

Case study: Use of the additional professional learning grant in 2019/20

Context and background

The school

Ysgol yr Hafod is an English-medium primary school in Wrexham and is part of GwE consortium, the School Effectiveness and Improvement Service for North Wales. The school has 350 learners on roll: 23 per cent are eligible for free school meals (FSM); 12.5% per cent have additional learning needs (ALN); and 2.85 per cent have English as an alternative language (EAL). The gender split in the school is 53.71 per cent boys and 46.29 per cent girls.

Designated leaders and members of teaching staff

Ysgol yr Hafod has three designated leaders and 15 full-time teachers.

Additional professional learning grant allocation

Ysgol yr Hafod received £10,047 in 2019/20.

How the additional grant was used

The grant was used to create 'time and space' during the school day for staff to work together on projects to support the development of a new curriculum.

The school was also keen to build a team of reflective practitioners, who were confident in engaging in action research and enquiry.

Alison Heale, Head teacher at Ysgol yr Hafod since 2017 commented on the school's vision for professional learning:

'Staff needed opportunities to engage in action research and try things out. They needed to feel comfortable to take risks and 'have a go' but also feel they were trusted as professionals, with high expectations for their learners.'

The grant has supported the following:

- funding of two higher level teaching assistants (Foundation Phase and Key Stage 2) to provide release time for all teaching staff to work in curriculum teams (one day per half term for each member of teaching staff) and with pupil-voice groups (School council, Learning squad, e-cadets, eco council) focusing on:
 - familiarisation with new curriculum and the areas of learning and experience
 - engaging with action research and enquiry
 - team teaching/coaching support
 - visits to other settings
 - access to relevant training linked to school/national priorities
- funding one day a week for an Additional Learning Needs (ALN) Co-ordinator to support staff and provide training for staff on ALN transformation and the development of universal provision
- funding for staff (teachers and teaching assistants) to access training provided by GWE e.g. Shirley Clarke Assessment for Learning Project, Aspiring Headteacher/Digital Leader/Foundation Phase training
- release time for senior leadership team to develop action planning linked to assessment for learning, provide coaching/mentoring support for staff to monitor and track progress
- release time for staff to share their practice within the school, the cluster and further afield.

Impact of the grant on colleagues across the school

Alison Heale, headteacher at Ysgol yr Hafod reflected on the benefits for practitioners at the school:

‘Staff have particularly valued having designated time for professional learning (PL), rather than having to do things after school or in their own time. This has given the PL time status and has thus been more effective.’

Staff have also been provided with opportunities to lead their own learning. This has included cross-phase working and opportunities for all staff to collaborate and learn together.

The headteacher added:

‘There is now an expectation that learning is reciprocal. We have established a culture of collaboration and sharing of best practice. Staff are keen to feed back following their PL time and are gaining confidence in trying new approaches and reflecting on the impact on learners.’

Impact of the grant on learners

Over the past 12 months, there has been a significant impact on learners, particularly in their confidence in using and applying skills across the curriculum and in their engagement in learning.

Designated time for pupil-voice groups has raised the status and value of pupil voice in shaping and developing the new curriculum. There are some examples below.

- Criw Cymraeg take responsibility for developing every day Welsh throughout the school. They monitor the use of Welsh, provide support for their peers, and provide suggestions on how to improve. They take fortnightly assemblies through the medium of Welsh.
- Learning squad are developing their role as part of the school's leadership team. They seek views on the curriculum, take part in learning walks and present their feedback to governors.
- E-cadets support the development of Digital skills and supporting their peers in keeping safe online.

Lessons learned about professional learning for application to the school

Time for feedback following PL was particularly important. It added value and gave status to the PL activities.

With every team having time for PL, it was important not to overload all staff with too many actions. Actions were linked to school priorities to ensure maximum impact.

Coaching and mentoring are important to support colleagues and provide encouragement when tackling challenges along the way. It is important to acknowledge there will be peaks and troughs!

Lessons learned about professional learning to share with other schools

Timetable professional learning time for the whole year to safeguard dedicated PL sessions.

Provide opportunities for staff to plan how they will use their protected PL time in advance.

Provide opportunities for feedback following PL activities during weekly staff meetings and during staff-training days.

Next steps

With regard to next steps, Ysgol yr Hafod are continuing to:

- provide time for staff to try things out
- review impact on learners
- reinforce that professional learning is not a 'quick fix'
- develop staff understanding of meaningful action research and enquiry
- ensure staff understand how enquiry work supports innovation.