

## REPORT FOR GWYNEDD'S SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

21 OCTOBER

### ACCELERATED LEARNING PROGRAMME

#### **Background:**

As a result of the Covid pandemic, the Accelerated Learning Programme Grant has been available to support schools as they strengthen the support available to pupils. As reported to the committee in June, all schools have produced suitable plans for the use of this money in order to respond to the needs of the learners in their care. These plans were held and approved in a regional dashboard. Where the Dashboard wasn't used, the schools planned using their own templates which have been sent to the associate consultants. Access to the schemes is provided by GwE consultants and Officers of the Authority. The Plans were validated by the associate consultants and where there were concerns about the quality and robustness of some plans, this was shared with relevant officers of the Authority and with the schools so that they could respond to concerns. Responsibility for monitoring expenditure rests with the Authority.

The plans complement the grant's conditions (*see further details of the Conditions in the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee report, 10 June 2021*) and identify a need to recruit additional staff or increase existing staff's time in order to run intervention programmes to restore and raise standards – whether on the basis of a teacher or an assistant. At the peak of the pandemic, it was difficult for some schools to find appropriate staff locally and other restrictions made it difficult to introduce new workers. The same challenge continues to face some schools.

GwE secured support for the accelerated learning programme by sharing the evidence and research into the most effective interventions for pupils or groups to catch-up with their learning. A large number of virtual presentations were held to share and explain the thinking behind some of these interventions. Many resources were shared to accompany the plans through the GwE Support Centre and it is clear that many schools have made extensive use of these. At individual school level, the Supporting Improvement Advisors (SIAs) have been on hand to offer further guidance and share good practice. In addition, in secondary schools, under leadership of the core subjects' SIA, network meetings for each Head of Core Subject have addressed literacy and numeracy interventions including the sharing of strategies and resources that departments can use or adapt to their purposes. Examples of the type of resources that have been produced for schools by the GwE SIA on subjects can be found at the following link: <https://www.herio.cymru/items/accelerate-english-tier1.html>. Follow up visits or additional support have been made available to those schools that have requested it through their individual support plans.

Schools have generally coped very well in a very difficult and tiring year for them. The headteachers and staff have all demonstrated remarkable resilience and have worked together, maintained and supported each other excellently. The pupils' wellbeing has been a priority for everyone and interventions to accelerate learning have been able to take place.

Since starting back in September, challenges still exist in many areas with so many pupils and staff absent or isolating. Interventions as part of this programme have restarted in most schools but monitoring the impact of the Accelerated Learning Programme spending in the classroom continues to present challenges. In a number of schools, it was possible to measure impact directly through

joint-scrutiny or joint-observation. However, in many schools the exercise has largely taken place through discussions with headteachers and their ability to share specific data or examples of the impact of the programmes with us.

Regular meetings are held between the Authority's officers and GwE Supporting Improvement Advisors to share information about individual schools in order to target additional support when there are concerns or to identify good practice for sharing.

Almost all primary schools, through discussions, questionnaires and internal assessments, were able to find a baseline for their pupils when they returned in September 2020. The programme's spending plans in their dashboard therefore targeted those individuals or groups 'most affected by lockdown, whether in terms of wellbeing or attainment'. Intervention groups were created in almost every school to provide recovery support for these pupils with the main focus on improving wellbeing and coping, literacy including improving oracy, reading and writing and to maintain and improve numeracy skills. Many schools also made good use of the guidance by GwE to consider research into the most effective interventions, thereby using many Accelerated Learning resources on the GwE website.

Examples of use and impact of the funding could include:

- Schools successfully helping pupils back into school life, helping them to cope with difficult situations from home and to be more resilient in their work.
- The money was used to remove specialist assistants from their usual classes to run more ELSA (Emotional Literacy Support) and Talkabout (discussing self-esteem and social skills) sessions with vulnerable individuals or groups of children across the school. This led to more pupils being able to re-adjust back into school life and re-form friendships as well as being more willing to learn.
- One school took advantage of local masters students who were home from university a few days a week to come into the school to work with groups of pupils to re-develop spoken and conversational skills in Welsh. With the background of the students' psychology and language degree, the school soon saw a difference in the standard of language and attitude of all members of these groups.
- Another school took advantage of LEGO Therapy training in order to hold regular sessions for groups of pupils who had become withdrawn and quiet after returning. According to the school's assessments, the sessions have raised almost all of these pupils' self-confidence, self-esteem and co-working and conversational skills.
- All Reception, Year 1 and 2 pupils have lost a large percentage of their time at school over the last eighteen months. Many schools note a delay in the fine motor skills of many of the children of this age which has an impact on their ability to hold a pencil, use scissors etc. These schools have therefore been targeting these skills through activities that are developmentally suitable to strengthen the hand muscles such as playing with clay, dough and building blocks. This is beginning to have a positive impact on the children's skills to use pencils, create marks and write independently.
- In terms of the skills, almost every school used funding from the programme to target groups of pupils identified as having slipped in literacy and numeracy, pupils who were often not in intervention groups prior to the pandemic. Every school that established a baseline when the children returned shows that a very high percentage of these pupils have made

progress following interventions. In one school that targeted the reading skills of B2 pupils, 85% had made progress towards their chronological reading age within a term.

- The long-term impact of this programme and action is that many assistants and teachers have been upskilled and have gained confidence and experience to undertake further effective interventions with new groups of pupils.

All schools have evaluated their provision in some way throughout the year and thus begin to capture the impact of the programme. They have used a range of methods such as pupil discussions and questionnaires, more formal assessments and extensive discussions among staff. All schools have considered the impact of their provision and measured pupils' progress through conversations or wellbeing questionnaires, wellbeing assessments such as PASS or Boxhall and by undertaking national literacy and numeracy assessments as well as internal standardised tests. Late in the summer term and into this year many schools have succeeded in re-introducing and holding more formal evaluation sessions of their provision such as work scrutiny and a learning walk, and some have observed lessons. Almost all schools have analysed their evaluations' findings and monitor pupils' progress closely. They have then modified the interventions as necessary, drawing up appropriate interventions or adjusting the provision for pupils who have slipped, pupils who made no progress or pupils that needed further support. Most schools have reported on provision and progress to their governors.

Therefore, in terms of this programme specifically, the schools' schemes are having a positive short-term effect with almost every school noting that the interventions have contributed to improving or restoring standards. However, many of these schemes are going to take longer to fully demonstrate the impact on some of the most vulnerable pupils and those with additional learning needs. It is still too early to see the full long term effect of this programme's spending on attainment.

This year will leave a long-term impact on many children and their families and many schools will therefore invest in support beyond this programme to respond to the long-term need.

In line with the grant's conditions, secondary schools have targeted intervention for specific cohorts of pupils, such as pupils preparing for exams, vulnerable and disadvantaged children, year 7 and any specific groups or individuals identified as needing additional support in literacy, numeracy, digital competence, promoting independent learning skills and securing additional support through training.

In most cases, initiatives include appointing or increasing the hours of assistants or learning coaches for catch-up sessions. There are various examples of how the schools have used the money to support learning. These include:

- holding literacy and numeracy lessons for pupils, adjusting timetables to ensure additional intervention is targeted
- holding lessons after school to support children to catch up with their work in general
- targeting specific interventions for pupils in the examination years who had been identified to receive additional support.
- supporting wellbeing by holding additional counselling sessions by charities such as 'Joshua Tree' for vulnerable pupils who have been adversely affected during the pandemic.
- overcome practical barriers to learning for individual learners by providing resources such as books, laptops, one-to-one support.

Since the start of the new educational year in September, the intention was to move to a system of monitoring which included joint-scrutiny and lesson observation with senior management teams in the schools, evaluating the quality of joint action and validating opinions. It is fair to note that the situation has been challenging for schools due to the incidence of Covid affecting staffing and the feasibility of conducting scrutiny exercises. However, many secondary schools have now resumed this work. In a few schools receiving more intensive support, the Associate SIA has been able to co-operate with senior management teams whilst validating opinions. Among the successes that schools have identified as early effects of the interventions are:

- improved motivation by pupils
- learners making good educational progress as they receive specific and positive feedback in catch-up lessons
- increase in pupils' confidence
- a greater awareness of linguistic accuracy by pupils
- vulnerable pupils are more willing to attend school because support is tailored to their needs
- pupils being supported and spending time in a supportive ethos, helping to improve learners' emotional health
- a school with a better understanding of learners' concerns and in a position to respond to those concerns. As a result, provision is constantly adjusted to be more effective.
- schools developing firmly in the direction of the Curriculum for Wales essentials.