very good standard. More than 25% of the results were of Grade 1, the equivalent of a C pass at 'O' Level.

At this point I must remind you that the examination results, whilst generally good in any context, are particularly so when one remembers the circumstances of last year. The winter of discontent with its school closures, the appalling weather, transport difficulties, teachers' sanctions, in themselves presented problems enough for the school, but we also experienced a fire which displaced 361 pupils for the Spring and Summer Terms. These pupils were relocated for some time on five sites, with limited facilities. It was with pleasure, therefore, that when reviewing the results of the W.J.E.C. Examinations, I noted that there was no evidence that they had been adversely affected by last year's difficulties. This reflects credit on the efforts of Staff and pupils.

Former pupils continue to visit us and we heard that eleven of these gained Honours degrees last year. One of these, John Morgan, gained a First Class Honours degree in Italian.

Five others gained degrees with Class II, Division 1 honours, and the other five had Class II degrees. Several former pupils are engaged in research for higher degrees.

Complementing the academic life of the school is a very active social life, involving a wide range of Societies to cater for pupils' interests. Many of these Societies hold their meetings after school. Several also act as springboards for visits to exhibitions and activities associated with their topics of interest. A notable success last year was that of the Debating Society in bringing together on the same platform, all four local Parliamentary candidates in the General election. The music provided here this evening is another illustration of the Music Society.

Many pupils continue to give active support to local and national charities. Considerable sums of money have been donated by the boys themselves to support such causes and we received several letters of commendation. Most gratifying, however, is the time the boys are prepared to give to helping with collections and the sale of flags.

It augurs well for the community that so many of our pupils, through their involvement with outside charity organisations, are already showing themselves to be socially conscious. The initiative displayed for causes outside the school is matched by the work done for raising money for the school itself. In conjunction with the Staff and parents, the boys raised £1,432 net in a Christmas Fayre. This money will help to purchase a second school minibus, a much-needed asset in a time of rapidly increasing transport costs.

During the year many visits, too numerous to list in detail, have been made to places of educational interest. Parties of boys have stayed at Rhosygwaliau and at the Urdd camps. At Easter a large party of pupils visited Germany, and in the summer vacation other pupils visited France.

The links with industry and commerce on which I reported last year are now well established. Whereas most schools still think of work experience in terms of the less academic pupils, we include Form VIA Level pupils in our programmes. Several Form VI boys have spent one to three days in local factories, studying the kinds of posts they wish to take up when qualified. This innovation has proved very successful, convincing some pupils that their career choice is correct, persuading others that they had better have second thoughts.

Sports and athletics continue to occupy a very important part in the corporate life of the school. Unfortunately, cricket and athletics were severely curtailed in the summer term as a result of Teachers' sanctions. No area or county championships were held, and boys were selected for representative teams through trials. Former County 400m champion Carl Jones seemed destined for international honours until forced to withdraw from the Welsh Championships in Cwmbran.

The Mid Glamorgan Schools' Cricket League was also disrupted and matches were finally abandoned. In the Senior Cup Competitions the First XI reached the second round.

The Junior Rugby Teams are enjoying an excellent season, the under 13s and 15s having lost only two games each. These teams contain several fine players. For the Senior Teams it has been a time of retrenchment, and the rebuilding of these has begun to show results.

The Swimming Team virtually swept the board in the Cynon Valley Championship, winning the Middle, Junior and Overall Championship trophies.

Badminton has a small, but dedicated following in the school and the Team is very ably led by Peter Stonelake. In the recent Mid-Glamorgan Championships the boys lost only one of their six games.

Here now are some individual achievements in sport and athletics:

Rugby. Andrew Thomas reached the under 19 Final Welsh Squad, but did not make the final trial, although coming close. David Moore and Neil Eynon have reached the final under 15 Schools' Trial and played for the 'Possibles'.

Cricket. Andrew Loyns, as well as playing for Mid-Glamorgan schools' senior team, went on to give a good account of himself when he represented the Welsh Schools at under 15 level.

Athletics. Huw Jones (Weight), Simon Berryman (Long Jump and Triple Jump) and Ashley Hamer (Pole Vault) represented Mid-Glamorgan.

Cross Country. Geraint Evans was Cynon Valley Senior Boy Champion.

Basket-ball. Adrian Armsden and Robert Rees continue to compete at a high level in their sports, Basketball and Boxing respectively. Last year Adrian Armsden represented Wales in the European Cup Championships in West Germany. He gives his time freely to coaching other boys in Basket-ball.

Boxing. Robert Rees, a Form 2 pupil, won the All Wales Boys' Club 30 Kilogram contest and was warmly commended for his sportsmanship.

Cross Country. Geraint Evans was Cynon Valley Senior Boy Champion. The Junior boys competed with distinction in the Mid-Glamorgan Championships and Mark Lambert (1st year), Steven Walton (2nd Year) and Tim Makin (3rd year) went on to represent Mid-Glamorgan.

Swimming. W. Paul Jones and Wyn Bassett represented Mid-Glamorgan in the Welsh Championships at Wrexham.

Badminton. Peter Stonelake and Mark Davies finished runners up in the Mid-Glamorgan Schools Championships.

Sailing. Lawrence Peters won the Mid-Glamorgan School Sailing Championship.

In all, this has been another eventful period. The pattern for Comprehensive education in the school was firmly established last year, and as yet, we have no evidence that it needs modification. Organisation of course will be constantly reviewed to meet the needs of a developing school.

The Craft Complex at the Old Boys' Grammar School on the Gadlys now comprises three workshops. The excellent facilities at these are welcome, but the transfer of children from lessons is utterly dependent on transport availability, promptness of arrival and departure of buses from the sites involved. It is desirable that at some future date such workshops will be in-corporated on the main site to prevent the time wastage arising from the occasional late arrival or

non-arrival of 'buses.

Accommodation difficulties to which I referred earlier have largely been resolved and I thank here the District Education Officer, his Staff and that of the Works Department for all the co-operation they have shown in helping the school over this period. It is to be hoped that the end of the year will see a start being made on the new buildings at the Upper Comprehensive School. These will replace accommodation destroyed at Rhydywaun. Unfortunately, even with these new buildings, all junior boys will have to be bused to and from Rhydywaun to make use of the Gymnasium and Playing area, as these will not be provided for them at the Upper Comprehensive School.

What has become clear is that the banding system of sixty per cent in the A Band and forty per cent in the B is necessarily somewhat artificial. The changed nature of secondary education means that the ability range of pupils is now distributed more evenly over four schools in the district. For socioeconomic reasons the school intake for the A band, designated by recommendation of the Primary Headteachers has not exceeded forty-three per cent and the sixty per cent is, therefore, made up from the other fifty-seven per cent. This, of course, will have an effect on the number of pupils capable of taking the full range of 'O' Level subjects expected in the old Grammar School system. However, I am sure that the school will be able to provide adequately for the broader range of the ability spectrum.

Success here will depend on the overall quality and flexibility of teaching provided. These I have no cause to doubt, basing my belief on the highly co-operative attitude already shown by most Staff who have readily adapted to the changed system. I thank them all, teaching and non-teaching, for another successful year despite the difficulties imposed by events beyond our control.

Mr. Chairman, I conclude my report.
