

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

Context and background

The school

Blackwood Primary School is an English-medium Primary school in Caerphilly and is part of EAS, the School Effectiveness and Improvement Service for South East Wales. There are 456 learners currently on roll; 23% are eligible for free school meals (FSM); 15% have additional learning needs (ALN); 6 % have English as an additional language (EAL) and 39% are regarded as more able and talented (MAT) The gender split in the school is 53.5 per cent boys and 46.5 per cent girls.

Designated leaders and members of teaching staff

The school has 16 teachers and four designated leaders, supported by two higher level teaching assistants and 14 teaching assistants

Additional professional learning grant allocation

Blackwood Primary School received £18,128 for the period between January 2019 and April 2020.

How the additional grant was used

The grant funding was used to further develop the school's capacity to adapt to the new curriculum through high quality leadership and collective learning.

The leadership team reviewed the schools strengths and areas of improvement and considered its priorities for the next three years in context of national development and the new curriculum. Through consultation with staff, governors, learners and parents, they developed and shaped the school's vision, strategic aims and objectives.

To address the objectives the school developed a professional learning policy to provide a framework which will be key to developing a new curriculum and improving learner outcomes in literacy, numeracy, digital competence and independent learning skills.

Through engagement with the EAS Excellence in Teaching and Learning Framework all staff were introduced to the new professional standards for teaching and leadership with some staff attending the training to support the whole school and create a professional learning journey for individual staff.

Alongside this, a series of staff professional development sessions were undertaken for all staff and meetings were held with individual staff members to create a continuous learning culture for all.

All staff have been involved in leadership development activities including attending various EAS courses and school-to-school collaboration to develop individual's leadership skills appropriate to personal stage of development.

Learning diaries and reflections are supporting practitioners not only to consider how professional learning affects their own practice but also how they are able to support other staff.

The Deputy Headteacher, in light of her role as the professional learning lead, has attended all training days and disseminated key messages and feedback to staff. She has driven forward a number of initiatives to support and prepare the school for the new curriculum. She has been involved in a cycle of enquiry (CCPE) with other primary schools in the cluster and Stirling University with a focus on STEM. The Lessons of Study model was used with mathematics triads and has supported the school to undertake action research and develop pedagogy.

Small teams of teachers and teaching assistants have worked on critical enquiry projects that have resulted in professional posters that show the research behind innovations.

Impact of the grant on colleagues across the school

A culture of change has been created, that supports the school's vision, through innovation and supported risk taking.

The schools as learning organisations dimensions have been shared and used so that all staff are confident in undertaking reflective enquiry both individually and collaboratively. This ensures that the main priority of securing high learner outcomes continues.

Impact of the grant on learners

The focus on pedagogy has had a significant impact on learners' approach to learning. Learners were involved in identifying the learning characteristics that drive the learning forward. Learners appear to have a stronger ownership of their learning and are able to verbalise how and what they are learning.

The Pupil Leadership team took a lead role in sharing the purpose for the change in learning environments so that they are based on independence and focused on high expectations.

Learners were also involved in the evaluation of the process to ensure their views were taken into consideration and form part of the school improvement process.

Lessons learned about professional learning for application to the school

A shared vision that takes into account the national priorities, is at the heart of professional learning at Blackwood Primary school. A supportive ethos of collaboration, enquiry and reflection, based on high expectations for pupil outcomes, has created a positive culture for change. Staff at all levels feel empowered to take risks to innovate together.

Lessons learned about professional learning to share with other schools

The schools as learning organisations dimensions are an effective tool to support professional learning. They were used to evaluate the professional learning and develop an action plan for the way forward. An united understanding of what whole-school professional learning means ensures that all staff are working together to create an effective learning organisation.