

Finance Secretary announces new permanent small business rate relief scheme for Wales

The new permanent scheme will limit the number of properties eligible for small business rate relief to two per business in each local authority, preventing larger businesses and national chains from benefiting from the scheme.

This will allow relief to be targeted more effectively to support small and local businesses and release £7m every year to be re-invested to support small businesses.

In addition to providing more than £110m of support for small businesses in Wales every year, the new permanent small business rate relief (SBBR) scheme will also provide:

- Additional support for the childcare sector, increasing the upper threshold for rates relief for childcare providers from £12,000 to £20,500.
- Targeted support for small hydropower projects, in line with the Budget agreement with Plaid Cymru.
- £5m to extend the temporary high street rates relief scheme into 2018-19;
- An extra £1.3m for local authorities for 2018-19, for them to use their discretionary powers to provide targeted relief to support local businesses which would benefit most from additional assistance.

The Finance Secretary also announced today an extra £9m and £22m will be allocated in the final Budget in 2018-19 and 2019-20 respectively, to support the switch from RPI to CPI for business rates from April 2018.

Professor Drakeford said:

“I have previously set out my intention to introduce a permanent small business rates relief scheme from 1 April 2018.

“This will provide certainty and security for small businesses in Wales, delivering a tax cut to businesses drive long term economic growth. I am pleased to announce the details of the permanent scheme today.

“This year, we have provided small businesses with more than £110m of support to help them pay their bills. Our permanent scheme, which will be in place from 1 April, will maintain this level of support from the Welsh Government.

“In line with our tax principles, the permanent scheme will target

support more effectively towards those businesses which will benefit most – supporting jobs and growth and delivering wider benefits for our local communities.

“My intention is to take a progressive, fair and transparent approach towards local taxation in Wales, which continues to provide vital funding for local services.

“Delivering a permanent relief scheme for small businesses is a key step in delivering this.”

Changes to the SBRR scheme are being introduced following a public consultation on a permanent scheme in the autumn.

Pupil Development Grant considered “invaluable” by schools, says new report

An independent evaluation of the Welsh Government’s Pupil Development Grant (PDG) has found that many schools consider the funding to be ‘invaluable’, with good progress being made on identifying and addressing the needs of disadvantaged learners.

The report by Ipsos Mori and the Wales Institute of Social & Economic Research, Data & Methods (WISERD) focuses on how schools are spending the PDG and teachers’ perceptions of the impact of the grant.

Many of the schools interviewed for the report acknowledged that the PDG has helped them to focus and raise the profile of tackling disadvantage across the school.

Schools said this had led to an increased focus on whole-school strategies to improve areas such as behaviour, attendance, family engagement and restorative approaches.

Substantial improvements were reported by schools in areas such as pupil well-being, confidence and self-esteem and an increased willingness from pupils to participate in classroom activities.

Schools also reported improvement in how learners who qualify for free school meals were supported as they progressed through school.

Welcoming the report’s findings today, Education Secretary Kirsty Williams said:

“Reducing the attainment gap between pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds and their peers is at the heart of our national mission to raise standards.

“This report is further evidence that our £93 million PDG is delivering real progress in addressing this injustice and supporting pupils to reach their full potential.

“I’m proud that schools regard the PDG as invaluable and I applaud the way funding has been used to target our most disadvantaged learners.

“Earlier this year I announced that we would be extending the PDG, including doubling the financial support to early years learners in the Foundation Phase.

“To ensure schools can plan and make full use of the funding, we have already signalled our commitment to the PDG for the lifetime of this Assembly.

“Whilst the report published today is evidence of genuine strides forward, there is no room for complacency. That’s why we will continue to focus on the PDG, alongside our other reforms, to ensure that all learners achieve their full potential.”

Schools across Wales benefiting from the Pupil Development Grant include Pillgwenlly Primary School in Newport.

Kath Bevan, headteacher said:

“We use a significant proportion of our PDG monies to finance two Nurture Groups. These groups provide a stable and caring environment for children who may be socially and emotionally vulnerable, helping to develop their self-esteem and self-belief and improving their levels of resilience.

“As a school, the PDG has also helped with an improvement in attendance, learning and application of key skills and the engagement of the wider family in school life.”

Heather Nicholas, former headteacher of Ferndale Community School and headteacher for the new 3-19 school in Tonyrefail said:

“The impact that the PDG has had on the community of Ferndale Community School is hugely significant. It has been instrumental in closing any gap in pupil experience and has accelerated the progress of pupils for whom disadvantage has limited progress and attainment.

“The impact of poverty manifests itself in many different ways across a school community and the PDG funding has allowed for the personalisation of support that ensures maximum outcomes for every individual.”

Rhian Morgan Ellis, headteacher of Ysgol Gyfun Cwm Rhondda said:

“The grant is of great benefit to us as it allows us to ensure equity and a level playing field for all students. For those who would disengage for financial reasons, it is a means of removing those barriers to learning. It allows us to ensure every student is included in our drive to provide them with the opportunity to be the best they can be.”

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Wales passes Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Bill

The Welsh Government’s aim to transform the additional learning needs system so it provides better support to those children and young people who need it most has achieved a key milestone tonight [12/12/17] after the National Assembly for Wales passed the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Bill.

Welcoming the news, Education Secretary, Kirsty Williams, said:

“Today is an historic day for education in Wales. Nearly a quarter of learners in Wales will experience some form of additional learning need (ALN) during their early years or education and this Bill places them at the very heart of our system. It focusses on identifying their needs as early as possible and working with them and their families to plan the right support.

“Once the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Bill receives Royal Assent, expected in January 2018, it will pave the way for a radical new approach; driving improvements in standards to ensure all learners are supported to meet their full potential.”

The Bill will be backed up by an ambitious wider programme of reforms, which

the Education Secretary provided more details on yesterday [11/12/17] by outlining her proposals for how the new additional learning needs system would be implemented in Wales.

The new Bill, which affects nearly every education setting in Wales and focusses on the needs of children and young people aged 0 to 25, means:

- The replacement of the terms 'special educational needs' and 'learning difficulties / disabilities' with the new term, 'additional learning needs';
- The creation of a single statutory plan, the Individual Development Plan (IDP) for learners;
- Increased participation of children and young people, ensuring they are at the centre of the planning and decision making process;
- Prioritising high aspirations and improving outcomes, focusing on the child or young person's achievement of their full potential;
- Providing a simpler and less adversarial process, ensuring learners' needs are at the centre and are continually met;
- Creating new statutory roles within health and education to ensure collaboration and integration so that learners' needs are met;
- Focussing on earlier disagreement resolution, with disagreements resolved at the most local level possible;
- The introduction of clear and consistent rights of appeal where disagreements can not be resolved at a local level;
- The introduction of a strengthened Code, which will sit alongside the Bill, with mandatory requirements and statutory guidance to support the primary legislation.
- The Bill also supports the Welsh Government's wider vision of achieving one million Welsh speakers by 2050 by including a series of strategic duties aimed at driving progress towards a truly bilingual additional learning needs system.

Further information about the proposed implementation plan for the [new additional learning needs system in Wales can be found here](#).

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