

**P-05-888 Make GCSE Welsh Language compulsory in all schools in Wales,
Correspondence - Welsh Independent Schools Council to Chair, 29.10.19**

Dear Mrs Finch-Saunders

**RE: Petition P-05-888 Make GCSE Welsh Language compulsory in all schools
in Wales**

Thank you for your letter of the 2nd October 2019, the contents of which are noted.

Following your letter of 5th July 2019 Welsh Independent Schools Council undertook a straw poll of WISC member schools that undertook Welsh. (Please note that we now represent and support the vast majority of mainstream independent schools in Wales and just under two thirds of the country's independent special schools, namely 53 out of 75 independent schools in Wales). 21% of schools in WISC membership offer their pupils the opportunity to learn Welsh at Key Stage 3 and optional Welsh GCSE at Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 5 A Level. **Please note that this figure may be higher as not all schools responded to this poll.** Also, this figure does not include those schools that teach incidental Welsh. And of course, this figure fluctuates if parents wish their children to be taught Welsh.

I reiterate the contents of my initial response in my letter of the 18th July that most member schools agree with most of what you are saying in the text of your petition that every child should have 'the chance to learn Welsh'. Schools realise the importance of and see the value of the Welsh Language and are aware of certain professions which require GCSE Welsh for our students remaining in Wales.

As a sector independent schools are keen to give parents and pupils a choice in education. Independent schools are businesses and are market driven by parents and pupils and thus parental choice is key. The independent sector is good at adapting to what the learners and parents want and is market driven.

I would like to remind the Petitions Committee that independent schools are governed in Wales by the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003 and by virtue of their independence schools can follow a curriculum of their choosing and it is a dangerous precedent to impose subjects on the independent sector.

For those schools who do not offer GCSE Welsh, there are several reasons for this which I will outline below: -

- **The literacy needs of students** – not all students especially students in special schools study GCSE's and the focus is in a functional level in English only. Pupils have significant language and communication difficulties; the teaching of Welsh would complicate things further. Many of these learners have had very disrupted educations and have significant gaps in their learning so the whole focus is ensuring that they have improved literacy and numeracy skills in readiness for the world of work/college.
- Many special schools do not teach the Welsh language as a lot of their **learners are placed by English Local Authorities**, for these learners as they return to England at the end of placement they would never need a Welsh GCSE as Welsh is in no way appropriate to their culture, their experiences or their SEN profiles.
- For some schools a large percentage of students are **international students, where English is their second language**. As an international school, most of the students having no intention of ultimately living or working in Wales.
- Some independent schools are boarding schools and whilst many pupils are international, **there are more English students boarding than Welsh and they will return to England after their education.**
- Some **independent schools do not offer GCSE's** for example some schools offer the International Baccalaureate, the English Baccalaureate or the International Certificate of Steiner Education.
- Parental surveys have revealed that some **parents would prefer their children in independent schools in Wales to study a modern foreign language** as an alternative to Welsh. **Our Muslim schools' parents would prefer their children to study Arabic and Urdu as an alternative to Welsh.**

As CEO of WISC and having spoken to our WISC Chair, Stuart Hay we agree with the vast majority of the petition however the Welsh Independent Schools Council is strongly opposed to the final sentence of this petition 'Make Welsh Second Language GCSE compulsory in all school in Wales by law' for the reasons outlined above. We are very happy to speak to member schools of the benefits of doing Welsh and we are more than happy to promote and forward any Welsh Language literature and posters to our schools. We are also more

than happy for a spokesperson to speak at our conference. However, any threat to a schools' independence will be vehemently opposed. A schools' decision to teach Welsh should be the decision of the individual schools needs and not mandatory. Compulsory GCSE Welsh would not benefit all learners especially those with complex needs or international schools where English is a second language. There are also the cost implications - to a small school these would be large as more staff and training would be needed and as an independent school this would have to be paid for privately as they have no access to Local Authority training and funds.

Please acknowledge safe receipt.

Should you have any further queries, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Very best wishes

Emma Verrier
Chief Executive Officer
Welsh Independent Schools Council