

Dear Buffy Williams MS,

We write to you to express our disappointment regarding the Senedd Children, Young People and Education Committee's Stage 1 Report on the Welsh Government's Welsh Language and Education Bill.

The first sentence of its foreword repeats a piece of rhetoric that has become common among our politicians: "The Welsh language belongs to everyone in Wales." Currently, 80% of our children and young people leave school without being able to speak Welsh confidently, as they have not received a Welsh-medium education. It is therefore clear that the Welsh language currently does not belong to everyone. Our concern is that this situation will persist even after the Bill has been passed by our Senedd, as it is not nearly strong enough at the moment to bring about the radical change needed to give the Welsh language to all our children.

In our evidence to your consultation on the Bill, we made it clear that significant amendments are needed to the Bill in order to ensure that it is transformative, including the introduction of statutory targets for the percentage of children who attend Welsh-medium education; placing each school on a continuum towards being a Welsh-medium school over time, once again with statutory targets; and incorporating a national action plan to upskill the Welsh language skills of the school workforce. It is very disappointing that these recommendations were not reflected in your report.

Although there is a recommendation in the report for the Government to provide clarity about each of the language categories, we and several other groups noted the importance of clearly defining Welsh education. The report refers to those comments therefore we hope the Government will take that into account. It is also promising that there is due attention to planning the education workforce, but considering that the report says that the importance of the education workforce in providing Welsh education was one of the main themes, and that several bodies stated in their evidence that the Education Workforce Plan needs to be re-examined, we are disappointed that the Committee has not made a stronger recommendation in order to start tackling the crisis in terms of the shortage of Welsh-medium education workforce.

As our politicians are not willing to stand with the 80% of children and young people who are deprived of the Welsh language, we will hold a rally outside the Senedd on 15 February to show that the people of Wales stand with them. In a recent opinion poll by YouGov, commissioned by us, 59% of the people questioned believed that schools should aim to educate all pupils sufficiently to ensure that they become confident Welsh speakers, with 29% disagreeing and 12% answered 'don't know'. Excluding those who answered 'don't know', the percentage in favour rose to 67%.

If the Welsh language really belongs to everyone, you will use your power as elected members of our Senedd in the coming months to influence it in order to realize the aspirations of the people of Wales and the rights of our children to speak our national language, and introduce amendments that will significantly change the once in a generation legislation so that it is truly transformative.

Sincerely,

Toni Schiavone, Chair of Cymdeithas yr Iaith's Education Group