

A report on
Welsh Language Immersion Arrangements in

Cyngor Gwynedd

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Date of inspection: March 2025

by

**Estyn, His Majesty's Inspectorate for Education
and Training in Wales**

This report is also available in Welsh

About Cyngor Gwynedd

Name of provider	Gwynedd Immersion Education System – Cyngor Gwynedd
Local authority	Cyngor Gwynedd
Start date of inspection	10/03/2025

Context

The Gwynedd Immersion Education System was restructured in January 2023. Through this, six Welsh language immersion units were established in three areas across Gwynedd, namely in the areas of Arfon, Dwyfor and Meirionnydd. The aim of the immersion units is to provide an intensive 10-week Welsh course for newcomers to enable them to integrate into the bilingual society and participate fully in bilingual education experiences.

Pupils from Year 2 – Year 4 are welcome at the three primary units and Year 5 – Year 9 pupils are welcome at the three transition units. Free transport is provided for pupils from home to the units, four days a week, with pupils attending the mainstream schools on Fridays. As a key part of provision, staff at the six immersion units support pupils at the mainstream schools on Fridays and when they return to these schools permanently. As an important part of provision, teachers have access to resources that are accessible on a digital platform to support pupils to continue to acquire the Welsh language over time. This is beneficial to pupils as they develop their skills further across the areas of learning through the medium of Welsh.

Summary

The Gwynedd Immersion Education System is extremely valuable provision for pupils who are newcomers to the Welsh language. The system is led by a skilled head who has ensured that provision innovates successfully to its next phase. Teachers work together effectively when planning stimulating activities for pupils based on the village of 'Aberwla'. Alongside the scheme, beneficial resources are provided, which include virtual resources, for pupils to use to engage and hold their interest while developing their ability to speak Welsh with increasing confidence.

An excellent feature of provision is that teachers and assistants uphold the principles of language immersion effectively, which helps pupils to gain confidence while developing their Welsh speaking skills in an inclusive and Welsh learning environment. They have an extremely positive working relationship with pupils, which encourages respect and courtesy consistently. Staff have high expectations of pupils and nurture their well-being valuably as they support them to learn from their mistakes and be willing to try. On the whole, staff do not participate fully in monitoring activities to self-evaluate provision increasingly effectively.

Staff provide a rich range of interesting and creative experiences that support pupils to make constructive progress in acquiring the Welsh language. Through this, from their starting points, nearly all pupils make extremely robust progress in their Welsh language skills within the duration of the course.

Pupils enjoy interacting enthusiastically in a rich range of learning experiences which, in turn, helps them to acquire vocabulary and sentence patterns increasingly skilfully. Valuable information is shared with staff in the mainstream schools as pupils transfer to them each week and at the end of their time at the immersion units.

One of the notable features of provision is the way in which teachers research effective language immersion practices and share them with staff from other units and schools. This develops the immersion provision as a whole in an extremely valuable manner, both locally and nationally. Staff also work skilfully with a range of partners to provide authentic opportunities for pupils to acquire the Welsh language and deepen their understanding of the history and traditions of Wales and the wider world.

Recommendations

We have made one recommendation to help the local authority continue to improve:

- R1. Develop a leadership structure and self-evaluation processes to provide enough opportunities for staff to monitor and evaluate provision increasingly effectively

What happens next

Following the publication of the inspection report, the local authority should update its plans to address the recommendations and to take account of shortcomings identified through the inspection process. The local authority should update its plans within three months of publication of the inspection report.

Main evaluation

The head of the Gwynedd Immersion Education System is a firm and passionate leader for developing language immersion provision based on effective pedagogy. He has an ambitious vision while ensuring that the system innovates constantly. Within the current arrangement, the immersion units continue to be a key part of the local authority's vision. Developing the provision to its next phase is a core part of the authority's policies, such as the Welsh Language Policy and the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan. The system's structure encourages regular co-operation and relevant accountability between the headteacher and staff, the authority's officers and councillors.

The passion and enthusiasm of staff at the immersion units promotes a homely and vibrant learning community. They provide stimulating and purposeful learning experiences for pupils and build skilfully on language acquisition methods. Planning is carried out systematically, with teachers providing opportunities to revisit and build on previous learning effectively. Staff do this by using a range of stimulating prompts to engage and hold pupils' interest. For example, pupils interact in virtual and practical games and participate enthusiastically in various singing and drama sessions. This provides an opportunity for pupils to reinforce vocabulary and sentence patterns regularly as they work together successfully in small groups and larger cohorts.

Purposeful planning to ensure continuity and progression in supporting pupils to acquire Welsh language skills in a modern context

Teachers' co-operation on the 'Aberwla' scheme to modernise the previous provision supports them to build systematically on the key principles as pupils acquire the Welsh language.

Teachers implement the scheme to provide a range of regular and engaging activities that enable pupils to acquire vocabulary and sentence patterns purposefully and coherently. Through innovative resources that support learning valuably, learning experiences are provided that allow pupils to use virtual resources by developing their Welsh language skills in a purposeful and inclusive context, for example when visiting a range of buildings in the village of 'Aberwla'.

This has a positive effect on building pupils' confidence and enjoyment in using the Welsh language in their community.

The Welsh communication skills of the staff at the immersion units are extremely robust. They are passionate about developing pupils' listening and speaking skills and talk in a lively manner constantly by using gestures and purposeful repetition so that they can emulate correct vocabulary and sentence patterns. Most staff use effective questioning methods to check pupils' understanding and deepen their learning. Teachers track pupils' progress effectively by evaluating learning regularly. This ensures that nearly all pupils, including those with additional learning needs and those who are affected by poverty, make extremely secure progress from their starting points in the Welsh language skills within the duration of the course.

Staff have a comprehensive understanding of the pupils' varied backgrounds and respond positively to their well-being and learning needs. For example, staff's understanding of the impact of trauma on child development plays a prominent part in planning meaningfully and meeting pupils' needs. Teachers provide purposeful opportunities for pupils to nurture their well-being and apply their Welsh language skills in a good range of areas of learning. For example, pupils take part in folk dancing sessions, emotional well-being and learn how to grow plants with a famous gardener.

One of the notable features of provision is the extremely positive working relationships between staff and pupils. Teachers establish order and high expectations in terms of behaviour and attitudes to learning. This means that pupils behave well and the respect with which they treat adults and visitors is commendable.

Teachers and assistants have high expectations of all pupils and aspire to the best well-being, progress and standards for them within the immersion units and as they provide aftercare for them in the mainstream schools. They promote a Welsh ethos and celebrate Welsh history and culture effectively, for example by providing opportunities for pupils to take part in a 'Race for the Language' celebration. Teachers ensure that learning sessions have a good pace and use a range of visual resources successfully. This engages and holds the interest of nearly all pupils and enables them to develop their listening and speaking skills securely.

Assistants are used extremely effectively to provide purposeful support for pupils and, in the best practice, they know when to intervene and when to promote persistence. Staff celebrate pupils' successes valuably, which contribute to pupils' innate pride and increasing confidence as they make swift progress in acquiring the Welsh language and become bilingual or multilingual.

Most pupils develop their reading skills successfully when reading a range of texts jointly in line with their stage of development. This contributes effectively to enriching pupils' vocabulary as they participate in general conversations in the learning environment. Pupils confirm their understanding of various stories through engaging activities such as improvisational drama and playing various board games. Older pupils develop their higher-order reading skills purposefully by gathering information about the histories of Wales, such as the flooding of the Tryweryn valley and the story of Gelert, as part of the transition activities as they return to the mainstream school. Teachers also organise a visit to Beddgelert which reinforces pupils' understanding of vocabulary and various sentence patterns successfully. These valuable experiences enable pupils to apply their oral, reading and writing skills in holistic activities across the areas of learning.

Teachers provide regular opportunities for pupils to reflect on their learning and evaluate their progress effectively against the learning objectives. The strong relationships and inclusive learning environment enable pupils to engage effectively with constructive feedback from staff and peers. This helps nearly all pupils to learn from their mistakes and be willing to try. As a result, they take increasing responsibility for their learning to identify their strengths and their next steps accurately in developing their Welsh language skills.

The peripatetic Welsh teacher, who teaches the youngest pupils in three schools in a particular area of the county, support pupils beneficially when introducing the language. A range of purposeful activities are provided to encourage pupils to use vocabulary and simple sentence patterns with increasing confidence. This contributes firmly to their confidence as they learn and play through the medium of Welsh.

Leaders implement relevant self-evaluation processes that support them to track the effect of provision over time. In general, the leadership structure and self-evaluation processes do not provide enough opportunities for staff to monitor and evaluate provision increasingly effectively. Leaders act purposefully on priorities to ensure that provision meets the well-being and linguistic needs of pupils. For example, officers use funding prudently to develop the 'Aberwla' scheme further to ensure that the content represents contemporary society in Wales. This contributes firmly to developing pupils' understanding and appreciation of the Welsh language, Wales and the wider world.

Staff's job descriptions and performance management arrangements support them to develop professionally continuously in a supportive environment. Regular opportunities are provided for staff to network in a variety of professional learning sessions, for example by attending sessions on further understanding of the 'Aberwla' scheme and to develop their digital skills. As a result, by promoting a culture of co-operation and sharing effective pedagogy among staff, these arrangements provide consistency across the units which, in turn, support pupils to make extremely robust progress in their Welsh language skills.

Co-operation between staff at the immersion centres and school leaders and staff is valuable, for example as they share relevant information about pupils' progress in their Welsh language skills on a weekly basis. As part of the aftercare support, the transition process supports pupils appropriately as they return from the units to the mainstream schools each week and at the end of the course. The resources that are placed on a digital platform are a useful means for staff to use them to support pupils continuously to reinforce their vocabulary and sentence patterns. Through this, pupils continue to use and apply their Welsh language skills in a variety of contexts.

Staff at the units share effective immersion principles and approaches successfully with a range of partners, for example with the authority's teachers and students at Bangor University. Through this partnership, teachers in the mainstream schools value the support as they refine their language teaching practices further for all pupils. Teachers also spend time beneficially researching effective immersion pedagogy and methodology further; for example, ideas about methods to support learning continuity as pupils transfer from primary to secondary, and how to include parents in the language acquisition process. They present the findings purposefully by producing a series of digital webinars which are an extremely valuable national resource for staff in immersion units and Welsh-medium and English-medium schools.

One of the strengths of the system is the way in which staff take advantage of regular opportunities to enrich pupils' experiences by working with a variety of partners.

Effective co-operation between staff at the immersion units and creative performers to support pupils to develop their language acquisition skills through the 'Tirwedd' project

The head of the immersion system has applied for a revenue grant to support pupils to develop their proficiency and confidence in their Welsh language skills. Through this, staff have worked regularly with primary schools in two different areas of the authority, together with creative performers from a theatre company, to organise a creative celebration in pupils' local communities.

The units' staff have trained creative performers to upskill them with effective immersion practices as they work with pupils to create artistic projects. By doing so, when holding the creative workshops, the performers used effective immersion methods consistently with pupils to support them in using and applying the Welsh language within the expressive arts.

An opportunity was provided for pupils to present their artistic projects as part of a St David's Day parade in pupils' local communities. Through effective co-operation with other partners, for example the Welsh Language Charter and the '*mentrau iaith*' Welsh language initiatives, pupils' pride and proficiency in the Welsh language were raised successfully. This contributes successfully to developing the appreciation of parents and members of the wider community of the value and benefit of the Welsh language.

The headteacher uses effective communication methods in promoting provision among parents, for example when holding open days in the immersion units about what their children will achieve when acquiring the Welsh language. Staff ensure that parents are given valuable opportunities to support their children at home, together with sharing information with them about opportunities to learn Welsh themselves.

Additional information

The provider's arrangements for safeguarding pupils do not give any cause for concern.

The provider's arrangements for the management of the site do not give any cause for concern.

Evidence base of the report

Before an inspection, inspectors:

- analyse the outcomes from the parent/carers and pupil questionnaires and consider the views of teachers, staff, leaders and headteachers of pupils' registered schools through their questionnaire responses

During an inspection, inspectors:

- observe teaching and other activities, including evidence gathered through learning walks
- meet pupils (past and present) to discuss their work and to gain their views on various aspects of the provider's work
- meet with staff, leaders, managers, headteachers of pupils' registered schools and others to evaluate the impact of the provider's work
- look closely at self-evaluation processes
- consider the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP) / improvement plan and look at evidence to show how well the local authority has taken forward planned improvements
- scrutinise a range of documents, including information on pupil assessment and progress, records of meetings of staff and the management committee, information on pupils' well-being, including the safeguarding of pupils, and records of staff training and professional development

After the on-site inspection and before the publication of the report, Estyn:

- review the findings of the inspection alongside the supporting evidence from the inspection team in order to validate, moderate and ensure the quality of the inspection

Appendix 1: Numbers – quantities and proportions

The report makes references to different quantities and proportions e.g. ‘most pupils...’ or ‘very few pupils...’. We use these terms to describe quantities and proportions as outlined in the table below:

nearly all =	with very few exceptions
most =	90% or more
many =	70% or more
a majority =	over 60%
half =	50%
around half =	close to 50%
a minority =	below 40%
few =	below 20%
very few =	less than 10%

Copies of the report

Copies of this report are available from the local authority and from the Estyn website (<http://www.estyn.gov.wales>)

The report was produced in accordance with Section 38 of the Education Act 1997.

Every possible care has been taken to ensure that the information in this document is accurate at the time of going to press. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

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This document has been translated by Trosol (Welsh to English).