

Gwynedd Education Language Policy Engagement Meetings.

The feedback gathered during a series of meetings with a wide cross-section of stakeholders in the statutory education sector in Gwynedd.

1. The Current Education Language Policy

- Clear support was generally felt towards the Welsh language, the Language Policy and the desire to see this policy updated across the County.
- A sense that the policy was an effort to protect the Welsh language in a stronghold like Gwynedd.
- The Welsh language was the norm for most of the pupils - they did not question that, only accepted it as a completely natural thing.
- The desire to see change and strengthen the policy, but not because the current policy does not 'work' or 'succeed'. Acknowledgement that the current policy belongs to a period where the Welsh language was slightly 'stronger' in the County compared to what it currently is in 2024.
- Although clear support is seen to update the policy, no definitive feedback was received proposing how exactly it should be amended.
- A clear sense of pride was expressed towards the Immersion Education System and a desire to strengthen and expand it.
- Therefore, the main message is a positive one: There is a need for change, but there is no need to overhaul the policy, only build on the strengths of the current policy.

2. Main Messages

Themes - Five sub-headings: Primary, Secondary, The Voice of the Learner/pupil, Inconsistencies, Support

- The primary sector is especially strong in terms of maintaining and developing the linguistic skills of pupils.
- Praise to the primary sector in terms of maintaining the Welsh language slightly stronger than what it was in the Secondary.
- Excellent work to create proficient, bilingual speakers before transferring to year 7, but there is a more varied linguistic situation once the transfer to the Secondary has taken place.
- Lack of clarity and consistency in terms of implementing the policy was partially responsible for that.
- Leads to a discussion of what is noted in the policy in terms of the percentage of subjects that pupils are expected to study through the medium of Welsh.
- The need to expand the capacity to support pupils' development after year 9 was noted, to ensure progression and continuation to their linguistic skills to enable them to study more subjects through the medium of Welsh.
- The Voice of the Learners is positive.
- A feeling of inconsistency in the way that the policy is implemented across the County, from one area to the other, from one school to the other.
- A desire and a wish to see change.
- Ysgol Friars and Ysgol Uwchradd Tywyn - a varied opinion regarding how to plan for the linguistic development of both schools when planning for the future, difficult to present a definitive conclusion of the discussions.

- The need to have one county policy was emphasised many times, but the need to plan strategically with every school over a period of time to comply with such a new policy was noted.
- More of a challenge is needed in the WESP targets to ensure that the current provision is maintained and strengthened.
- The Council needs to show more accountability for the policy and strengthen the powers of the Education Department to monitor this.

3. The Main Themes

- A need for training.
- Recruitment challenge to realise the policy.
- Social use of the Welsh language, and the role of the wider community.
- Deterioration in the use of the children's language as a result of external influences.
- A desire to see a policy with clear content for the County communities to promote an ethos of collaboration with enterprises and clubs.
- The importance of the Language Charter and the Secondary Language Strategy activity.

4. Revised policy

- The need to monitor the way that it is implemented.
- Everyone working with the same criteria.
- Support and measured implementation plans.
- Clear achievement targets.
- Primary/secondary transition is inconsistent across the county - weakness in the way that the current policy has been analysed and interpreted.

5. Training

- Demand for specific training for headteachers to plan for any possible change.
- The County needs to be clear of the support that will be available to support any change.
- Recruitment challenges in some areas.
- Training for Governors to understand the implications of any change.
- Training for teaching staff and ancillary staff to implement the change.
- Promoting and marketing change.

6. Elected Members' observations from the Language Committee and the Education Scrutiny Committee.

- The current policy does not offer sufficient protection to protect the Welsh language.
- The current policy does not assist to maintain the use of the language or increase the use of the language as a result of the demographic changes.
- Weakness in terms of progression from one educational stage to the next.
- Need for accountability to implement policy and to monitor policy implementation.

- Lack of vision in the County's targets to increase the number of pupils who follow GCSE and A Level subjects.
- A clear demand for the need to monitor.
- Should the policy only refer to the Welsh language?
- This supports headteachers to object to any requests to change the language medium of subjects.
- Is there a need to consider including a reference to how a sufficient workforce is ensured?
- Presenting the advantages and importance of bilingualism.
- Friars and Tywyn Schools: mixed opinions.
- Awareness of Tywyn's geographical challenges in terms of recruitment.
- Need to plan towards change more strategically.
- No suggestion or definitive answer as to what a revised policy should look like.
- A clear message: the need for change

7. Considerations when reviewing

- Challenge of how to keep the communities as Welsh as possible throughout the County.
- The need for a strategy to try to positively influence parents to promote and encourage the children's use of the Welsh language in the school and outside of school.
- School categorisation - outline the need to ensure an understanding of the definitions to have a baseline as a foundation for any policy.
- The Council to consider what can be achieved within those definitions.

8. Summary

- The need to note the context for any changes
- Unquestionable success of the current policy generally but needs to be updated to face the current linguistic situation
- The need for a concise, clear and robust policy
- A concise policy is required, which is explained by a background document which includes directions on how to implement the policy
- The background document must refer to matters beyond the remit of the education department and statutory education which would include the role of parents and pre-school education. A more detailed analysis of the provision and the arrangements regarding immersion education
- Develop support plans to expand the provision of Welsh language education up to 16 years old
- Ensure effective progression between each education stage, including the post-16 sector