

Welsh should not be compulsory for children with dyslexia and special needs

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 1 Mai 2018
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Research Briefing:

Petition number: P-05-808

Petition title: Welsh should not be compulsory for children with dyslexia and special needs

Text of petition: *Like many other children in the UK my son is dyslexic. English writing and reading is an everyday challenge so imagine having to learn to read and write another language that you will never use. This is what living in Wales my son has to do every day. I have tried to remove him from Welsh so he can have extra English lessons but it is a legal obligation for the school to teach Welsh in Wales. It's an everyday challenge for dyslexic children living in Wales. Welsh should be a choice for children with dyslexia and special needs, not compulsory.*

Background

Welsh (either first or second language depending on whether a school is Welsh-medium or not) is a **statutory subject** in the national curriculum in Wales. It became a compulsory subject for all pupils at Key Stages 1, 2 and 3 in 1990 and at Key Stage 4 in 1999. Following the publication of Professor Graham Donaldson's review of the curriculum in Wales, [Successful Futures](#) (February 2015), [Huw Lewis, then Minister for Education and Skills confirmed](#) (October 2015) that he had accepted Professor Donaldson's recommendations on the new curriculum for Wales that Welsh **will remain compulsory** in all schools up to the age of 16. The current national curriculum [Welsh Second Language Order](#) states that:

Learners of all abilities should have access to appropriate assessment and accreditation.

Although Welsh is a compulsory subject in the national curriculum, it is not compulsory to enter learners to sit a GCSE or other qualification. Making a decision on a particular qualification is a matter for schools and is done at a local level.

Welsh Government action

Welsh in Education: Action Plan 2017–21

In December 2017, the Cabinet Secretary for Education and the Minister for Welsh Language and Lifelong Learning published the [Welsh in education: Action plan 2017–21](#) which sets out the Welsh Government's direction for the development of compulsory Welsh-medium and Welsh language education over the next four years. This reiterates that the status of Welsh as a compulsory subject will not change and that:

in future, increasing value will be placed on Welsh as a subject and as a medium for teaching and learning.

Alongside the Action Plan, the Welsh Government published [answers to frequently asked questions](#). It says:

What about learners with additional learning needs?

- We must ensure that all learners can have equal access to Welsh-medium education and experience the best opportunities to develop their language skills.
- Equity requires that we ensure that the system, at school, local and national level takes account of and responds to the unique challenges that present themselves to individuals or groups of learners.

Additional Learning Needs

The Welsh Government is making changes to provision for learners with additional learning needs. The Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018 will replace the Special Educational Needs framework with a new one based on Additional Learning Needs (ALN) which is expected to be implemented from 2020. Until it is implemented, the current arrangements for identifying and providing for Special Educational Needs remain in place as set out in the Education Act 1996 and in more detail in the [SEN Code of Practice](#) (introduced in 2002 and updated in 2004). Local authorities, schools, early years settings and those who help them, including health and social services must have regard to the Code.

The Code also sets out the fundamental principle that:

children with special educational needs should be offered full access to a broad, balanced and relevant education, based on the National Curriculum

It also states:

Each school is required to plan a curriculum that includes provision for those National Curriculum subjects that are statutory at key stages 3 and 4. Teachers should deliver the National Curriculum programmes of study *in ways that meet the particular learning requirements of their pupils*. Some variations in the requirements at key stage 4 are permitted through the use of the regulations under Section 363 of the Education Act 1996 which permit disapplications of National Curriculum subjects for specific purposes.

When it published the Additional Learning Needs and Tribunal Bill, the Welsh Government also published a [draft Additional Learning Needs Code of Practice](#) (February 2017) which was not itself the subject of consultation, but was intended as an aid to understanding the Bill. The draft Code included the general principle that learners **must** be supported to participate in mainstream education and in the National Curriculum as fully as possible wherever this is feasible.

National Assembly for Wales action

The Committee considered a similar petition ([P05-760](#)) that called for an end to Compulsory Welsh Language GCSE's, for all, rather than for certain groups of learners. At that time, the Cabinet Secretary for Education was unequivocal that the study of Welsh remains a key element in the curriculum in Wales to age 16 and there were no plans to change this position. She said that there should be ample opportunities for all learners to develop their core skills while learning Welsh, and learning Welsh should broaden rather than narrow the curriculum. The petition was therefore closed.

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in this briefing is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.