

OPEN EVENING 5th October 2016



TALK BY THE HEAD PREFECT, CAITLIN WILLIAMS



Hello and welcome to our open evening. My name is Caitlin Williams and I am Head Prefect here at Risca Community Comprehensive School. I would like to begin by saying thank you all for attending our open evening here at the school this evening. Having been appointed Head Prefect in the summer, I am incredibly proud not only to represent our school by standing here speaking to you but also to just be a part of the school community as a whole.

Year after year, our overall school exam results have got increasingly better. This is down to the incredible work ethic that we have that is encouraged by all staff at the school. They are always there to support us with our work and help us by giving us revision materials and useful website links to help us to achieve our full potential. Not only that, but all of the teachers and support staff help to build confidence in us so that we feel proud of our abilities. If you had told me when I was in Year 7 that I would have to stand here and give this speech, I am certain that I would be terrified at the prospect. However, from the constant encouragement that the staff at Risca give, when I was told at the beginning of term that I would give this speech, I was far less nervous!

Recently, the school has set up a challenge group and mentoring system. Both of these systems have helped pupils to raise aspirations but also given support in helping pupils get on track to achieve these aspirations.

There isn't a week at Risca when nothing is going on; we are constantly busy. Whether that is a sporting fixture, a school trip or a guest speaker, there's always something in the diary. As a result, there is always something that you can get involved in. For a relatively small school, we are renowned for our sporting achievements. The variety of clubs that you can join includes Netball, Football, Rugby and Hockey. You get the opportunities to take part in matches and tournaments as well as making friendships within the team. You also have the opportunities to take part in

clubs away from the sports field. We have a film club, take part in the Shakespeare Festival and run a school council in which you can be a representative. Although the main focus will be on your school work, the importance of the individual achievements and skills that you learn from extra-curricular activities is still vital. I know that for me and so many others, the memories of competing in sports tournaments, performing in a play or trekking through a Duke of Edinburgh Expedition are much better than the memories of revising for exams!

Of course, as to be expected, not every day here is going to be your favourite day ever; it is a school after all! However, having attended Risca over the past five years, I honestly couldn't imagine having gone to a better school.

I hope you enjoy your evening, I'm very sure that you will! Thank you.

TALK BY THE HEAD TEACHER, JOHN KENDALL

Thank you Caitlin.

Yes, welcome- and for some of you welcome back- to Risca Community Comprehensive School and our Community Campus. My name is John Kendall and I am very proud to be the Head Teacher of this school. My colleagues and I have already spoken together with some of our Year Eight pupils to most of the children at our feeder primaries, and I am pleased to see so many of you here this evening.



We are delighted to be part of a trio of services- the others being the Flying Start and the Leisure Centre- who share the same campus and work together for the good of all. Shortly you will be able to take a full tour of our campus, meet teachers and pupils and see plenty of activities. Recent visitors include two prime ministers: the former Taoiseach of Ireland Bertie Ahern and our own First Minister of Wales, Carwyn Jones, and the deputy speaker of the House of Commons, Lyndsey Hoyle. I am proud to say all said how impressed they were with our school. Some of you will remember HM Queen came here in 1977 and we've invited her back for the 40th anniversary in 2017.

Your children are the most important thing in your lives, and as a parent myself I know how difficult it can be to decide on a school- in fact it was a decision my wife and I made for our younger son just last year. Each year now we see more publicity, more costly adverts, more glossy leaflets. Schools seem almost to be in the pressure selling game! Although we have made a decision to stay away from that, I can understand it. And I am the first to say that the good news is there are plenty of good schools in this area. This is one of them; this is a very good school, crucially it is an improving school, and even more crucially it has been on an upward trend for some years- but the reality is that you want to be sure yourselves. That's why you're here.

Now, I am going to be honest with you. My appointment here started in an unusual way when I was seconded here at three days' notice in September 2009. I was happy to accept the professional challenge but I didn't know what to expect. If truth be told I had heard RCCS was not the best of schools. Its reputation outside its immediate community was not marvellous. Even then I found a completely different environment to the one I had expected, and after three weeks I had made up my mind I wanted to work here and applied for the proper job. But there was an important job of work for us all to do.

Some of you who are here tonight know our school well. Some of you are perhaps are more like I was back in 2009. To you I say thanks for coming to have a look and I hope we can show you what a great school we have- and it really is getting better and better. So what matters? What makes the difference at Risca?

Firstly, our staff. I am especially proud of our staff. They are well-qualified, hard-working, and they care. They are experienced and many have been here for a while now, but we also have much new blood in our ranks as the school is expanding. We care about each child in the school. We set targets based on individual ability for each individual child (and more of that later.) We know our children- we're still small enough to know them well. I am consistently impressed by the level of commitment from everyone in this school, not just the teachers; it is a real team effort. Talk with them tonight.

What makes the difference? Our resources. The buildings and facilities are in superb condition, well cared for and respected by the school community. You probably know that we have recently invested in considerable

refurbishment of much of the school. Our sports facilities would make even a new school jealous! Our playing fields, the leisure centre and swimming pool, the all-weather playing area resurfaced just a couple of years ago,) the new dance studio, the 3G playing areas, drama, art, technology, science. Our library, our recently refurbished canteen. Do have a good look around this evening; our resources are as good as any school in the area and we make full use of them.

What makes the difference? Our school events- ranging from netball matches to our famous Shakespeare productions to our rugby and football teams' successes. Science visits, geography field trips, Duke of Edinburgh Expeditions, rewards trips, our USA trips last year and next, skills challenge events in school, music concerts, maths competitions, golf, chess, the list goes on and pupil participation is excellent. At Risca we pioneered the use of twitter and blogging as a means of celebrating success and everyone is copying us now! All this is published on the website- do have a look! In fact you can get a real flavour of the school by reading the blog over time.

You'll want to know about our academic performance. I said earlier, we base our targets on individual pupils. We set challenging targets for each pupil to ensure they achieve their potential, or even exceed it. We mentor pupils. I think the message is out there at last that we are looking increasingly stronger. But it is the difference we make to each individual child which is important to us. Our speciality is finding and nurturing talents whether they be in modern languages, mathematics, art, poetry, gymnastics, design, swimming... Pushing the child in the right direction. Challenging and supporting, with high and appropriate expectations. It's right for parents to look at past performance and at Risca you probably know that this has shown a very impressive rise.

So here come the numbers! 2012, was a great year for Risca, I think this was the turning point for us, if I am honest. We achieved our highest ever results at both Key Stages, with our Y9 showing a 13% increase in their performance over three years and with our GCSE pupils achieving above expected levels, with an increase in 10% or more in all the major indicators. 2013 was an even better year! The number of pupils gaining five GCSE at C or above including English and Maths went up again, and the number of pupils getting five GCSEs or equivalent at C or above went up by a massive 19% to 73%.

In 2014 we did still better, with 80% gaining L2. In 2015 we plateaued out in real terms in some areas, although we had the best

English grades we have ever had, and when prior attainment is taken into consideration our pupils again did well. But to tell the truth I was disappointed we did not see a rise in the Level 2 or Level 2+, and we were as committed as ever, probably even more so, to seeing our trends rise again. And in 2016 they certainly did, as we achieved our best results ever, with the Level 2+ rising to an impressive 57%- that's an increase of 13%!

Importantly, this steady, solid rise in attainment over time by our pupils has been across the board, whether it be a student gaining 10 grade As with five A*s, someone managing to gain the five crucial grade Cs or above including English and Maths, or perhaps a pupil getting other qualifications to secure a place at College. But the truth is that what you'd like to know is not what results were like, but what they will be in 2022. I don't know because I don't know who our pupils will be. I hope yours will be with us, whatever their talents, and I promise we will do our best to maximise potential. Some pupils leave us with a whole set of A*s and As, others with different qualifications. All are special, all are valued. I am proud of each one of them.

What makes the difference? I mentioned good schools in the area.

Four such are Ty Sign Primary, Risca Primary, Waunfawr Primary and Ty Isaf Infants. We enjoy excellent relationships with these, our feeder schools. Our staff work collaboratively on curriculum issues and pupils have a whole range of opportunities to make transition smooth. If you're attending another school though, whether within Caerphilly or Newport, don't worry. You would also get the chance to enjoy transition events before next September if your application to the school is successful

We also have access to the biggest sixth form in the area. Our sixth form is Crosskeys College, part of the Coleg Gwent group, which is able to offer a huge range of courses, and the transition programme is extensive. We also have excellent relationships with Coleg Y Cymoed and local sixth forms

What makes the difference? Well, our pupils of course. As I say, we are proud of them and their achievements. Whether you're a senior prefect like Caitlin or you've just started in Y7, you're important and the reason we are here. Pupils here are friendly and respectful, well behaved and hard working. As I have said, we listen to them and their opinions; we teach mutual respect, and respect is mutual.

But perhaps the biggest difference of all is our teaching. We've worked really hard to ensure our pupils are getting a good learning experience in

the classroom with a philosophy that embraces new ideas but does not dismiss tried and tested methods, building on the excellent work done in Primary School.

Please if you have any questions at all don't hesitate to ask either this evening or, if you prefer, at another time, and if you'd like to visit the school during the working day you are very welcome to do so.

