



PRESS RELEASE – 06.02.2009

SMALL SCHOOLS WORK

The small rural secondary schools which make up the Rural Academy of Cumbria are leading the way in raising pupils' attainment. Not only are their results improving faster than many schools in Cumbria but three of them were amongst the top five most improved schools in the country in 2008. Susie Shepherd, headteacher of Solway School, Silloth and chair of the Rural Academy Steering Group said, 'We are all delighted with our 2008 examination results. Since 2004 the member schools have demonstrated the truly collaborative approach summarised in our motto, 'Shared futures from local strengths''

The Rural Academy of Cumbria was established to support the original partnership of nine schools which were all designated as specialist technology schools in 2004. Their bid for specialist school status as a group of collaborating schools was a unique achievement and resulted in them all receiving additional resources from the government which they would not have been able to achieve on their own.

Member schools of the Rural Academy serve very varied communities spread out across Cumbria. The majority of the schools have less than 250 pupils with the largest, Appleby Grammar School, having just over 600. The schools have worked together and used their collective expertise to bring about rapid and wide-ranging improvements in the quality of the education they provide for their pupils. Over the past four years the examination results for each of the schools have been improving and in 2008 they have achieved their most notable successes to date.

Settlebeck School, Sedbergh and Solway School, Silloth were joint third in the list of most improved secondary schools in the country. Both had a 26% point increase in the proportion of pupils who attained 5+A* to C GCSE grades from 2007 to 2008. Samuel Kings School, Alston was not far behind in fourth place in the most improved list with a 24% point increase in the same period.

Settlebeck School was also the second highest performing comprehensive school in Cumbria. 69% of its pupils attained 5+A*-C GCSE grades including English and mathematics (one of the governments premier indicators of success for secondary schools) in 2008. This was outstripped only by Cartmel Priory (CE) School, Cartmel, another member school of the Rural Academy, which with 72% of pupils reaching this benchmark was the highest performing comprehensive school in the county.

When compared to all schools in Cumbria (including selective and private schools) Cartmel Priory (CE) School was the sixth highest performing secondary school in the county. Its results in 2008 placed it tenth in the Times Educational Supplement list of most continuously improved schools in the country. Cartmel, Settlebeck and Solway schools along with John Ruskin School, Coniston, have all received awards from the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust (SSAT) for the improvements in their results.

With 61% of pupils attaining 5+A*-C GCSE grades in 2008 Beacon Hill School, Aspatria has increased the proportion of pupils achieving this benchmark by 29% points since 2005. The proportion of its pupils attaining 5+A*-C grades including English and mathematics has also increased by 12% points to 34% during the same period.

Appleby Grammar School, Appleby has also demonstrated substantial improvements during the same period. In 2008 81% of its pupils attained 5+A*-C GCSE grades. This was a 9% point increase on 2007 and the fourth successive annual increase in this figure from its 2005 result of 53%. Its proportion of pupils attaining 5+A*-C grades including English and mathematics has also increased by 18% points to 58% during the same period.

Maurice Peddely, recently retired headteacher of Samuel Kings School, Alston, said, ‘The 2008 results of the Rural Academy schools are a major achievement for the pupils and the staff of all of the schools. They demonstrate that small schools do work and how we have all benefited from working in partnership with schools in similar circumstances’

Editor’s Notes

1. The Rural Academy of Cumbria is a registered charity established to support the work of its member schools. There were initially nine member schools but Ehenside School, Cleator Moor and Lochinvar School, Longtown both closed in August 2008. The remaining members are:

Appleby Grammar School, Appleby
 Beacon Hill School, Aspatria
 Cartmel Priory (CE) School, Cartmel
 John Ruskin School, Coniston
 Settlebeck School, Sedbergh
 Solway School, Silloth
 Samuel Kings School, Alston

2. A summary of the results of the member schools and the aggregated results of the Rural Academy of Cumbria are included in the table below.

School	Number of 15-year-olds on roll 2007/8	% of pupils attaining 5+A*-C GCSE grades		% of pupils attaining 5+A*-C GCSE grades including English and mathematics	
		2005	2008	2005	2008
Appleby Grammar School	114	53%	81%	40%	58%
Beacon Hill Community School	38	32%	61%	22%	34%
Cartmel Priory (CE) School	78	64%	78%	44%	72%
Ehenside Community School	57	21%	23%	16%	18%
John Ruskin School	38	50%	74%	41%	45%
Lochinvar School	38	40%	55%	35%	34%
Samuel King’s School	42	31%	69%	17%	64%
Settlebeck High School	42	79%	81%	76%	69%
Solway Community School	48	49%	65%	46%	48%
Rural Academy of Cumbria	495	49%	67%	38%	51%

3. If you require any further information or have any questions please contact the headteacher of each school directly or the consultant employed by the Rural Academy of Cumbria schools, Steven Goldsmith on 01642 714667.