

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

Context and background

The school

Dwr-y-Felin Comprehensive School is an English-medium School in Neath Port Talbot and is part of the ERW Consortium. The school has 1125 learners on roll; 15.6 per cent are eligible for free school meals (FSM); 23.4 per cent have additional learning needs (ALN); 0.4 per cent have English as an alternative language (EAL) and 18 per cent are global A* and A grade learners, regarded as more able and talented. The gender split in the school is 47 per cent boys and 53 percent girls.

Designated leaders and members of teaching staff

The leadership team consists of a headteacher, a deputy headteacher, two assistant headteachers and an additional learning needs co-ordinator (ALNCo). The school has 60 teachers and eight teaching assistants.

Additional professional learning grant allocation

Dwr-y-Felin Comprehensive received a total of £36,714 grant over the period of 2019/20.

How the additional grant was used

PL model implementation

Dwr-y-Felin Comprehensive School has committed to the implementation of the professional learning school model. The school has used the additional grant to facilitate a number of activities, including:

- training on the professional standards for teaching and leadership
- engaging with the schools as learning organisations dimensions
- preparing for new ALN arrangements
- ensuring the best use of technology in lessons and for collaboration
- access to leadership programmes for staff members
- creating a number of leadership roles across a number of different projects.

Examples of activities and their specific impacts are detailed below.

Teaching and learning network group

The development of a Teacher Networking Group has had a clear impact on the standards of learning and teaching. The group has undertaken research, reading, and trialling of resources and implemented their findings at a whole-school level. This has given staff an important voice for their expertise, and offered an opportunity to access relevant theory behind whole school decision making

Cross-curricular project

The school developed a cross-curricular project to trial collaborative teaching. Nine subjects were involved in the 'Plastics: Who Cares?' project, encompassing five of the areas of learning and experience (AoLEs). The aims of the project were to encourage independent learning and empower learners to make informed, positive choices on the use of plastics.

AoLE curriculum pilot projects

Staff at Dwr-y-Felin were offered the opportunity to apply for lead roles in curriculum development through pilot projects in Health and Well-being, the Expressive Arts and the Humanities. The focus of the role was to explore, plan and implement new curriculum projects using the new Curriculum for Wales Framework. Throughout the process all leads and staff involved in the process were given time to plan collaboratively, visit other educational settings, prepare resources and evaluate the process.

Action research lead

An action research lead role was also developed, with the focus of developing teacher-lead action research across the school to enhance PL and improve learner outcomes. The initial focus of action research follows the Spiral of Enquiry approach, with support from University of Wales Trinity Saint David's, and focuses on a whole-school priority (how to address the learner's lack of confidence in oracy and impact positively on learner outcomes).

Impact of the grant on colleagues across the school

The range of PL opportunities has improved teacher understanding of the principles of pedagogy and improved the standards of learning and teaching in the classroom. A collaborative culture has been nurtured and staff have felt able to take ethical risks. The drive towards enquiry-based learning has stimulated wider reading, developed staff confidence and engagement, and supported and empowered staff in their professional needs.

There has also been a positive impact on the number of staff undertaking further qualifications to support their PL and continuing their professional career.

Impact of the grant on learners

The collaborative projects have helped learners make connections across different aspects of their learning, and has taught learners at Dwr-y-Felin to find positive solutions to issues. Pupil voice has become a strong feature across the school in modelling learning and teaching. The curriculum projects have impacted positively on learner independence and resilience towards learning. Learner engagement and enjoyment has increased, as can be seen in the learner quotes below.

I liked working on something different, and we had it in most lessons, so it was easier to remember.

It was really fun and interesting to look at real-world issues for a change.

I enjoyed the plastics project because the tasks we had to do were really fun and it expanded our knowledge on what is going on in the world today and now I feel even more strongly that we need to save our planet!

Lessons learned about professional learning for application to the school

Mapping PL opportunities at a whole-school level has had a huge impact. Involving all teaching and non-teaching staff in PL that is directly suited to their needs has resulted in staff being more willing to engage.

The school found that developing teachers to become leads has helped motivate staff and has given them a different experience in terms of developing their own PL.

The development of collaboration projects across the school learning environment has allowed learners freedom to choose. In future planning of projects, more choice for learners is critical to promote independence and engagement of all learners.

Lessons learned about professional learning to share with other schools

Introducing a teacher group to lead on the new curriculum, pedagogy or the AoLEs, has proved to be a powerful tool for driving whole-school development. It has provided the opportunity to develop learning and teaching through sharing best practice and expertise within the school.

The school also found that by developing teachers to become coaches/mentors, both for colleagues within the school and the wider cluster, staff were more motivated and received a different experience in terms of developing their own PL and meeting the new professional standards for teaching and leadership.

Increasing collaboration, through both formal and informal discussions about pedagogy, leads to improving school performance and raising standards throughout the school through, developing excellent teaching and progress in learning.

Next steps

Dwr-y-Felin Comprehensive School will:

- collaborate with cluster primary schools and develop opportunities for PL linked to the new curriculum for Wales, with a focus on the Health and Well-being Area of Learning and Experience
- share findings and experiences of curriculum pilot projects in Health and Well-being, the Expressive Arts and the Humanities through curriculum INSET
- undertake self-evaluation of curriculum pilot projects through pupil, staff and parent/carers' voice
- provide staff with PL in new curriculum developments, which include the refined what matters statements, rationale and curriculum design
- identify opportunities for future curriculum projects within the three remaining AoLEs and provide PL support from curriculum leads
- further develop a PL environment at Dwr-y-Felin Comprehensive School which is driven by enquiry action research.