

Case study: Use of the additional professional learning grant in 2018/19 and 2019/20

Context and background

The school

Trinity Fields school and resource centre is an English-medium facility in Caerphilly, and is part of the Education Achievement Service (EAS) for South East Wales. Trinity Fields provides education and specialist facilities for pupils aged 3 to 19 with a wide range of learning difficulties. The school has 168 learners on roll, 38 per cent of whom are eligible for free school meals (FSM). The gender split of pupils is 69 per cent boys and 31 per cent girls.

Designated leaders and members of teaching staff

Trinity Fields has five designated leaders, 30 full-time teachers, four part-time teachers, 64 full-time teaching assistants and 32 part-time teaching assistants.

Additional professional learning grant allocation

Trinity fields received £11,816 in 2018/19 and £19,745 in 2019/20.

How the additional grant was used

Staff training – preparation for the new curriculum/leadership development

Reason for spend:	Supporting leadership development at all levels, including existing leadership team members and aspiring future leaders.
Activities undertaken:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mentored and coached the wider leadership team using the 'Colour Works' profiles.• Provided enhanced leadership training for a cohort of emerging leaders.• Delivered the Middle Leaders Development Programme, to a cohort of mainstream Additional Learning Needs Co-ordinators (ALNCOs) and special school and pupil referral unit (PRU) leaders.• The professional learning (PL) lead attended regional curriculum reform days and fed back to staff at the school.

Reason for spend:	Support the significant changes across the special school sector in light of the new professional standards, Curriculum for Wales guidance, Schools in Wales as Learning Organisations and the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act.
Activities undertaken:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Worked with other schools to develop a range of strategies to address these new challenges across the cluster. • Allowed Teaching and Learning Responsibility (TLR) holders to be released from duties to engage with the draft curriculum and sector-specific pedagogy. • All teaching staff released for a PL day to familiarise themselves with the professional standards and the draft Curriculum for Wales documentation published in April 2019. • The same PL day was also offered to Level 3 teaching assistants to consider the draft professional standards for assisting teaching identifying areas for development to inform performance management and whole-school training. • Delivered the National Teaching Assistant Development Programme to all teaching assistants, which was adapted for the wider special school sector.

Impact of the grant on colleagues across the school

The PL grant has enabled release time and access to a range of informal and formal development opportunities for all staff, including the leadership team and support staff. It has also enabled a renewed focus on emerging leaders, giving them skills for their future career pathways. The extra release time for teachers has enabled them to consider important aspects of their own professional practice and also to read, analyse and begin to adapt the new Curriculum for Wales guidance into their teaching.

Release time for Level 3 teaching assistants has enabled them to be much more informed. It has also developed them as a coherent professional group and the links to the professional standards have made them think more about how they can develop their important roles in school.

Impact of the grant on learners

The impact on learners has been in two main areas. Teaching staff have increased freedom in timetabling, curriculum and pedagogical approaches which have resulted in teaching becoming even more specialised and specific to the learners in each class. We are nurturing a culture of innovation, experimentation and collaboration. Teachers share developments across the school at regular Teachmeets.

The second approach has been embedded for many years. As a special school, we include our learners in all decision making at the school. They contribute to our whole school SER and School Development Plan processes and help the school to set its targets.

As we adapt both our curriculum and our journey to enable the principles of the Schools as Learning Organisations approach, this pupil voice and involvement will only get stronger. As we develop our curriculum and further embed the four purposes in our learning and teaching we will do this alongside all of our learners.

Lessons learned about PL for application to the school

The main change is that the school now takes a wider view of what constitutes PL and is now equipped to lead PL to meet their own requirements.

The PL lead for the school commented:

‘We now have less reliance on outside organisations and ‘experts’ coming to our school to deliver training and are developing more of an in-house and cluster-based approach.’

As well as bringing PL more in-house, support networks, both formal and informal, are being built in school through work with the wider leadership team, emerging leaders, teaching staff and Level 3 teaching assistants. These networks, as they become more focused, are leading change and developments in PL across the school.

Another important development has been the forming of the professional learning leads (PLL) cluster. Although the South Wales Association of Special School Headteachers (SWASSH) has met for many years, the PLL Cluster has brought another level of collaboration between the schools and PRUs in the EAS region.

Discussing the PLL cluster network the PL lead for Trinity Fields said:

‘From our perspective the inclusion of the PRUs in our cluster has been important. Although our educational settings are different in many ways, we face familiar challenges and opportunities. Although the cluster has been going for less than a year, we are already sharing information and expertise and supporting each other.’

Lessons learned about PL to share with other schools

The importance of having frequent professional dialogue with other schools in the cluster has enabled Trinity Fields to broaden their horizons as a school.

By establishing the PLL role and writing and implementing a PL plan, the school is now clear about what they want to achieve and how they are going to achieve it. They have focused on all staff as a holistic group and have involved everyone in the process of change rather than making it a ‘top down’ process. When people are involved they feel valued and invest themselves in the PL journey.

The PL lead for Trinity Fields added:

‘The opportunity to network with other new PL leads from across the EAS and listen to emerging issues and challenges facing the primary and secondary sector has

enabled me, as the special school and PRU cluster lead, to contextualise and visualise more clearly the path that we are taking as a special school.

One important lesson has been how supportive and helpful the EAS has been through this process. Engaging with all of the meetings and information days has given us a head start as a school in meeting all of the new challenges and changes that are ahead of us.'

Trinity Fields' PL plan can be found at:

<http://www.trinityfieldsschoolandresourcecentre.co.uk/policies/default.htm>

Next steps

With regard to next steps, Trinity Fields will be:

- further developing and embedding their PL journey
- continuing to improve how the wider leadership team communicates and works together, by having a group session on The Colour Works principles
- continuing to develop emerging leaders
- leading on the Middle Leaders Development Programme for a cohort of 20 mainstream ALNCOs and new leaders in the special school and PRU sector. An exciting feature of this will be the forming of a new professional relationship between these two groups.
- supporting some Level 3 teaching assistants on their Aspiring HLTA journey or their qualified teacher status journey. This group will also be fully included in all of the PL opportunities throughout the school
- looking to create and implement their own Curriculum for Wales that meets the four purposes as well as the needs of all of their learners. This will be an inclusive process with not only all staff but also governors, parents/carers, learners and the wider community.
- continuing to be an even more effective in their approach to becoming a Learning Organisation and to meet the new challenges set out in the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act.