

THE RADYR AND MORGANSTOWN ASSOCIATION

(A Civic Society affiliated to the Civic Trust for Wales)

GENERAL MEETING

Old Church Rooms on Monday 17th November 2014 at 7.30pm

Present: David Silver [Chairman], Tom Evans [Vice Chairman], Nick Hawkins (Secretary), Bob Roberts (Treasurer), David Cargill, Ralph Vaughan, Cllrs Mike Diment, Sally Evans, Judith Marsh & Rod Mckerlich and 14 members.

Apologies: Allan Cook, Cllr Clive Morgan, Maggie Roberts & Anne Silver.

A Talk by Andrew Williams, Headteacher, Radyr Comprehensive School

The Chairman introduced Mr Williams. With a background originally in banking in the City of London, Mr Williams took up teaching as a vocation and moved through a number of schools. He was appointed Headteacher at Radyr Comprehensive in January 2012 having been Deputy Head for the previous 10 years.

Mr Williams gave some background to the School, which he described as 'thriving'. With 1300 pupils, 80 teaching staff, 50 non-teaching staff and seven feeder Primary Schools, it is a large undertaking. The demographics of the students are interesting, with 6.5% receiving free school meals (Wales average 17%) and 9.6% with special educational needs. Current results are impressive with the School being rated at A level in the top three schools in Wales and, by The Times, as being in the top 200 of all schools in the UK. GCSE results are also solid.

He saw his role as an educator as a series of challenges. He quoted Nelson Mandela '*Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world*'. He challenged the way schools, notably in Wales, are rated. Radyr Comprehensive offers teaching in traditional subjects and does not inflate its results via padding with vocational subjects. This (currently) means that the School is under-rated which is difficult to cope with when the media focuses purely on Key Performance Indicators - and is even disadvantaged as being labelled a 'leafy suburb school'. Money is an issue. Whilst Radyr is rare as having its accounts 'in the black', if the School were in Bristol it would receive an additional funding of £1m per year - given the extra money 'he would make a difference'. He noted that the rating system would be changing in 2017 with a focus on core subjects with a reduction of the impact of vocational subjects.

When he took over the headship, he inherited a 'cosy good school'. The staff were comfy and not being challenged enough. He introduced strong leadership with accountability at all levels. He defined and shared a common vision, focusing on what is really important, creating an 'improvement culture', encouraging risk taking. He wants every child to believe they can do better; to raise their personal expectations. He said he believed teachers enter teaching to teach. They need to learn on the job, promote and support innovation and change, create networks and partnerships - share best practice with other schools.

Mr Williams said he was passionate about encouraging creativity in children - 'creativity is as important as literacy'. He bemoaned the fact that creativity - clearly ripe in primary schools - is, effectively, 'unlearned' through the current education process. Classes and teaching need to be rethought, refocused; conformity needs to be challenged. Children respond and learn better with flexible teaching models - in groups, mixtures of ages - rather than simply sitting in rows. Education is not about cloning; it is about personalisation. Teachers need to be facilitators in the process. He is concerned that the (admittedly necessary) promotion of subjects such as maths and English as being top of the 'hierarchy of subjects' means that 'lower subjects' such as drama, music, dance etc will lose funding and not be rated. These subjects are key to encouraging divergent thinkers. Children are naturally inventive and must be encouraged to innovate. He made the point that no-one knows what the world will look like in five years time but schools are meant to be educating children for it.

Mr Williams concluded his talk by saying that he thought he needed to be brave to do the best for the children in his charge, despite what key indicators may say. And he read a poem by W B Yeats which ends with '*I have spread my dreams under your feet. Tread softly because you tread on my dreams*'. His simple message was 'do not destroy our children's dreams'.

In responding to questions, Mr Williams said his time in 'the square mile' had given him much-needed knowledge of the 'world outside' and a passion to create and nurture natural leaders, but he admitted he had acquired a 'hard edge'. He was frustrated with the inevitable slowness of change - although, looking backwards, he was pleased with what he has achieved. Money is always a concern. He thought that the proposed new housing developments next to Radyr would bring additional schools to the area. He loved the idea of demolishing Radyr Comprehensive and doing a 'land swap' to create a new state of the art school on a better site, but he doubted that would happen. He had concerns over the quality of some new teachers in core subjects - but there were some 'stars'. He noted that the change to the school uniform had come as a shock to some students (who had had to learn to tie a tie for the first time), but the children liked it and it had brought a better feeling to the School. He accepted some implied criticism about the cost of some organised trips but noted but noted that parents remained keen to support them - that was definitely a 'Radyr effect'. And, finally, he recorded his concern with politics being used as a driver for education - a very dangerous state of affairs.

The Chairman thanked Mr Williams for accepting the invitation of the R&M Association, his talk and participation in the ensuing discussion. He presented him with a token of appreciation.

Minutes of the previous General Meeting on 15th September 2014

The minutes were approved. There were no matters arising.

Treasurer's Report

The Treasurer reported that the recent Film Shows had been largely cash neutral and, amongst various minor payments made, the usual donation of £50 had been made to the Royal British Legion. Reserves stood at £6297.04.

Local Planning Issues

Cllr Rod Mckerlich outlined the current status. There had been no real change on the LDP from the previous meeting. The full hearing by the appointed Inspector was scheduled for January/February 2015 and a pre-hearing was being held on 5th December. The North West Cardiff Group had compiled lots of evidence to be presented at the hearings and the key thing at this stage was decide who was best to present it. Regarding the planning application by Redrow Homes for the building of 630 dwellings, the response to the recent petition had been very well supported with 686 signatures. The petition had been submitted and the Association had thereby acquired the right to speak at the Planning Committee, should that be thought worthwhile. However, Cardiff Council really wished to delay consideration of the application until more detailed is available from Redrow Homes concerning the 7000 dwellings they wish to build as part of the wider LDP. That meant that the Planning meeting might not be until March or April 2015.

Entertainment being organised

The Chairman outlined a number of events being put on in the lead up to Christmas. These included a performance in the **current week** of '*The Schoolmistress*' at 7.30pm in Morganstown Village Hall by the Radyr Drama Society; a **Film Night on Thursday 27th November** in the Old Church Rooms at 7.30pm when the film '*Belle*' would be shown; the **Christmas Tree Lighting Ceremony on 5th December** and, on **Wednesday 10th December** at 7.30pm in Morganstown Village Hall, **Lighthouse Theatre** would be performing '*The Chimes*' by Charles Dickens, a wonderful story for Christmas. Tickets for all these events were available now.

Christmas Tree Lighting Ceremony

The Chairman outlined the details of the event. The tree in The Granny Park, Morganstown will be lit at 6pm with the help of children from Bryn Deri Primary School and the tree in Lychgate Gardens will be lit at 6pm with the children from Radyr Primary in attendance. The tree in Windsor Gardens will be lit at 6.40pm by the Festival Queen followed by the 'switching on' of the Christmas lights in Station Rd at 6.50pm by Nobel Prize winner Sir Martin Evans. Santa will arrive shortly afterwards. Burgers, hot dogs and mulled wine will be available from 6pm. Many of the shops will be open and there will be a variety of stalls. NSPCC, the Association's charity for the year, will be collecting during the evening.

Festival 2015

David Cargill reported that the Festival was well advanced with most events now in place. The nominated charity was the NSPCC and the overall theme was 'Carnival'. He noted that Radyr Tennis Club would be celebrating their 125th anniversary in 2015 and he hoped they would be able to feature something special.

General R&M Matters

Nothing raised.

Any Other Business

Nothing raised.

Next Meeting

The next meeting will be on Monday, 2nd February 2015, commencing at 19.30 in the OCR. The speaker will be Association Executive Member Allan Cook, who would be talking about 'Soaps' on TV.