

SUMMARY REPORT:

Gwynedd Language Centres' Pilot Scheme.



Background

On 2 April 2019, Gwynedd Council's Cabinet resolved to implement a pilot scheme at one Language Centre of a teacher and assistant staffing structure, in order to identify whether it affected the quality of the education and the children's attainment.

The brief of the research

A brief for the research was compiled and was presented to the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee on 10 October 2019 for comment.

The brief denoted the following requirements, with every Language Centre a part of the research that would form the basis to measuring the impact of the pilot scheme at Maesincla Language Centre.

1.1. a) The Daily Structure of the Language Centres

The research team will be required to consider the day-to-day arrangements for teaching and learning at every Language Centre, namely at which times during the working day does every Centre hold:

- one learning group with two teachers (maximum ratio of 2:16)
- one learning group with a teacher and assistant (maximum 2:16)
- one learning group with one teacher (maximum ratio of 1:16)
- one learning group with an assistant (maximum ratio of 1:16)
- two learning groups (maximum ratio of 1:8)
- other

1.2 The numbers of pupils attending Language Centres can vary up to a maximum of 16 pupils. This means that the numbers of pupils in the learning groups at every Centre can vary, based on the total number of children, and the research team is asked to give due consideration to this as part of the research.

1.3 b) Background Information

As well as the general information gathered about every pupil, the research team will also consider additional background information about the children and their families who have moved to Gwynedd, along with their connection or previous or current experiences with the Welsh language before attending the Language Centre. This information will include:

- When did they move to Gwynedd?
- Have they lived in Gwynedd previously?
- Main reasons for moving to Gwynedd?
- Can any members of the family or the extended family speak Welsh?
- Do they attend Welsh-medium community activities?
- Do they believe that it is advantageous for them to learn Welsh?
- Does the child have experience of the Welsh language before moving to Gwynedd?





- Does the child have a connection with anyone outside school who is able to speak Welsh?
- What does the child hope to achieve from learning the Welsh language?

1.4 This information will be a way of establishing a baseline of the children's backgrounds, ages, school year, their attitudes as well as their previous connection with the Welsh language, which will provide a basis for the research across the Language Centres.

1.5 c) Visits to the Language Centres

The research team will attend the Language Centres in order to consider, see and measure the linguistic progress made by the children during their period at a Centre. The Research team will attend the Language Centres at three specific periods during the course in order to measure the children's linguistic progress.

This will be approximately:

- Primary: Weeks 4, 8 and 12
- Secondary: Weeks 3, 6, 8

1.6 The Language Centres will draw up criteria based on the course's content regarding the progress and language patterns that the children should have mastered by those agreed key stages during the course.

1.7 The research team will be required to reach a judgement as to whether or not the children have achieved the expected progress, in discussion with teachers and assistants at the Language Centres, in order to ensure a full context to the judgement.

1.8 In accordance with the Language Centres' Business Plan, the research team will measure to what extent the Language Centres achieve their purpose by means of the following measure:

Number / % of children reaching Level 2 at the end of their period at a Language Centre and for this to be considered in parallel with:

- ·The daily structure of the Language Centres
- ·Background information and children's profile
- ·Visits to the Language Centres

2. The Research Team

2.1. The members of the research team were appointed based on their experience and expertise in immersion and second language education. The members of the research team were: Dr Diane Jones, Education Officer, Sian Eirug, Secondary Sector Language Strategy Coordinator, and Nia Williams, former Headteacher at Ysgol Morfa Nefyn. ~ Professional and informal input was also provided by Dr Enlli Thomas, School of Education, Bangor University.

Dr Diane Jones

Education Officer

Diane has been an Education Officer with Gwynedd Authority for five years. As a member of the Education Department's Management Team, she contributes to, and leads on education improvement plans, school estate capital plans and education developments, jointly leads on interventions and development plans, and offers guidance and support to school leaders in a variety of fields. Her background is in the field of community and cultural development, and teaching Welsh to learners of varying proficiency in the Secondary and Higher Education Sectors. She gained a doctorate in Welsh Language and Literature for her research into drama in Wales.

Sian Eirug

Secondary Sector Language Strategy Coordinator

Prior to taking up her current role as Secondary Sector Language Strategy Co-ordinator within the Authority, Sian Eirug was Head of the Welsh Department at a Secondary School in Ceredigion, and then Director of the PGCE Course at Aberystwyth University for over ten years with responsibility for Welsh as a subject. She taught Welsh as a second language to trainee teachers, and contributed regularly to the provision of the Welsh Medium Improvement Plan, specialising in bilingual teaching.

She has also contributed on a Masters in Educational Practice course at Cardiff University, and was a Peer Inspector with Estyn. She has extensive experience of working as a moderator for WJEC.





Nia Williams

Former Headteacher at Ysgol Morfa Nefyn

Nia was Headteacher at Ysgol Morfa Nefyn for 10 years, before retiring in 2018. Under her leadership, the school was awarded the Excellence standard by Estyn on two occasions. To conclude a successful career in education, Nia received a 'Finalist' award at the 2017 Professional Teaching Awards Cymru for her contribution to developing Welsh to a High Standard.

As part of her role as Headteacher, she diligently created teaching resources, led and ran courses on raising standards in Welsh, especially in oral work, across Wales for various organisations such as schools, WJEC and numerous conferences.

Nia has recently been a Foundation Phase Oracy Coach as part of the Welsh Government's 'Cymraeg 2050: A million Welsh speakers' project.

3. The Research

- 3.1. The research into the Language Centres was conducted between October 2019 and March 2020. However, the unprecedented conditions of the Covid-19 pandemic affected the time-scale originally planned for the completion of the work.
- 3.2. Below is a summary by the research team of their findings, based on their visits to each Language Centre during the Autumn Term 2019 and part of the Spring Term 2020.

4. The Findings of the Research

4.1. Good practices:

It was a pleasant experience for the Research Team to witness the fact that the pupils present at the Centres during our visits enjoyed being there. The collaboration between members of staff at individual Centres to ensure positive experiences for the pupils attending is to be commended, and it was pleasing to testify to the appreciation of the Headteachers of the schools for the work being undertaken there to equip the pupils with Welsh language skills. It is clear that the pupils attending are making progress in their ability to speak and use the Welsh language - there is no doubt about that. However, the variation that exists within that progress is something that needs further consideration.

4.2. Service Structure:

There are four Primary Language Centres and one Secondary Centre. Although there has been evidence of some recent collaboration across the Centres, they operate as individual centres. As a result, it is felt that there is inconsistency in the provision provided to the county's pupils, and there were examples of the duplication of functions, which could be more tightly controlled. It is believed that this would have a positive influence on the effectiveness and efficiency of the provision.

It was felt that the Centre's staff were not adequately supported on teaching and learning issues, e.g. access to the support of Education Officers, teachers in Professional Learning Communities and GwE Officers.

4.3. Admission Procedure:

The length of time spent in the Centres by the pupils attending them varied. Pupils attended the Primary Centres for twelve weeks, and the Secondary Centre for eight weeks. The procedure for admitting pupils to the Primary Centres was unclear, and it was seen that the procedure reported at the individual Centres varied greatly. Some were there because they were pure latecomers, others were there to get a little boost with their reading and writing skills, but were completely fluent in their spoken language. Others at another Centre had already attended the Centre during the previous academic year, but had returned to school at that time and had received the opportunity to come back. One Centre noted that some children went there as they were "generally weak" academically. There was no specific procedure for setting a baseline for individual learners against which progress could be measured. There was no consistent process across the Primary Centres of checking schools' applications for learners to attend. It was felt when speaking to the staff of the schools sending pupils to the Centres that there was an obvious lack of understanding of the referral procedure and in deciding who was eligible to attend or not. Due to the lack of clarity in the procedure for admitting pupils to the Centre, it is difficult to reach a firm judgement when measuring pupils' progress.

Due to the variation in the conditions of pupil admission to the Centres, this highlights the need for a more differentiated provision, which appropriately challenges the linguistic and educational ability of the attendees.





4.4. Staffing Structure:

There was no clear logic or consistency to the staffing structure of the Language Centres. There is no other example within the County's schools of classes being led by two teachers, but rather, a teacher and an assistant. In two of the Primary Centres, there was a leader and a teacher. At another Centre, one teacher and an assistant (i.e. the pilot scheme), and in the other, a leader and an assistant. In the Secondary Centre, there was a leader and a teacher. Very good practices of effective collaboration were observed in all centres, and no pupil was felt to be at a disadvantage as a result of the varied staffing structure of the Language Centres. Some excellent examples of collaboration between teacher and assistant were witnessed at one primary centre. There were no significant differences observed in the use of assistants and/or teachers across the Centres, with some examples of teachers and assistants taking learning groups at times, or supporting the learning led by another teacher or leader. The teachers' method of grouping and teaching pupils during the day was unclear. There were numerous examples in two teacher Centres or in leader and teacher Centres, of one member of staff taking all the groups for extended periods during the day. It was felt that opportunities were being missed to differentiate on the basis of linguistic ability in order to offer further support or challenge as appropriate.



4.5. Structure of teaching and quality of learning:

Although Cynllun y Llan was a structured scheme for the Primary Centres, there was significant variation in the way it was used and presented from one site to another. There was variation in what was presented orally - some examples of mutations being delivered naturally and an example of them not being presented at all in another centre. The general feeling, from talking to the Centres' staff, and from observing the learning, was that the Scheme had become dated, and it was felt that basing the entire teaching programme on an imaginary village as in the Scheme, was irrelevant to the experience cycle of those pupils who attended the Language Centres. Certainly, effective immersion techniques were practised at times, but it is felt that there is undoubtedly a real need to update the context in which the language is presented.

A similar scheme, namely the Cefyn Cŵl scheme, exists in the Secondary Centre, but some subject provision is also tailored there, to give learners who attend elements of the Cwricwlwm Cymreig, where themes such as the Welsh Not, the history of the Celtic nations, the history of the language, etc. are addressed. It was felt that this was good practice that should be emulated at the Primary Centres. However, with the Secondary pupils in particular, does their development in their core subjects suffer perhaps as a result of missing out on an extended period of mainstream education input in their schools?

The aim of the Language Centres is to ensure that the pupils who attend them reach Level 2 (Oracy) at the end of their time there in order to cope with the bilingual provision provided back in their schools. Good practice was witnessed within the context of the Pilot Scheme, but as there is no consistent system used as evidence to set a baseline and measure progress, it is difficult to judge whether this is being achieved with each pupil. In addition, as the provision does not sufficiently differentiate between the needs of individual pupils, it is not possible to know for sure how many of those pupils who were pure latecomers achieved Level 2 (Oracy) descriptors in Welsh. The reliability of this data is therefore questioned. However, it can be noted with certainty that all learners make progress and succeed in acquiring some Welsh, but that there is a noticeable variation in that progress for individual pupils in each Centre.

4.6. After-care:

It was not felt that there was an entirely clear picture of after-care provision as it was not possible to visit during the third term due to the pandemic. A small number of learners that had attended the Centre during the Autumn Term was observed, and it could be seen that following the educational provision in the class proved challenging for some, as did the ability to mix naturally with their peers. Talking to the Centre's staff revealed a vague picture of the procedure for offering after-care following the





pupils' return to the schools. The Primary Language Centres (as a result of the Cabinet decision of 2 April 2019) had not yet implemented the new procedure of providing after-care for learners in the third term directly themselves, however, up to 20 March 2020, there was no clear plan in place to respond to this new requirement. It is felt that the primary schools could benefit further from the expertise of Language Centre staff by sharing good practice and supporting wider groups of children who may benefit from the additional boost to their oral skills. This would further strengthen partnership working with the primary and secondary schools, and strengthen the sense of ownership in the journey of introducing the language to the pupils. Developing the current after-care to offer support and form potential Intervention Groups in primary schools would have a positive impact on pupils' achievements, and allow them to realise the relevance of the language to their wider educational development, instead of confining it to within the boundaries of the imaginary village of Llanfairgogoch (Cynllun y Llan).

5. Fields that need further attention:

It is recommended that the following be carefully considered in order to strengthen existing provision:

1. A clear admission policy and procedure to be established and carefully monitored.
2. The current structure of provision: are there alternative ways to offer the provision that will enable pupils to settle in their schools alongside attending the Language Centres?
3. Reconcile the daily administration of the Centres, e.g. the INSET days of the schools in which the Centres are located, the arrangements and times of the taxis transporting the pupils.
4. Reconcile the procedure for reporting on learners' progress.
5. Share good practice across Centres and schools.
6. Strengthen the relationship with the primary schools to enable further progress in terms of support for language development.
7. Adopt a method of work planning that identifies clear and timely outcomes to facilitate the monitoring of progress.
8. A clear after-care plan.
9. Strengthen Quality Assurance approaches in aiming for excellence.
10. Further consider the current termly scheduling structure to ensure comprehensive provision, which meets the needs of learners and provides value for money.

