

Small and rural schools set to benefit from £2.5m funding – Kirsty Williams

Local authorities have been applying for the funding after the Education Secretary Kirsty Williams revealed the support package in November last year to encourage innovation and support greater school to school working.

This includes using digital technology to combat the issue of professional isolation, providing administrative support in schools where the head teacher has significant teaching commitment, supporting collaboration and federation of schools, and where opportunities exist and there is local demand, using school facilities for community purposes.

Amongst the local authorities to receive funding are Anglesey, which will receive £138,000 to federate some of its schools, and Pembrokeshire, which has been awarded £158,000 to fund a Small School Innovation Project for a network of 15 small and rural schools.

Kirsty Williams said:

“Small and rural schools play an important role in our national mission to raise standards and extend opportunities for all our young people.

“We are taking action and providing new funding to help small and rural schools deal with the unique challenges they face, such as small pupil numbers and issues in recruiting head teachers and staff.

“This financial support will benefit pupils, teachers, and the wider community. I want to see rural schools working more formally together and across the country, forming federations and looking into the possibility of sharing buildings with other services to ensure school buildings remain viable.”

WLGA Spokesperson for Education, Councillor Debbie Wilcox (Newport) said:

“This funding is great news for small and rural schools. As a former teacher of many years myself, I know how having the best possible learning environment can enhance education and overall experiences. Local education authorities have been working hard to ensure schools are responding to modern challenges and are fully-equipped to provide the best education environment for teachers, pupils and staff, and this investment will help to continue that important work.”

WLGA Deputy Spokesperson for Education, Councillor Ellen ap Gwynn (Ceredigion) said:

“Small and rural schools face unique challenges, especially in terms of recruitment and smaller pupil numbers. But they’re more than just schools in the communities that they serve. They are important assets to the community as school buildings and resources are widely used for an array of community purposes. This funding will contribute to ensure that learners and communities alike can continue to reap the benefits of these schools, and also to strengthen the support for Welsh language education provision in our rural communities.”

The Education Secretary also announced plans to consult on strengthening the School Organisation Code in respect of a presumption against the closure of rural schools. For the first time ever there will be a designation of rural schools for that purpose. A 14 week consultation ended on 30 September and responses are currently being analysed.