

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

Context and background

The school

Llanhari primary is an English-medium primary school in Rhondda Cynon Taf and is part of the Central South Consortium. The school has 185 learners on roll: 25.6 per cent are eligible for free school meals (FSM); 25.1 per cent have additional learning needs (ALN); and 1.13 per cent have English as an alternative language (EAL). The gender split in the school is 56 per cent boys and 44 per cent girls.

Designated leaders and members of teaching staff

The school has a headteacher, a deputy headteacher, two TRL holders, seven teachers and seven teaching assistants.

Additional professional learning grant allocation

For the period between April 2019 and March 2020, the school received £8,602.

How the additional grant was used

To develop a research-driven culture and progress further as a learning organisation, the school developed a multi-layered approach to professional learning. Implementing this approach was funded by the additional professional learning grant.

Learning and teaching meetings – impact on classroom practice and pedagogy

Reason for spend in this area:	Release staff for monitoring and evaluation activities to improve practice.
Activities undertaken:	<p>Instead of holding traditional staff meetings, the school holds bi-weekly learning and teaching meetings. All staff, including support staff, attend. Each half term focuses on a different element of learning and teaching, aligned to the school's development plan (SDP) or staff self-evaluations.</p> <p>The focus areas for this year include the following.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Self and peer assessment.• Differentiation.• Learner–teacher/teacher-learner relationships.• Use of the outdoors.• Involving partners in learning.

	<p>For each theme, current practice is evaluated and success criteria are set with the aim of raising standards to at least good, and in most cases, excellent.</p> <p>Throughout the half term there are opportunities to share good practice, trial new strategies and collaborate.</p>
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Staff training – preparation for the new curriculum/leadership development

Reason for spend in this area:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow staff to attend external training, equipping them with the knowledge needed to design the curriculum. • A large amount of the grant has been allocated to cover supply costs for national professional learning pathway programmes.
Activities undertaken:	<p>Staff have accessed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the national professional learning pathway • Aspiring HLTA programme • middle leaders and aspiring head teacher programmes. <p>A number of our support staff are also undertaking level 3 qualifications with ITEC (at no cost) under their own direction and self-study.</p>

Wellbeing and resilience in staff

Reason for spend in this area:	Ensure staff are emotionally and mentally prepared to manage change.
Activities undertaken:	Investment in INSET and twilight training sessions on building 'resilience' in staff, focussing on emotions and relationships.

Action research

Reason for spend in this area:	Supply cover for collaboration internally and with external partners.
Activities undertaken:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All members of teaching and support staff are engaged in individual action research projects. • A staff development plan was created to help staff format their ideas (following reflection on the professional standards) and impact on their learners. This formed the basis of discussions at performance management meetings with research included as performance management targets for all staff. • To widen their thinking, staff have been tasked with reading 'Clever Lands' by Lucy Crehan. Each half term they look at a different country in the book and choose an element to try in the classroom.

Collaboration

Reason for spend in this area:	Cover inset-day costs for external providers and to release staff to undertake a peer enquiry.
Activities undertaken:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Held joint inset days with their school improvement group focused on developing a creative curriculum with Hywel Roberts. This inspired staff to trial new strategies in the classroom and provided a focus for cross-school working.• A key element of the school's professional learning plan was to develop collective responsibility and self-evaluation skills through a cluster peer enquiry project. The project highlighted good practice and supported areas that need developing further. The project included visits to schools in England to consider different models of peer enquiry. Format and protocols were agreed at an initial training event and further training has taken place on impact models and next steps. The project will be fully evaluated.

Impact of the grant on colleagues across the school

Consistent approach to pedagogy

Using the 'Continua' framework for their learning and teaching has allowed all staff (including support staff) to focus on a small area of pedagogy in great depth. There is a great deal of sharing of good practice and ideas trialled, as well as opportunities for collaboration. Colleagues have a shared understanding of each element and this ensures consistency of approach across the school. Using the 'Continua' evaluation tool, staff evaluate and measure their progress against each element and identify their own areas for improvement.

Developing research skills and self-directed study

All staff have developed their enquiry skills. Staff have all produced new development plans for a new action research project and are more focused and confident in carrying it out. Staff undertaking programmes on the professional pathway are developing their leadership skills and are undertaking a school-based project. Staff completing the middle leaders programme have a school-based mentor which is also developing coaching skills and strengthening relationships. Support staff undertaking Level 3 self-directed study with ITEC demonstrates their professional commitment to learning. Many are undertaking their second qualification!

Impact of the grant on learners

The impact on learners is measured following each learning and teaching focus. Longer term, as each element is usually linked to the SDP, impact can be measured using data. Impact and improvement is always evident following a focus, but the challenge is to maintain them!

Learners in the school have an understanding of the four purposes and can plan and evaluate their work using them. Teaching is at least good, and often excellent, which is reflected in the progress scores in each year group and end of key stage data.

Individual staff's action research has had an impact on learners. For example, in Reception the teacher looked at independence and the use of intrinsic rewards. Her research has led her to change her practice and embed the successful elements of her enquiry.

Lessons learned about professional learning for application to the school

Linking to school improvement plans

For professional learning to be successful and impact on learners and staff, elements need to be linked together. Following this approach has enabled the school to interweave activities and budgets and to secure maximum impact.

Collaboration with external partners

The wide range of opportunities to collaborate with the cluster and the school improvement group for all staff has led to a culture of sharing and openness. Stronger links within the cluster can now be built upon and the school hopes to establish a number of new professional learning community groups to develop the new curriculum together as a cluster.

Lessons learned about professional learning to share with other schools

Firstly, the school has found that having a structured whole-school approach to action research is beneficial as is planning and evaluating outcomes, guides, regular revisits to look at progress in staff meetings and the use of the professional learning passport to evidence professional development.

Replacing staff meetings with teaching and learning meetings has ensured that professional development is ongoing. Furthermore, a structured approach, looking at elements of pedagogy in detail, has impacted both on attitudes to professional learning among learners and staff.

The cluster peer enquiry project has strengthened relationships and supported improvement in all schools involved – developing a collective responsibility but also contributing to strengthening the self-evaluation processes at Llanhari primary.

Llanhari primary's professional learning plan is available on their website at www.llanhariprimary.com