

WESP 10 - Individual

Senedd Cymru | Welsh Parliament

Pwyllgor Diwylliant, Cyfathrebu, y Gymraeg, Chwaraeon, a Chysylltiadau Rhyngwladol | Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee

Cynlluniau Strategol Cymraeg mewn Addysg - y fframwaith deddfwriaethol sy'n cefnogi Darpariaeth Addysg Gymraeg | Welsh in Education Strategic Plans - the legislative framework that supports Welsh-Medium Education Provision

Ymateb gan Annibynnol | Evidence from Individual

Record your views against the inquiry's terms of reference.

1. Has the current statutory framework for Welsh in Education Strategic Plans (WESPs) improved since the recommendations published in December 2015 in the report of the 'Inquiry into Welsh in Education Strategic Plans' by the Children, Young People and Education Committee of the Fourth Senedd?

N/A

2. To what extent do Welsh in Education Strategic Plans contribute to the outcomes and targets set out in the Welsh Government's Welsh Language Strategy – Cymraeg 2050?

N/A

3. How are local authorities responding to changes to guidance on school categories according to Welsh-medium provision, and are they meeting the Welsh Government's ambition to increase Welsh-medium provision in English-medium and dual-stream schools?

Dear Sir / Madam,

I write to express my concern at the way the Welsh Government's proposals to introduce greater emphasis on Welsh in the education system is being interpreted by some. I realize that different authorities have their own views on how to implement the Welsh Government's

proposals but certainly the reaction to proposals by Carmarthenshire County Council is causing a stir and opposition is mounting. Carmarthenshire County Council have indicated that they wish to see all Early Years Education conducted predominantly through the medium of Welsh in all primary schools by the year 2030. Fears that children will be denied Early Years education in their mother tongue, i.e English, are a great concern. Two hundred years ago such a policy was tried by government, resulting in the infamous "Welsh Not" which was rightly decried. Now we seem to be heading towards an "English Not". Surely parents have the fundamental right to decide the language in which their child should be educated especially if that language is the predominant language in the country. I am sure the United Nations Children's Charter expresses such a view. I speak as an ex-headteacher who has supported the development of Welsh throughout my time in education, but mandating the use of Welsh in Early Years, probably against the wishes of many parents, is a step too far and risking the educational development of children who might not have the linguistic support at home to provide the required help. It has always been recognised that parental support in Early Years is one of the most important factors in improving children's progress and something headteachers are always trying to encourage. Surely trying to encourage English speaking parents to support their children in Welsh will be less successful. If parents want their children educated in Welsh then that is wonderful and they should be supported but it should not be forced on everyone.

If my reading of Carmarthenshire County Council's policy is correct then by 2030 there will be no option open to children and parents but Early Years education through the medium of Welsh. I cannot though find any reference to a Children's Rights Impact Assessment recommended by the Children's Commissioner.

On a personal level, despite being reasonably bilingual, I would prefer my recently born grandchild to have his Early Years Education predominantly, though not exclusively, in English as both parents are English speaking and will be able to give greater support in that language. I do not want the child to risk not reaching his full potential because of possible language difficulties in a language which is not the language of his home.

I can find no research into the number of children who start their schooling in Welsh language education but then, consciously, switch to nearby predominantly English schools. Anecdotally I believe that the numbers might well be at a level which is significant and the reasons behind it surely need to be established before any expansion of Welsh medium education to include children whose parents might not be in favour of such a move.

How many children start their education in the Welsh language but then deliberately switch to predominantly English schools?

What is the academic level of achievement of these children?

Does their level of achievement improve after reverting to predominantly English schools?

Why do parents decide that their children should make such a move?

Bearing in mind that these are children who, initially, chose an education through the medium of Welsh, then surely the answers to these questions are even more relevant when considering expansion to include children whose parents have not made a choice to have them taught predominantly in Welsh.

Also, do we know how many children bypass a local Welsh medium school to attend a predominantly English school further away from their home and what are the reasons for this?

4. What challenges lie ahead in the planning and development of Welsh-medium provision, ahead of a proposed Welsh Language Education Bill?

Continuation of Question 10

Surely there is need for research into this area before we expand Welsh medium education in the way Carmarthenshire County Council intends.

I believe, after over 30 years experience in Primary Education, that we may well be risking the development of a significant group of children by not giving them their Early Years Education in the language of the home. Placing children of, possibly, lesser ability, from English speaking homes or where education might not be a priority, into a linguistically different environment is surely a risk. I spent years trying to convince parents of the value of reading to their children and listening to their children read as being one of most important ways of helping their child's development. Trying to get them to do it in Welsh would have been problematic to say the least.

Please do not think that I am anti-Welsh language as I believe that the development of Welsh language education in the county has been excellent and I support it wholeheartedly. Parents make a conscious decision to send their children to a Welsh medium school. They want their children to be there because they believe their children will reach their full potential in that system. They are concerned about their child's education and are very likely to be supportive of the school and their children. In any language this will create an ethos for success. What about parents who believe that the current system allowing a bilingual Early Years education is best for their children or those parents who take less interest in their children's education than we would

hope? Would the success of Welsh language education continue if parents are disaffected because of the language issue or not interested at all?

There must be many children who would do better in an Early Years education with the emphasis on their home language of English rather than Welsh. My older grandchildren are currently in a predominantly English school, doing well and improving their Welsh but I am not sure they would have been so successful in a totally Welsh language environment. That, I believe, is the problem. How can the Authority be confident that every child will reach his/her potential in the new system? I am afraid I have my doubts but, of course, how will we ever know? What we decide as educators affect the lives of children in ways we often never know.

Once we send a child down a certain path we have influenced their ability to reach their full potential, for better or worse. A child only has one chance at Early Years Education and should be given every advantage to successfully access its joys and experiences. Doing so through the medium of a language which is not their mother tongue might not be ideal. I feel I have to ask whether this is an educational or political decision. I realise that the need to increase the number of Welsh speakers in the country is seen as a priority by some but surely the problem is more about getting children who have learnt Welsh at school to use it in a social setting in the community after leaving school. Learning Welsh is an important part of a child's education but should not jeopardize development in other areas of the curriculum. I am afraid this will be the case for a significant group of children if their Early Years Education is through the medium of a language which is not their mother tongue, in a situation which may not be wanted, or supported, by their parents. Surely no-one can believe that EVERY child in Carmarthenshire will benefit from a Welsh medium Early Years education irrespective of the linguistic background and circumstances of the home

Thank you for listening to my views and as you can probably tell I feel very strongly about the subject. I would be happy to discuss things further especially on a more informal basis.

Regards