

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

Context and background

The school

Ysgol Ty Coch is an English-medium Special School in Rhondda Cynon Taf and is part of the Central South Consortium. The school currently has 172 learners on roll, 36 per cent of whom are eligible for free school meals (FSM). The gender split in the school is 66 per cent boys and 34 per cent girls.

Designated leaders and members of teaching staff

The leadership team is made up of a headteacher, two deputy headteachers and four TLR holders. The school has 27 teachers as well as 60 teaching assistants.

Additional professional learning grant allocation

The school received £12,409 for the period between April 2019 and March 2020.

How the additional grant was used

Self-evaluation and school improvement planning

The school used the additional grant to help identify the school's improvement priorities and undertook a number of activities to facilitate their professional learning vision.

Ysgol Ty Coch used the schools as learning organisations (SLO) survey to develop an understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. From the initial baseline survey, the school identified the following school improvement priorities and used the professional learning (PL) grant to assist with a number of activities:

- Increasing resilience – working closely with staff to implement various interventions and PL in order to improve and maintain high levels of resilience. The impact on performance, staff absenteeism and positivity has been unquestionable.
- Identifying time – the school introduced a new structure within the support staff team and subsequently appointed two new higher level teaching assistants to lead on interventions and release class teachers to focus on enquiry-based practice.

- Forming a Curriculum Planning Forum – centred on interpreting the draft Curriculum for Wales documentation with particular emphasis on pedagogical principles and the co-construction of an areas of learning and experience (AoLEs) enrichment day programme. The results of this programme have been formally evaluated using Google Survey and written into an enquiry using SPIRALS methodology.
- Forming an Assessment and Accountability Group – focussed on interpreting various elements of *Education in Wales: Our national mission* including ALN reform to ensure the school is assessing ‘what matters’ for their learners.
- Enquiry – the school informally appointed and released a ‘lead enquirer’ to coach staff in their enquiry journey. Selected staff were provided with training and undertook an enquiry approach to objectives on the school improvement plan.
- Publication of the professional learning offer – the PL grant facilitated the release of the deputy headteacher to formally construct and produce the school’s PL, closely linking with the National Approach to Professional Learning (NAPL) and clearly defining the school’s approach to a blended PL offer.

Impact of the grant on colleagues across the school

The impact on colleagues in the school has been very positive. Staff resilience and morale is high. Absenteeism is generally low and most staff have an improved sense of emotional intelligence and resilience. As a result, there is a strong methodology for change and a culture of high aspirations and positivity at Ysgol Ty Coch.

An increasing number of staff feel confident in undertaking an enquiry with a significant number choosing to include this in their performance management.

The AoLE enrichment Day Programme has been very successful in improving staff knowledge and understanding of the *Education in Wales: Our national mission*, the four purposes, pedagogical principles and AoLEs.

Impact of the grant on learners

Feedback from members of the student council who assisted with the planning of the science and technology themed AOLE day was excellent.

In addition, the work of the Curriculum Planning Forum involved learners’ feedback, which has been incorporated into ongoing curriculum design. The focus of this work was to ensure the curriculum and associated assessment strategy reflect the highly complex additional needs of the school’s learners. As a result, Ysgol Ty Coch has seen improvements in learner attendance, engagement and behaviour.

Lessons learned about professional learning for application to the school

The school recognise the importance of balancing statutory training (relating to safeguarding, manual handling, total communication) with school improvement PL.

‘Checking in’ with staff on a regular basis, including completing the SLO survey, anonymous online short surveys and face-to-face coaching is important to ensure that PL is driving school improvement.

The school found that the AoLE enrichment day programme is an effective vehicle to create rich pupil and staff learning. Evaluation is key.

Lessons learned about professional learning to share with other schools

The school learnt the importance of spending time with staff to construct and publish a formal PL offer that signposts to the methodologies and the blended materials readily available.

The school also consider it vital to frame the schools PL offer on a number of systematic processes such as:

- real-time self-evaluation
- schools as learning organisations
- National Approach to Professional Learning – it is important to have a secure understanding of how the school’s PL offer fits within this
- regional PL offer – it is also vital to ensure the school’s PL offer dovetails and maximises the regional offer. There are many free courses/training events that can complement the work well
- internal and external networks – ensuring the school is well placed at every level to engage in networks in order to critique practice
- enquiry
- inclusivity – teaching assistants are invaluable to high quality learning and teaching
- creating time for high quality PL.

Next steps

- Coaching – the school will continue to work to ensure that all members of staff benefit from a coach at all levels within the school.
- Enquiry and time – the school will continue to work creatively to identify time and coaching for all members of staff to use enquiry as a key part of their PL