

Oldham plunges down new GCSE league

OLDHAM has plummeted down new GCSE league tables which target maths and English.

And three Oldham schools — Breeze Hill, Counthill and Grange — are among the country's worst performing when the subjects are taken into account.

The borough is ranked 123rd out of 150 nationally for the proportion gaining at least five A* to C GCSEs, including English and maths, last year.

It has plunged 32 places from 2005 when the figures measured the proportion of pupils gaining five top passes in any subjects.

And only two of the nine other Greater Manchester boroughs fared worse: Salford and Manches-

by **KAREN DOHERTY**

ter. Last year 35.3 per cent of Oldham pupils received five top GCSEs, including English and maths, compared with the national average of 45.3 per cent.

This climbs to 54.8 and 58.5 per cent respectively under the old measure which critics argued allowed schools to use vocational qualifications, such as GNVQs which are equivalent to four GCSEs, to boost their results.

Nick Hudson, Oldham's service director for learning, development and localities, said the the new measure was a challenge for boroughs with social and economic problems.

Oldham is putting extra resources into English and maths and at both primary and secondary

level, and Mr Hudson added: "Results have been in the mid to low 30s for a very long time and we have got to be investing at all stages, it is not just a quick fix."

"In terms of the five A* to C figures [excluding English and maths], we made a step change a couple of years ago."

"It is testament to everybody in our secondary schools that we have been able to maintain this achievement."

"It is about developing a curriculum which is appropriate to the young people of Oldham, and some vocational qualifications are more appropriate than traditional GCSEs."

Counthill, Breeze Hill and Grange are among the bottom 200 schools in England for raw results under the new measure. However, Grange's contextual value added

score, which measures pupil progress, is in the top 100.

The schools are among five in Oldham which are earmarked to be replaced with two city academies — although Mr Hudson stressed that this was to ensure schools were in the right places.

"Grange and Breeze Hill have been successful over a period of time and Counthill has made significant progress recently," he added.

Breeze Hill celebrated record results last year, both including and excluding English and maths, and gained specialist humanities status

English is not the first language for 85 per cent of pupils there and head teacher Bernard Phillips said: "The results show tremendous achievement given the low level of prior achievement."

See pages 12 and 13 for GCSE tables, pictures and more reaction



CHEERS for beers: Peter Nuttall with some of his favourites

Beer-nut Peter toasts online sales venture

BEER-LOVING Peter Nuttall has decided to turn his favourite hobby into a global business.

Peter (42), from Springhead, is planning to launch a unique website and retail shop sourcing unusual and unique beers from around the world for discerning Oldham drinkers.

He said: "I have had a pas-

Words and picture by **KEN BENNETT**

sion for beer since being a teenager. Good beer is one of our country's great traditions.

"Oldham is a classical, beer-loving town and home of some really great brews. However, with more people travelling abroad, they have

widened their horizons from standard lagers to a huge range and choice of exciting beers.

"And when England played soccer in the European championships, it gave even more beer drinkers the chance to sample new and different brews.

"My idea has really been greeted very favourably. I have taken advice from specialist beer importers and, like me, they believe the idea could be a big hit."

Peter is negotiating with the authorities over licences to operate his company — Beernutts — and hopes to launch it at the Oldham Beer Festival in March.

He said: "I have already collected some marvellous beers from frequent trips abroad. The world has some spectacular beers to offer — and I am determined to find them and let them tickle the palates of drinkers here."

Peter is still building his website which can be found at www.beernutts.co.uk

Royton Library centenary events

ROYTON residents will get the chance to immerse themselves in the history of their area when the Mayor launches a series of events to celebrate Royton Library's centenary.

Councillor Bernard Judge will drop into the library at 1pm tomorrow, when people can enjoy displays about the history of Royton and the library.

The history theme will continue on Monday when local historian Frances Stott will give a talk about the history of Royton at 10am.

Family history follows on Tuesday with introductory lessons to the ancestry.com website, and there is rhyme time fun for the under-fives on Wednesday, at 2pm.

To round off the celebrations, visitors can explore the changing role of Oldham libraries' reference and information services in the 21st century on Thursday, at 10am. All events are free and there is no need to book, except for the ancestry.com sessions which has places available at 11.30am. For more details, call Royton Library on 0161-770 3087.

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