

Schools to share in over £90m to help disadvantaged learners

The Cabinet Secretary has written to schools across Wales to confirm how much they will directly receive in 2018-19.

In addition to over £90m committed this year, £187m has been guaranteed for the remainder of the Assembly term, so that schools have the stability to plan ahead.

The PDG helps schools tackle the effects of poverty and disadvantage on attainment and is targeted at learners who are eligible for Free School Meals or are Looked After Children.

Schools use the PDG in a number of different ways, including nurture groups for children who may be socially and emotionally vulnerable, out-of-hours school learning, on-site multi-agency support and better tracking of pupils as they progress through school.

This year, the PDG for the youngest learners (pupils aged 3-4 years old) has increased from £600 to £700 per pupil. This builds on last year's doubling of financial support from £300 to £600 per learner in the early years.

Primary and secondary schools will continue to receive a rate of £1,150 per learner, and this rate also continues to apply to learners in education other than at school (EOTAS).

From this year, schools will also have greater flexibility to support learners who have been eligible for Free School Meals in the previous two years.

Advisers and coordinators from education consortia are also on-hand to provide extra support and guidance for schools on using the funding.

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 is one of the most effective ways in which we can break the cycle of deprivation and poverty.

“Time and again, teachers have told me how much of a difference PDG funding has made in raising aspirations, building confidence, improving behaviour and attendance and in involving families with their children's education.

“Teachers have also called for greater certainty around future PDG funding and that's why I'm pleased to be able to guarantee allocation levels for the next two financial years and reaffirm our

commitment to the grant for the lifetime of this Assembly.

“We have always said that the PDG is there to support all pupils who are eligible for Free School Meals, not just those that are struggling academically. That’s why I want schools to ensure they are supporting more able pupils as well.

“I would also encourage all schools to make full use of the PDG advisers and coordinators from the education consortia – they’re there to help when it comes to making the best use of the funding and ensuring that we raise attainment across the board.”

An independent evaluation of the PDG last year found that many schools consider the funding to be ‘invaluable’, with further evidence from Estyn and the Welsh Government’s raising attainment advocate, Sir Alasdair MacDonald, showing the majority of schools are making well thought out decisions on how to spend the funding.

[Health Secretary welcomes review findings into Sexual Health Services in Wales](#)

The review was undertaken by Public Health Wales following consultations with a wide-range of stakeholders and overseen by the Sexual Health Programme Board.

The report acknowledges the significant contribution sexual health services in Wales make in the prevention and treatment of sexually transmitted infections and in providing contraception.

The report does however highlight inconsistencies in sexual health service provision across Wales, including services provided by primary care, and accessibility to, and availability of, abortion services.

It also found that attendances at sexual health clinics have doubled in the last five years, which is putting pressure on existing service models.

Welcoming the report, the Health Secretary, Vaughan Gething said:

“My vision for sexual health services in Wales is one of modern services meeting the needs of all users. I am pleased to see the report praises the commitment of the sexual health workforce in Wales and the progress that has been made.

“We’ve made tremendous strides in recent years in reducing teenage pregnancies, but the burden of sexually transmitted infections remains considerable and it’s clear from this report that more needs to be done, particularly in respect of access and inequality.

The report’s recommendations include:

- Health boards to develop an understanding of the needs of their population and have a system in place to deliver services to vulnerable groups
- Considering amending the legal framework to allow patients to take medication for termination of pregnancy at home
- Enhancing the role of for primary care and pharmacies in sexual health provision, for example delivering over the counter oral contraception
- Health boards look at other opportunities to extend provision of Long Acting Reversible Contraception (LARC) in both primary and secondary care.

The Health Secretary added:

“We wanted an honest picture of services and now we have one to inform improvements. We will work with stakeholders to develop an implementation plan, and the Sexual Health Programme Board will remain in place to support and oversee the implementation of the recommendations over a two-year period.

“I’d like to thank the Public Health Wales reviewers for the collaborative way in which they undertook the review, and to all those who contributed to it.”

Dr Giri Shankar, Professional Lead Consultant for Health Protection at Public Health Wales, who oversaw the review on behalf of the organisation, said:

“While huge progress has been made in addressing teenage pregnancies, much work remains to be done on accessibility to services, risky behaviours, modernising information gathering systems, access to abortion services and moving care closer to patients.

“We are confident that the implementation plan coming out of the review will provide a great opportunity to make further progress in these key areas of need, particularly by harnessing recent advances in technology.

“We are grateful to Welsh Government for asking us to undertake

this much-needed review of sexual health services in Wales. It was a collaboration between all partners involved in sexual health provision and has yielded rich information on the state of services in Wales.

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Thousands in Wales missing out on help with Council Tax

Finance Secretary, Mark Drakeford today urged people across Wales to check whether they were aware of the discounts and reductions they could be entitled to.

You may be entitled to pay less council tax if:

- you believe you live on a low-income
- you live alone, or with people / children who do not pay council tax
- you are a student
- you are disabled
- you are mentally impaired
- your property is empty.

The Welsh Government is working with local authorities and third sector organisations including Citizens Advice and Age Cymru, to make people more aware of the range of support available to help them pay their Council Tax bills. A new awareness raising campaign will be launched and a simple eligibility checker is available online. Reminders about the support available will also be sent to householders.

Professor Drakeford said,

“We know that thousands of households across Wales are not receiving the support they could be entitled to with their Council Tax. There are many discounts, reductions and exemptions available and these are all listed on our new website. A few minutes of your time, could mean significant savings to your outgoings.”

Cabinet Secretary for Local Government and Public Services, Alun Davies, said,

“Making Council Tax fairer is an essential part of our plans to reform local government in Wales.

“We’ve worked hard to ensure vulnerable households in Wales continue to receive Council Tax support as part of our national Council Tax Reduction Scheme. However, many households aren’t aware they could be eligible for the scheme or entitled to other discounts or exemptions. I would encourage everyone to check the website to see whether they could be paying less council tax.”

A full list of eligibility criteria is available on the Welsh Government website at gov.wales/counciltaxhelp

Extra funding to help Mudiad Meithrin contribute to 1 million Welsh speakers

Minister for Welsh Language and Lifelong Learning, Eluned Morgan visited Cylch Meithrin Pont-y-pwl, a member of Mudiad Meithrin, on Monday 16 April to hear more about the work from Dr Gwenllian Lansdown Davies, Mudiad Meithrin Chief Executive.

The organisation will receive £3.031m per year for the next two financial years. This comprises £2.031m of annual funding and an extra £1m per year as part of the budget deal between Plaid Cymru and the Welsh Government.

The extra funding will allow Mudiad Meithrin to:

- offer additional support to establish new settings in priority locations across Wales where there is lack of Welsh medium provision
- develop alternative models for new cylchoedd meithrin
- strengthen Mudiad Meithrin’s regional and national structures to support its increased membership.

Torfaen has been identified as one of the priority areas for development of new provision as part of this work. Mudiad Meithrin is working closely with local authorities and other partners to ensure additional capacity developed over the coming years is targeted effectively and enabling as many children as possible to start on the journey to bilingualism.

Announcing the funding, Minister for Welsh Language and Lifelong Learning, Eluned Morgan said:

“Reaching one million Welsh speakers by 2050 is a very ambitious target. Education, and early years education in particular, is key to this and this is why we have set targets to expand Welsh-medium

provision by 40 Welsh-medium nursery groups by 2021 and by 150 Welsh medium nursery groups over the next decade.

“As the Welsh-medium early years and childcare specialist, Mudiad Meithrin has a vital role to play so I am delighted to announce this extra funding to help them contribute to this target.”

Dr Gwenllian Lansdown Davies, Mudiad Meithrin Chief Executive added:

“The additional investment by Welsh Government will enable Mudiad Meithrin to open more Welsh-medium childcare provision – a key element of the government’s language strategy, ‘Cymraeg 2050’. The early years is integral to the success of that strategy and this investment highlights its importance.”

TrawsCymru extends and improves vital Aberystwyth to Cardiff service

TrawsCymru is the Welsh Government funded, long-distance bus network for Wales comprising a number of routes, the latest of which will connect Aberystwyth with Carmarthen and Port Talbot before continuing on to Cardiff.

Before the end of last year, Ken Skates announced additional funding to local authorities to enable them to introduce a package of improvements to the TrawsCymru bus and coach connections linking Aberystwyth with Carmarthen, Swansea and Cardiff.

Following feedback from passengers, the service has introduced a modern wheelchair accessible high floor coach on the daily Aberystwyth to Cardiff long distance service, which will provide a more comfortable journey for longer distance passengers, complemented by the introduction of a shorter route which will offer quicker ‘end to end’ journey times.

The service will be operating a more comfortable long distance coach equipped with coach style seating, on board toilet and free WiFi.

Furthermore, TrawsCymru Day Ticket will be valid on the service, so people can visit Cardiff for the day from Aberystwyth and return for £10 (adults) and £7 (young persons). Also, the Welsh concessionary travel passes valid for use on the service.

This coach service will also call at Port Talbot Rail Bus Interchange at the Parkway station.

A daily TrawsCymru T1S bus link will also be maintained between Aberystwyth, Lampeter, Carmarthen and Swansea with additional short journeys between Carmarthen, Cross Hands and Swansea being operated during the day (weekdays and Saturdays)

Economy Secretary Ken Skates said:

“In 2016, when we took on the running of this route, we intended to not just maintain the continuation of this critical service, but to strengthen it.

“We have listened to passengers and have introduced coaches onto this key route, and have significantly reduced journey times. Along with the additional stop in Port Talbot, this long-standing service will add more value to already vital public transport links to and from rural Wales, giving passengers extra choice on this key strategic route.”

Further information on the T1C service including a timetable, when it becomes available, can be found at www.trawscymru.info (external link).