

Increase in funding to help Wales' most disadvantaged pupils – Kirsty Williams

The Cabinet Secretary has also announced that the Pupil Deprivation Grant will be renamed the Pupil Development Grant (PDG).

The Welsh Government is to invest over £90m through the Pupil Development Grant over the next financial year to help disadvantaged pupils in Welsh schools.

Extending the PDG was a key part of the progressive agreement between the First Minister and Kirsty Williams.

The Education Secretary has revealed significant expansions to the programme, from the amount allocated to the youngest pupils, to extending the funding to pupils not educated at school, to providing more support to children who are looked after by their local authority.

The changes, which come into affect in April, include:

- Doubling the grant to £600 per eligible child in nursery and reception classes.
- Extending support to all three year old looked after children. The funding can also be used to support previously looked after children who have been adopted.
- Extending the support to pupils whose education happens outside a school setting. Currently only those from pupil referral units received the support.

Kirsty Williams said:

“It remains our national mission that every child has the opportunity to succeed.

“I am pleased that this grant is having a significant impact in breaking the link between poverty and attainment that has dogged our education system. However, there is more to do, which is why we are extending the grant to ensure every child has a fair start in life.

“I am also announcing a small but significant change in the name of the grant. Not only does this reflect the excellent practice that already exists across Wales, but this more positive name will better emphasise learner progression alongside reducing the attainment gap.”

Extra £7 million for innovative all-Wales autism service

Today's announcement brings the total amount of funding allocated to supporting autism services in Wales to £13 million up to 2021.

Wales is the first part of the UK to create a national service to provide lifetime support to children and adults with autism, and their families. The innovative service, which will be rolled out across the country by 2018, will provide new adult diagnostic services; support for families and carers; help with transition from child to adult provision and training for professionals.

The additional £7 million funding announced over four years (2017/18 – 2020/21) will ensure all regions in Wales are able to provide consistent, high quality, and sustainable autism support.

Minister for Social Service and Public Health, Rebecca Evans, said:

“Wales has long been a leader in providing support for people with autism and their families, publishing our first action plan back in 2008. The National Integrated Autism Service is another important step forward. It will help ensure people receive consistent services and get the right support, at the right time, wherever they live in Wales.

“The additional funding I have announced today, at the start of National Autism Week, demonstrates our continued commitment to improving autism services. I am confident that the four year funding will enable regions to deliver sustainable support to families.”

The funding will also help deliver the Welsh Government's Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Strategic Action Plan. This includes a commitment to developing improved autism resources, such as the new scheme developed by the WLGA, “Can you see me?” which is to be rolled out in the coming months.

The initiative promotes understanding and acceptance of autism within communities in Wales. It is launched today with a video showing support from sporting stars from Wales' national football and rugby squads.

Leaflets and posters for outlets such as shops, banks, hairdressers and cinemas as well as dentists and GPs have been created to support interactions with people with autism. People with autism can also choose whether they would like to make others aware of their autism by wearing a wristband or showing a card (which will also be available for mobile phones).

Steve Thomas CBE, Chief Executive of the WLGA, said:

“This scheme, which has been led by the National ASD Development Team within the WLGA, will be a significant step in terms of recognising the needs of individuals with ASD across communities in Wales. I am delighted that local authorities will take this forward and play a key role in promoting it. The WLGA warmly welcome the extra funding that has been announced by the Minister, which will help us deepen our work with individuals with ASD, their family and carers, and professionals working with children and adults with ASD.”

[Carwyn Connect heads to Barry](#)

The Carwyn Connect event will give local people the opportunity to meet the First Minister and ask him questions on any issues which affect them or their local community.

The session will take place between 6pm and 7.30pm at the Memo Arts Centre [Gladstone Road, Barry, CF62 8NA].

People are encouraged to register their interest in attending the free events online at the following link:

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/cyfarfod-carwyn-carwyn-connect-tickets-29821069622>

Questions can be asked in a number of ways – they can be submitted when people arrive at the venue when doors open at 5.30pm; in advance via email on cabinetcommunications@wales.gsi.gov.uk or via Twitter using @fmwales with the hashtag #carwynconnect.

First Minister of Wales Carwyn Jones said:

“Over the past year, I have travelled across the country to hear the views of local communities and answer the burning questions of the people of Wales.

“I would like to see as many people as possible at the event in Barry on 3 April, so if you have a question for me, want to raise issues affecting your community or have a great idea to make your home town a better place to live, come along to the event.

“We always discuss a wide variety of topics at these events, with questions about very local issues, to discussions about broad Government policy.

“This is your chance to meet and speak with me in person. I’m really looking forward to meeting you all.”

[New EU project to enhance coastal infrastructure in Wales and Ireland](#)

More than €3m of EU funds is being invested in the Ecostructure project, which will develop and trial new methods to enhance the quality of coastal structures, including sea-walls and tidal lagoons, through more ecologically-sensitive design.

The project has been funded through the Ireland-Wales co-operation programme, which is helping to strengthen economic links and collaboration between the two countries.

Welsh Government Finance Secretary Mark Drakeford said:

“Cross-border projects between Wales and Ireland are important because they bring together expertise from both nations to meet shared challenges and opportunities from our Irish Sea border.

“Aberystwyth University and its partners will benefit from more €3m of EU funds to deliver this project. It’s another example of the advantages to Wales of continued access to EU co-operation programmes after the UK leaves the EU.”

The investment in Ecostructure will help to modernise future coastal development, create new business opportunities for local companies and improve the protection of wildlife and local ecosystems.

The project will be led by Aberystwyth University, in collaboration with University College Dublin, Bangor University, University College Cork and Swansea University.

Dr Joe Ironside, from Aberystwyth University’s Institute of Biological, Environmental and Rural Sciences, said:

“In response to increased storminess and rising sea levels, as well as the need for sustainable renewable energy generation, hard coastal infrastructure is likely to increase along Irish Sea coastlines.

“In Wales and Ireland, we currently rely on man-made sea defences

to protect many of our most important cities, towns and transport links from floods and storms.

“These artificial structures tend to provide poor habitats for wildlife, but the eco-engineering we’ll be trialling through this project has huge potential for improving coastal infrastructure and better protecting ecosystems and marine life.”

Welsh Government seeks innovative ideas to tackle childhood obesity with healthier & cheaper food choices

By the age of 11, more than 40% of Welsh children are either obese or overweight. Research shows that the vast majority of obese children tend to grow up to become obese adults.

Obesity has a significant impact on the economy. In 2011, obesity alone was estimated to cost the NHS in Wales £73 million, with between £1.40 million and £1.65 million spent each week treating diseases resulting from obesity.

Companies are being invited to submit solutions which focus on reducing levels of salt, sugar and saturated fat as well as increasing the levels of vitamins, minerals and fibre provided in food and drink for children.

Schools have a key role to play in providing children with access to nutritious and healthy food and Welsh Government is also inviting applications which further improve the nutritional value of school meals, while reducing the cost to ensure families are able to afford this option.

The competition was launched at Wales’ first major food event, Blas Cymru/Taste Wales. The Welsh Government organised event brought together representatives from across Wales’ food and drink industry with influential buyers from all over the world.

The Cabinet Secretary for Environment and Rural Affairs, Lesley Griffiths, said:

“This programme is a call to our food innovators in Wales to help us improve the health of our children by providing good quality and nourishing food, whilst keeping costs down. The Welsh food and drink industry can be proud of its record in innovation, in launching new products and driving up standards, and I’m now appealing to you to use your skills, talents and creativity, to

tackle one of the greatest challenges of all – improving the diets of our children today, to enable them to become the healthy young adults of tomorrow.”

Those who submit ideas for funding will come up with innovative solutions such as new processing technologies, reformulation techniques, enabling technologies, new engineering designs and flexible manufacturing processes, to drive down costs.

In addition to improving the diet of children it's expected that the programme will have wider benefits, including, providing financial savings for schools, boosting the food industry in Wales and further enhancing its reputation for research and innovation.

The funding is provided through the Small Business Research Initiative (SBRI), from the Welsh Government and Innovative UK.