

# REDUCING THE IMPACT OF POVERTY ON EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT

## POLICY OBSERVATORY CASE STUDY 5

Name of School/Setting: <b>Ysgol Uwchradd Tywyn</b> Local Authority: <b>Gwynedd</b> Type of School/Setting: <b>Secondary</b> Language Medium: <b>Welsh</b> Number of Pupils: <b>270</b> Free School Meal Percentage: <b>10%</b> Focus of Case Study: <b>Identifying low-achieving pupils and developing a range of strategies to improve their performance including additional learning experiences and engaging their parents.</b>
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### *Ysgol Uwchradd Tywyn*

#### **Introduction**

Ysgol Uwchradd Tywyn is one of the smallest secondary schools in Wales. It is an 11-16 comprehensive school offering education predominantly through the medium of Welsh and sometimes English. It serves a large rural and coastal catchment area and around 25% of its pupils come from Welsh-speaking home backgrounds. According to data on the *My Local School* website<sup>1</sup> there are 270 pupils in the school, 9.7% of whom are entitled to free school meals (FSM). The current number on roll is 259 and 9.6% are FSM pupils.

The school has traditionally only had a small number of pupils entitled to free-school meals. However, it has often had a high proportion (currently 30%) of pupils with additional learning needs (ALN). Therefore, the main focus in terms of support and intervention has been on these pupils, some—but by no means all—who would also fall into the FSM category.

The school has frequently targeted support for various categories of pupils, for example, boys, in addition to GCSE C/D borderline and pupils who risk leaving school without entering education, employment or training (NEETs).

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<sup>1</sup> <http://mylocalschool.wales.gov.uk/school.htm?estab=6614032&lang=eng>

The school believes its small size has a positive impact. This can best be summarised by the following quotes:

**“We are a small school and we know all the pupils and families so well.”**

**“Most teachers in non-core subjects will teach all the pupils in years 7-to-9.”**

**Head of Key Stage 4**

**“We work as a team with the teachers.”**

**“We feel valued by most teachers.”**

**“The teaching staff work well with support.”**

**LSA Voices**

**“I know the pupils very well; I teach them all.” “Things can’t work in isolation in a school this size. There’s no hiding place.”**

**Head of Science**

**“I know everyone in the school. I teach them all. Everybody knows everybody.”**

**Head of Art**

## **The Use of Data and Related Interventions**

The school has a very effective data-capture system, developed over the last few years. This enables it to effectively map pupil achievement and attainment. It uses colour-coding which allows staff a very quick and straightforward overview of pupils’ progress and achievement. This includes grouping pupils under a range of categories, one of which is FSM. Furthermore, with such small numbers, teachers and support staff say it is very manageable for them to get an overview and be aware of every pupil’s progress and current attainment on a continuous basis.

The systematic analysis of progress, achievement and attainment data by the headteacher forms the basis of departmental reviews. Each department is required to define what support it will provide to enable pupils to meet specified aspirational targets. They are also asked to provide an evaluation of how effective and successful the actions were.

Half-termly whole-school reviews of pupil progress, achievement and attainment include a section on FSM pupils. The Senior Management Team (SMT) monitors a targeted group of pupils (on the grade C/D boundary or equivalent) in years 9 and 11. Departments undertake this same role with similarly targeted groups in years 7, 8

and 10. The close in-school attention and scrutiny to these pupils is accompanied by regular dialogue and, when necessary, meetings, with parents.

Classes are organised in three sets for the core subjects from year 8. Staff believe this makes planning and teaching more straightforward and enables the school to create small 'bottom' sets where a lot of individual attention can be given to pupils (especially with the increased level and specialism of LSA support now available).

**“The whole system is now targeting pupils in a more robust fashion.”**

**Headteacher**

### **Additional Support for Pupils**

Additional support has been provided outside the classroom. This can take the form of one-to-one or small groups working on bespoke revision and catch-up programmes. Much of this focuses on literacy. There is also increased support through appointing another Learning Support Assistant (LSA) with a specific responsibility for numeracy.

There is a very clear support system for pupils in the core subjects with after-school 'Helpline' drop in sessions each week. There is one for science, English and mathematics along with a lunchtime session for Welsh. All pupils are welcome to come to these and the school reports that they are generally well attended. However, particular attention is given to try and ensure those pupils who have little or no facility for doing work at home are able to attend. Other subject teachers are willing to organise lunch-time meetings, including on a one-to-one basis, to deal with any pupil queries or concerns.

Some Pupil Deprivation Grant (PDG) funding has been used to appoint a LSA, one of whose roles is to track all FSM pupils and advise on any intervention and support strategies for them.

'Reading buddies' have been used whereby pupils in year 11 volunteer to work with year 7 pupils in registration periods at the start of the school day. The centrally located Library provides a good setting for this activity.

Out-of-school-hours activities included *Breakfast Club* and *Homework Club*, where the take-up by both FSM and non-FSM pupils is consistently high. The *Breakfast Club* is held daily from 07:45 until 08:30. It was set up by one of the Learning Support team. It offers the obvious advantages of proving a nutritious and healthy start to the day at school (due to the large catchment area some pupils have very early starts and, for some others, there is no tradition of eating breakfast at home). It also

reinforces social skills. Pupil feedback also indicates other factors, which may well help pupils settle well before the start of the school day.

**“It’s also good to be able to talk to Mrs Sheedy.”**

**“Mrs Sheedy is really nice and good to talk to.”**

**“Mrs Sheedy is very nice and funny and she is nice to talk to first thing in the morning.”**

### **Pupil Voice**

The *Homework Club* runs once a week for two hours. The same member of the Learning Support team who set up the Breakfast Club established it. The club is held in an ICT room and this provides pupils with additional resources and equipment with which to undertake their work. It is intended to provide a supportive environment for pupils, with ready support from the member of staff present. There is an incentive to attend as those who come eight times or more are awarded a certificate. The Club is also somewhere where older pupils readily help younger ones with their tasks. It aims to make pupils more confident and motivated learners as they tackle tasks and assignments in a well-equipped, supportive setting rather than one where they may struggle to get any personal or material help and are isolated. Some recent pupil comments that seem to endorse this include:

**“Homework Club is jolly and warm as can be. The minute I walk through the door I feel relaxed.”**

**“Homework Club is great. It’s for two hours after school and it allows you to do your homework with your friends.”**

**“Homework Club is AMAZING! We get a good 2 hours after school every Thursday night. We get to do our homework and print it out for free and Miss Sheedy is always there to help and we get to be around our friends.”**

**“Going to homework club is better than doing homework at home because if you’re not sure of something you can get help and advice from Miss Sheedy or your friends.”**

**“I like it because when I try to do my homework at home I get distracted but I don’t at homework club.”**

### **Pupil Voice**

There is a wide range of extra-curricular and enrichment activities. These include skills-based activities such as *Chess Club* and *Scrabble Club*, field trips, visits to the theatre and other places of educational interest such as the National Library of Wales. The school ensures that no pupil will miss out on these because they do not have the money to pay for them.

The school's hours (08:30-14:45) mean that there is still a reasonable amount of time remaining in the afternoon for extra-curricular activities, revision classes and Homework Club. Pupils are felt to be more inclined to stay on at school than if there was a 15:30 or later finish. There is also conscious effort to timetable these activities so as to avoid unnecessary clashes.

## **Work with Parents and the Community**

Building on-going dialogues with 'hard-to-reach' parents through close and regular contact with outside agencies and specialist services is a priority at Ysgol Uwchradd Tywyn.

Staff work with parents who lack confidence to approach the school and have an awareness that this is sometimes the case with pupils from 'disadvantaged homes'. Teachers and other school staff are trained to be good listeners and offer guidance to help parents make decisions, which influence their children's education. Staff communicate with parents by telephone and offer face-to-face meetings which are sometimes carried out in the home which helps parents to feel more relaxed and comfortable. Many parents have written to the school to praise their excellent communication with parents:

**“Since my son started at your school I have been very impressed by the up to date and correct information sent home via newsletters and text messages.”**

## **Parent Voice**

A half termly Newsletter keeps all parents informed of school events and developments and is circulated to key places in the community such as the Leisure Centre, the Health Centre, Dentist, Library, and Shops.

Specialists are invited into school to run workshops, some of which lead to qualifications such as OCN:

- Babysitting
- DJ Skills
- Physical Recreation

Information evenings are held in order to offer advice and gain parent's opinions and views. This is also achieved via surveys and questionnaires. An FSM pupil support questionnaire has been developed by the school and encompasses questions such as:

- **Has your child taken part in any of the variety of trips offered by the school? If so, which ones, if not, why not?**
- **How much do you feel you are able to help your child with their homework? A little, - A lot, - Not at all?**
- **Can you suggest any alternative or additional support that could be provided for your child which you feel would benefit them?**

On information and parent's evenings, if parents are unable to attend due to transport issues, the school will act as 'a go between' and put parents in touch with other families who are perhaps travelling in the same direction so that they can offer lifts to each other.

The school has an extremely successful partnership with the local Rotary Club and all pupils have access to events that are sponsored by the club, such as 'Young Chef' and 'Young Musician of the Year'. The Police Service also works in collaboration with the school and Youth Workers on a Community Garden Project at the local railway station.

## **Outcomes**

The small numbers of pupils who receive FSM (four or five in a year group) make year-on-year comparisons and conclusions within the school or with other schools very risky. Nevertheless, in 2013 performance showed the school gaining Level 2+ outcomes above the Family, the Local Authority and Wales. This was mirrored by the performance of FSM pupils. For 2012 a break-down of individual pupil performance of the eight FSM pupils who sat GCSE showed that seven attained Level 2, six the Core Subject Indicator and six Level 2+. All eight attained L1.

## Summary

The key message from this case study is the importance of leaders using data effectively to identify those pupils who are falling behind and to monitor and evaluate the impact of interventions to address underachievement.

Theme	Particular factor	YUT
Leadership	Rigorous use of data and self-evaluation	✓✓
	Training and effective deployment of staff including teaching assistants and specialists	✓✓
Teaching and Learning	Catch-up programmes	✓✓
	Tailored curriculum	✓
	Effective feedback and assessment	✓
Engagement with parents and wider community	Strong dialogue with parents	✓✓

## Key Contact

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