

Case study: Use of the additional professional learning grant in 2018/19

Context and background

The school

Ysgol y Preseli is a Welsh-medium secondary school in Pembrokeshire, part of the ERW Consortium. There are 812 learners on roll, with 4.4 per cent being eligible for free school meals (FSM); 21 per cent have additional learning needs; and 22 per cent are identified as more able and talented learners. The gender split in the school is 48.27 per cent boys and 51.73 per cent girls.

Appointed leaders and the teaching staff

In terms of the senior management team, the school has five appointed leaders and 18 middle managers. Additionally, the school has 47.5 teachers and ten teaching assistants.

Amount of additional professional learning grant

The school received an additional grant of £60,781.25 for the 2018/2019 year.

How the additional grant was used

Action research

A study of the pedagogical continuum across Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3 within Humanities was undertaken. The study initially explored stakeholder views in terms of their experiences of the continuum from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3. The aim was to prepare teachers for the new curriculum and to raise awareness amongst stakeholders of the forthcoming changes.

As part of the study a focus group of practitioners representing each key stage was formed.

The study provided an opportunity for professional development by deepening understanding of the pedagogical continuum. There was a strong focus on researching professional learning within high performing systems. The aim of the research and subsequent planning work was to ensure that learning and teaching experiences have a positive and sustainable impact on learner outcomes and well-being as they transfer from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3.

Whilst discussing the project, Mrs Morris, Assistant Headteacher of the school said:

'MacKinnon and Lachlan's research in a published article *The Move to student centric learning* shows the importance of metacognition. The learning pool must therefore be considered when designing tasks that allow current metacognitive learning and teaching that is fit for purpose.'

Learning and teaching – impact on classroom practice and pedagogy

The development of metacognition was at the heart of the work, with learners encouraged to be both independent and enterprising.

There was intensive planning with the focus on the pedagogical principles and the ethos of growth in the design and delivery of interactive, challenging and experimental tasks.

Designing outdoor tasks was a priority for the group. There was reflection on outdoor activities based on the work of Glyn J Thomas, *Pedagogical frameworks in outdoor and environmental education* in addition to the work of Lars Qvortrup *Visible Learning and its enemies – the missing link* which highlights the need for teachers to choose interventions in relation to a particular situation when planning and teaching.

With regard the last planning period, the inquiry mainly comprised of primary research. Receiving stakeholder responses was key and it was therefore decided to conduct a questionnaire, a series of interviews and to observe lessons.

This research provided a full picture of the impact of the joint planning on the learners as well as the impact on the professional development of teachers as they prepare for the introduction of the new curriculum in 2022.

Impact of the grant on colleagues across the school

Steps were taken to ensure that the project had an impact across the school. Insights were provided into the perspectives of teachers via a series of interviews and focus discussions.

The second cycle demonstrated teachers' recognition of the need for a pedagogical continuum from the Foundation Phase to Key Stage 3 or even Key Stage 4.

Mrs Morris added:

'The next cycle was an opportunity to explore the change in the mindset of those teachers who had been joint-planning, and in so doing, had enriched their understanding of the pedagogical principles and cross-curricular responsibilities.'

In terms of teachers' responses to the project, Mrs Morris said that there were similarities in the primary and secondary sectors.

'There has been a great deal of praise for the opportunity to address what is meant by the term pedagogy and the need to plan for learner centred pedagogy.'

Impact of the grant on learners

There has been strong recognition of the focus on learners taking ownership of their progress in planning opportunities for them to learn through making mistakes and deciding on the next step to resolve various challenges. This was evident during the observation of a Year 6 Humanities lesson where learners were eager to discover, investigate, co-operate and work independently without the support of the teacher.

The results showed that the planned work and the pedagogy used in the classroom challenged learners. All respondents believed that their interest had been stimulated in the subject and that they had built upon prior knowledge. The intention is to measure the success of the project again to incorporate the responses of the learners after they have transferred to Key Stage 3.

Consideration of learner voice identified the need to provide more opportunities to develop cross-curricular skills, with a particular focus on the ICT. External visits and including opportunities to teach outside the classroom were also identified as priorities when planning the next steps in the pedagogical continuum.

Lessons learned about professional learning for application to the school

The following benefits were highlighted for those teachers who had been involved in the pedagogical continuum project:

1. The teachers ensured that the focus of planning is on the learner, paying attention to what each learner is learning. Moving forward, this ethos has to be shared with the rest of the school and the cluster schools.
2. There have been numerous opportunities for professional development through joint working, enriching the understanding of pedagogy and the pedagogical continuum.
3. Successful teamwork was central to the project. There has been close co-operation with everyone sharing the same vision.
4. Moving forward, the use of new forms of collaboration and information sharing will be key. Joint-planning is not possible without sharing good practice and challenges.
5. Modelling and developing leadership in Humanities will be a priority moving forward. This group of teachers has and continues to lead the way for the rest of the school staff and the cluster schools.

Lessons learned about professional learning to share with other schools

This project is continuing to evaluate the impact of the action research. Adequate time needs to be set aside for teachers to meet, research, plan jointly and reflect at school level and possibly at cluster level. The school has made efforts to ensure that each training session is an opportunity for teachers to work and plan jointly during the academic year.

Similarly, the school has succeeded in providing one action research lesson on the timetable of each member of the teaching staff. The lesson provides an opportunity for teachers to undertake action research, to observe each other, to conduct focus groups and to analyse qualitative and quantitative results in taking forward the planning work.

Next steps

The school has used the above insights in formulating a whole-staff training programme in the year 2019/20. The school's priorities include the formation of professional learning communities for each area of learning and experience to build on the success of cluster level planning.

Providing opportunities for teachers to engage in research and use theoretical knowledge as a basis for planning is a priority for all professional learning communities. There was a focus on pedagogy, the learner voice and the contribution of stakeholders to planning during the autumn term before sharing findings with colleagues within the cluster.

The experimenting and piloting phase comes next, with the professional learning communities putting ideas and plans into action. This will also present an opportunity to refine the planning for the next academic year.