

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.”