

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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[Animal welfare to be strengthened in Wales](#)

Maximum animal cruelty sentences in Wales are set to increase to five years and the Cabinet Secretary has written to Rt Hon Michael Gove MP, Secretary of State Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) on the issue of introducing legislation on an England and Wales basis.

Currently the maximum sentence in England and Wales for an offence under the Animal Welfare Act 2006 is six months, in addition to unlimited fine and ban.

Officials from England and Wales will now work together on the introduction of the Bill. The UK Government today submitted a draft Bill for the consideration of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (EFRA) Select Committee and intends to introduce the Bill as soon as Parliamentary time

permits.

Cabinet Secretary said:

“We have always been clear the way we treat animals is an important reflection of the values of our society. Animals should be protected from pain, injury, fear and distress, and those who commit the worst acts of animal cruelty should face tough punishments.

“That is why I have written to the Secretary of State on the issue of introducing legislation on an England and Wales basis. Increasing the sentence to five years imprisonment will maintain a comparative sentencing regime across England and Wales and will bring clarity for enforcement agencies, the Courts and the public alike.

“It will also bring the maximum sentences for animal cruelty in England and Wales in line with Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland and the Scottish Government’s plans in this important area.”

The draft Bill published today sets out the government “must have regard to the welfare needs of animals as sentient beings in formulating and implementing government policy”.

Cabinet Secretary added:

“Our position on sentience has been very clear. We fully agree that animals are sentient beings and we will continue to promote and enhance animal welfare, both now and after we have left the EU.

“The issue of sentience not being of the face of any UK Bill was a concern for us and our stakeholders, particularly the British Veterinary Association. Therefore the inclusion of this sensitive element in this UK Bill will provide confidence and regularise the position.

“I will be meeting with the Secretary of State later this week and am pleased he is now backing up his messages on the importance of animal welfare and animal sentience with decisive action. I look forward to these discussions.”