

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

Context and background

The school

Ysgol Bro Lleu is a Welsh-medium primary school in Gwynedd and is part of the GwE (North Wales School Effectiveness and Improvement Service) consortium. There are 214 learners on roll: 18 per cent are eligible for free school meals (FSM); 24% per cent have additional learning needs (ALN); and 3 per cent have English as an additional language (EAL). The gender divide in the school is 47 per cent boys and 53 per cent girls.

Designated leaders and members of teaching staff

Ysgol Bro Lleu has three designated leaders and nine full-time teachers.

Additional professional learning grant allocation

Ysgol Bro Lleu received an additional professional learning investment in 2019/20.

How the additional grant was used

The grant was used to identify areas that needed to be developed by each member of staff. This was the starting point of the Ysgol Bro Lleu change journey.

Gerallt Jones, headteacher of Ysgol Bro Lleu, reflected on the school's journey:

'Having identified the areas for development, we then went on to cover specific aspects that required attention. One of the difficulties experienced by staff was a lack of time to reflect and actually look at what they do on a daily basis, and to evaluate achievements as well as areas for improvement. We set about changing the ethos of the school to be more inclusive to staff.'

In addition to this the grant has also supported the following activities:

- sending staff on specific training provided by the consortium
- arranging non-contact time to upskill staff in the new way of working
- provide time for staff to think about how to develop themselves, others, and the school
- invest in equipment that enabled staff to film themselves for personal reflection
- work together on stimulating Curriculum for Wales projects across the catchment area e.g. use of virtual reality tools to transform learning.

Impact of the grant on colleagues across the school

The impact in the school has been huge. Within the school the ethos of schools as learning organisations has been embedded. It has given staff the confidence and power to be able to improve themselves through self-assessment methods and through critical and quantitative self-monitoring. This has led to staff questioning each other about practice, and solving problems together, rather than doing this alone in a classroom. All of this happens naturally, with the senior management team providing support and sharing ideas.

Moreover, the grant has also had an impact beyond Ysgol Bro Lleu, with the grant having a particular impact on the catchment area. There is now a collaborative ethos across schools in the area, including the secondary schools. This collaboration has meant that staff discuss, share best practice and look for ways to improve. Every member of staff in the catchment area feels confident in seeking to develop a new curriculum – a curriculum that is appropriate for all of its schools.

Impact of the grant on learners

According to the school, the main benefits of the projects for their learners were:

Improving enthusiasm and attitude to learning

Opportunities to collaborate with other schools

The Headteacher at Ysgol Bro Lleu said:

'As the projects were enjoyable, stimulating and challenging, the enthusiasm of the learners was there for all to see. They had shown a very positive attitude to learning, to the point where they had so much fun they didn't realise that they were learning!

'We saw particularly good collaboration across the catchment area. The learners had an opportunity to collaborate with a large number of children. As the size of schools within the catchment area is variable, this was something very powerful for everyone.'

Lessons learned about professional learning to be applied across the school

Professional learning at Ysgol Bro Lleu is based on the key points below.

A real focus on the principles of schools as learning organisations.

How flexible and brave can teachers be in relation to the new curriculum.

The school has also realised that:

- staff must have time to reflect, and therefore, specific quiet time has been allocated for staff to actually contemplate what they are doing
- sufficient time must be made available for staff to have discussions and share ideas.

The headteacher added:

'One of the most important and possibly most difficult lessons was trusting. The nature of schools is to challenge staff to get the most out of learners. The school has been fully confident of staff appraisals and this has been a positive aspect for everyone.'

Lessons learned about professional learning to share with other schools

Here is some advice from the Headteacher at Ysgol Bro Lleu:

'Be brave with the new curriculum and teach modern skills to learners. We saw the best collaboration as a catchment area in relation to this, where all staff members had expertise, and the staff shared their experiences with each other.'

'The main change we saw from this was that staff have been stimulated – stimulated to plan an attractive curriculum, appropriate for the catchment area and full of fun and excitement. The school and the catchment area feel confident and enthusiastic to start planning for the future and for the new curriculum.'

Next steps

Ysgol Bro Lleu has already started on the next steps by:

- working together to create development plan priorities for the catchment area e.g. the 12 pedagogical principles
- deepen the relationship by encouraging staff to see each other teaching
- offer staff new experiences as they work in different schools within the catchment area.