MEETING	Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee
DATE	October 16th, 2025
TITLE	Immersion Education System
REASON FOR SCRUTINY	The Immersion Regime is one of the priorities of the Council's Plan 2023- 2028 – Gwynedd Gymraeg, In March 2025, Estyn inspected the Immersion Regime provision, and the report was published in May 2025. It is therefore timely for the Scrutiny Committee to study the content of the Estyn report. Since the establishment of the revised Immersion Regime, Gwynedd's Education Department has committed to carrying out a timely evaluation. An update was given to the Scrutiny Committee on 13 February 2025, and an invitation was extended to return to the committee to present the findings of the evaluation.
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CABINET MEMBER	Cllr Dewi Jones

1. Why does it need to be scrutinised?

1.1 At the Committee meeting on February 13th, 2025, an update on the evaluation process was scrutinised in the context of the evaluation of the Immersion Regime.

1.2 It was decided that the Committee would scrutinise the implementation plan of the Immersion Education Regime's improvement recommendations arising from the evaluation.

1.3 Estyn carried out an inspection of the Immersion Education Regime during March 2025. Estyn made one recommendation to help the local authority continue to improve.

1.4 By scrutinising the action plan in response to recommendations arising from the evaluation and the Estyn review, the Committee will be able to receive assurances that action will be taken to further develop the provision.

2. What exactly needs to be scrutinised?

2.1 Estyn's report and the actions responding to Estyn's recommendation.

2.2 Bangor University's report: <u>Exploring the effectiveness of the Welsh Language Immersion model in Schools in Gwynedd: Detailed Case Stud</u>y and actions responding to the conclusions and recommendations.

2.3 Opportunities identified to further develop the provision

3.Summary of the Key Matters

3.1 In March 2025 the Immersion Regime was inspected by Estyn. This is the first time the Regime has been inspected in accordance with the new guidelines introduced in 2024. **(appendix *4*)**

The report states that Gwynedd Immersion Regime is an innovative and valuable provision for pupils who are new to the Welsh language. It describes how the provision effectively immerses new speakers, and it is noted that they are making significant progress in Welsh by mastering vocabulary and language patterns. Estyn made one recommendation to help the authority continue to improve, namely: -

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

3.2 In 2024 Bangor University was commissioned to examine the effectiveness of the language immersion model in schools in Gwynedd and to produce a detailed case study. The report was shared in late July 2025. The research identifies clear strengths and offers four recommendations to further develop the provision.

3.3 The opinion of members of the Scrutiny Committee on the actions responding to the recommendations in both reports will be sought. We want to ensure that any modifications to the immersion model are evidence-based, coherent and sustainable.

4.Background / Context

4.1 Estyn Inspection

In 2024 Estyn introduced a new and specific review framework for immersion provisions setting out how immersion arrangements would be inspected and evaluated. The guidance states that immersion provisions are now inspected in accordance with the following three areas of inspection:-

1. Teaching and learning	2. Well-being, care, support and guidance	3. Leading and improving
Focus How effectively does the curriculum, teaching and assessment support **all** pupils, including those at risk of adverse outcomes, for example those pupils affected by poverty, with ALN or other identified barriers to progress to: • learn and make progress in their Welsh language skills? • develop their knowledge, skills and understanding of the Welsh language in a variety of contexts? • develop positive attitudes to learning?	**Focus** How effective are the care and support arrangements in ensuring that **all** pupils, including those at risk of adverse outcomes, for example those pupils affected by poverty, with ALN or other identified barriers to progress: • are safe and secure? • attend regularly? • are respected and fairly treated? • develop leadership skills and take on responsibility? • receive the guidance and support they require for the next steps in their development, including support whilst in their registered schools?	**Focus** How effectively do leaders: • manage the organisation of the providers across the local authority including admission arrangements? • manage the resources for Welsh language immersion across the local authority? • ensure that all pupils learn and make progress in their acquisition of the Welsh language? (This includes those at risk of adverse outcomes, for example those pupils affected by poverty, with ALN or other identified barriers to learning.) • develop a culture, inclusive ethos and strategic direction that support the progress and well-being of all pupils? • identify and address areas for improvement and management? • ensure that professional learning supports improvement and equips all staff to carry out their roles?

The Gwynedd Immersion Education Regime was inspected by Estyn in March 2025 and received an extremely positive report stating that the Gwynedd Immersion Education Regime is an innovative and valuable provision for pupils who are new to the Welsh language. (***Estyn report – Appendix 1***)

The report explains that teachers work together effectively to plan creative experiences, using rich resources, including virtual resources, which maintain pupils' interest and develop their confidence to speak Welsh in an inclusive and Welsh environment.
It is noted that staff build positive relationships, set high expectations, and support pupils' wellbeing. By providing diverse and stimulating learning opportunities, pupils make significant and rapid progress in acquiring Welsh, mastering vocabulary and language patterns.

The report clearly states that the collaboration between the staff in the immersion units and the leaders and staff in schools is valuable and that this supports the pupils appropriately as they return to the schools each Friday, and at the end of the course.

It is explained that resources shared with the schools are a useful medium for staff to use to continuously support pupils to reinforce vocabulary and sentence patterns. Through this, pupils continue to use and apply their Welsh skills in different situations.

In addition, staff are reported to be researching and sharing effective immersion practices with schools and working skilfully with the authority's teachers and Bangor University students. It is noted that the teachers at the mainstream schools appreciate the support as they further refine their language teaching practices for all pupils.

In addition, immersion teachers spend time beneficially researching the pedagogy and methodology of effective immersion, for example ideas about methods to support continuity of learning as pupils transition from primary to secondary, and how to involve parents in the language acquisition process.

The only recommendation in the report refers to the Regime's self-evaluation processes.

4.2 Bangor University Report

A study was commissioned by Bangor University's School of Education in October 2024 to evaluate whether the current immersion model delivers on the promise and provides pupils in Gwynedd with the necessary foundation to acquire Welsh when embarking on their linguistic journey to become new speakers. It was considered whether the model is suitable and effective for increasing pupils' use of Welsh in their schools, supports well-being during the immersion period, is effective in enabling learners to acquire Welsh to their full potential, and provides any opportunities to further strengthen the Welsh language in the centres and schools.

The study highlights numerous strengths within immersion provision in supporting pupils' linguistic development in Welsh and in supporting pupils' wellbeing.

It is noted that the robust teaching methods and the effective use of teaching strategies in terms of the integration of language, culture and literacy are evident. The study highlights that pupils are happy in the learning environment and create staunch support networks among other peers learning the language.

The observation period saw examples of effective language learning through identification games to learn new vocabulary, before proceeding to form more complex sentences. There was robust evidence of teachers intentionally setting language learning objectives, ensuring that learners were able to understand and reinforce specific elements before using them in a wider context.

The report highlights that the consistent use of music across the immersion provision reinforces positive values and attitudes towards the language and culture and develops cultural expression as pupils develop their language skills. In questionnaires and interviews it was made clear by pupils and parents that the experience of learning Welsh was a positive one.

The report explains that the team did not observe constant collaboration between the centres and all schools involved in the study. The demands of the end of term activities and schools' preparations for concerts and Christmas services were certainly contributing factors. Another consideration was the ratio of staff to learners in some schools. It is therefore concluded that the Welsh language is not used naturally by all immersion pupils in all schools on return days.

It is worth noting that Yr. 2-4 learners now attend the primary immersion centres compared to Yr. 3-6 learners in the previous model. It is also worth noting that the current provision, like the original provision, offers the same number of days of 40 days in immersion centres for secondary age pupils.

The research team notes that a solid foundation exists for developing a model that could lead the sector nationally if the appropriate investment and vision is secured.

4.3 Recommendations

Estyn

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

Bangor University

i. Adapt the current immersion model to ensure that pupils have access to sufficient contact hours in an immersion space. Change the current model of returning to schools on Fridays to one of being at mainstream on Mondays. Adopt the use of digital technology to support ongoing contact with the mainstream schools. Consider changing the current model by ensuring that learners gradually return to school during the second half of the ten-week immersion period.

ii. At a national and local level, explore how to strengthen professional learning pathways for mainstream teachers, supply teachers, and teaching assistants to develop effective immersive teaching strategies to support the acquisition of Welsh, embedding them in the pedagogy of all teachers.

iii. Develop more effective collaboration structures between the language centres and mainstream schools during the immersion period and beyond. Look at how the mainstream immersion staff is used to support and maintain the pupils more effectively within the school, rather than taking the pupils out of the classroom to work in isolation with the immersion teacher.

iv. Explore whole-school approaches to promote children's confidence in using the Welsh language in mainstream schools. Special attention should be paid to the linguistic culture of the yard, as this informal environment is at the core of the linguistic development of immersed pupils, but also to the ethos of a school.

4.4 Response to the recommendations

<u>Estyn</u>

Within the <u>Immersion Regime</u> 2025 – 2026 Improvement Plan, responding to Estyn's recommendation has been identified as a priority.

Priority 2: Develop a leadership structure and self-evaluation processes to provide sufficient opportunities for staff to monitor and evaluate provision.
Term 1 Timetable

21-10-25	**Meithrin dealltwriaeth a hyder o ran prosesau hunanwerthuso** <u>Defnydd o hunanwerthuso effeithiol wedi'i gefnogi gan brosesau monitro, adolygu a gwerthuso (MAG) trylwyr i ddatblygu arweinyddiaeth ac arwain gwelliant ysgol. - Estyn</u> <u>Monitro Safonau Llafaredd.docx - Google Drive</u> • Pennu meysydd penodol i fonitro a gwerthuso • Adnabod cyfleoedd i gyd arsylwi a dod i farn.
	Gwyliau Diolchgarwch 27- 10-25 – 31-10-25
4-11-25	**Meithrin dealltwriaeth a hyder o ran prosesau hunanwerthuso** <u>Defnydd o hunanwerthuso effeithiol wedi'i gefnogi gan brosesau monitro, adolygu a gwerthuso (MAG) trylwyr i ddatblygu arweinyddiaeth ac arwain gwelliant ysgol. - Estyn</u> <u>Monitro Safonau Llafaredd.docx - Google Drive</u>
11-11-25	**Cyd arsylwadau yn y canolfannau – amserlen i'w rhannu.**
18-11-25	**Adborth yn dilyn arsylwadau – meysydd i'w datblygu ymhellach.**

<u>Bangor University</u>

The opinion of the members of the Scrutiny Committee on the suitability of one of the following models are sought in response to the following recommendation: -

i. Adapt the current immersion model to ensure that pupils have access to sufficient contact hours in an immersion space. Change the current model of returning to schools on Fridays to one of being at mainstream on Mondays. Adopt the use of digital technology to support ongoing contact with the mainstream schools. Consider changing the current model by ensuring that learners gradually return to school during the second half of the ten-week immersion period.

Model	Provision (days)	Immersion Centre (days)	School (days)	Day at school	Additional Funding	Response to Bangor's recommendation	Risk
1	50	40	10	Every **Friday** for 10 weeks	£0	Continue the current arrangement and strengthen the	Some pupils at some schools return to less

						collaboration with the schools. *See below*	structured learning periods
2	50	40	10	Every **Monday** for 10 weeks	£0	Responding to the recommendation of changing a day at school.	Pupils less willing to go to the centres as the week's work is introduced at school. Negative impact on pupils' wellbeing.
3	50	40	10	2 days each week during weeks 5 to 10	£0	Basic patterns are taught before the new speakers return to schools during the second half of the course	No contact with peers for 5 weeks. Negative impact on well-being. Risk that new speakers are not happy and willing to learn at the schools nor at centres during weeks 5 – 10. Less intense immersion in the period when the language is assimilated
4	50	45	5	A day each week during the second half of the course (Weeks 5 to 10)	An increase of 12.5 % in travel costs. This equates to an *increase* of £8k each term.	An opportunity to review and embed language patterns within the centres during the first half of the course. Increase in pupils' confidence speaking Welsh at school.	No contact with peers for 5 weeks and contact for only one day a week during weeks 5 to 10. A risk of a negative impact on well-being. Significant additional travel costs. The reluctance of parents to take advantage of the provision particularly in relation to older pupils.

The use of digital technology to support ongoing contact between the centres and schools is neither appropriate nor feasible given that pupils from up to 10 different schools attend each centre each term. Developing more resources, sharing them in a more effective way with the schools and putting together a comprehensive training programme have been identified as steps to be taken regardless of any future changes to the model. See **4.5** below.

4.5 Wider response regardless of remodelling considerations.

The following have already been included in the <u>Immersion Regime's Improvement Plan</u> 2025 – 2026: -

- more resources provided for schools.
- a change in practise the in terms of working in schools on Fridays prioritising support in the classrooms rather than taking pupils out of class.
- preparing and sharing long-term aftercare / language resources including working with the Welsh departments of Gwynedd secondary schools to prepare new resources for pupils in Years 10 and 11.
- a new website developed to share information about the provision and to share resources in a more accessible way than Google Classroom.
- a comprehensive training programme developed to embed teachers' use of immersion principles at schools.
- the Language Charter programme relaunched to accompany the National Quality Awards. The successes and ambitions of the Language Charter celebrated.

4.6 Costs

Historically, the Welsh Language Grant was the main source of funding for the Language Centres, but as is common with many grants from the Welsh Government, the grant received does not address inflation or cost increases, and this has led to a consistent budget deficit. With the establishment of the revised Immersion Regime in 2021, a more sustainable funding model was established to fill the gap, securing a

commitment from all schools to contribute to the funding of the Immersion Regime, together with the Department for Education.

The commitment to receive a contribution from the schools has not yet been implemented, however, given that the Welsh Language Grant now only covers 40% (£400k) of the costs of the Immersion Regime, it is likely that a contribution from the schools will have to be considered in due course as costs continue to increase significantly due to inflation and rising wages.

This financial context is therefore a key consideration when evaluating the above options e.g. from the adoption of model 4, there would be an increase of around £24,000 per annum in the transport costs of learners to the Language Centres.

In addition, there will be a significant one-time cost in terms of freeing up staff to present training programmes and develop new resources. It is anticipated that there will be a need for an investment of £80,000 in staffing costs and up to £15,000 to develop a digital site/website. It is anticipated that this can be funded this year through the Late Immersion Grant.

5.Consultation

5.1 Consultation that has taken place

17/9/25. **Headteachers' Group** – headteachers of pupils attending the centres during the Autumn term of 2025

The desire of this group is to stick to the current pattern. In their view the system is working successfully, and school staff have developed an effective working relationship with the staff of the immersion centres. The weekly contact with the centres is important to obtain information on pupils' progress. However, schools would like to have more easily sourced resources.

It was noted that an intensive immersion course (Model 4) would give the best opportunity for learning the language but that there was a risk that the youngest pupils and older pupils would not be prepared to spend as much time at the centres.

Several practical challenges of going to the schools for two days (Model 3) were identified. Responding to diverse school timetables and arrangements would be difficult and it was predicted that schools would not favour this model. Spending only 3 days at the centres during the second half of the course would mean a period of less intense immersion when the patterns are fully learnt, and confidence increases. During the second half of the course the emphasis is on using, and building on, all the vocabulary and language patterns that have been introduced during the first half.

While blended learning and the use of technology to connect with schools offers several possibilities, it would also bring with it a disproportionate number of challenges e.g. dedicated and suitable space and supervision, setting a timetable and responding to each individual school's curriculum. It was noted that digital learning is not equivalent to the experience of face-to-face learning, especially when practicing spoken language and when nonverbal communication, including body language is used as a valuable tool in language acquisition.

It was noted that the staff of the immersion centres would prefer to adhere to the current model (Model 1) if increasing the days in the immersion unit (Model 4) is not possible.

1/10/25 - Heads of Welsh Departments in Secondary Schools.

It was noted that increasing the time spent in the immersion centres during the first half of the course would give the Welsh language the opportunity to be effectively learnt but that implementing model 3 and supporting pupils in a wide range of subjects at Secondary school would be challenging. It was noted that it is not feasible for staff to hold a weekly discussion with immersion centre staff. The

opportunity to work with the Immersion Regime to create ready resources for older learners was welcomed.

5.2 Further consultation in the coming weeks: -

Headteachers of Primary Schools (GYDCA) - October 14th
Secondary Headteachers (GCSU) – October 15th

It will be possible to report views back to members of the Scrutiny Committee on October 16th.

6.The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

6.1 In terms of collaboration and other involvement, we have already held focus groups with parents, learners, staff and headteachers of Gwynedd schools and received comments from individuals. We intend to work with schools in providing resources and organising comprehensive training programmes.

Carrying out an evaluation of the Immersion Regime recognises the need to identify strengths and issues to improve to ensure the best possible service for the residents of Gwynedd.

Ensuring that Gwynedd's children and young people develop into confident bilingual citizens improves their educational, economic, cultural, and social opportunities in the long term and enriches their experience of living and working through the Welsh language in Gwynedd.

The empowerment of the County's Immersion Education Regime lays a solid foundation for the development of bilingual citizens and conforms to the status of the Welsh language in the context of Public Bodies.

7. Impact on Characteristics of Equality, Welsh Language and Socio-Economic Duty

A timely and proportionate impact assessment is underway.

The following considerations clearly demonstrate that the Immersion Regime has **given due regard to reducing inequality** and is in line with the duties of the **Well-being of Future Generations Act** and **the Equality Act:**

- Ensuring transport for pupils and consider expanding immersion opportunities within the centres
- Adapting teaching methods and offering additional support to pupils experiencing disadvantage
- Ensuring that the voices of families from all backgrounds are involved in the development and evaluation of provision.
- Carrying out equality impact assessments before introducing new policies or plans.
- Measuring the impact of immersion not only on language skills but also on social participation, confidence, and fairness of opportunity.

The Welsh Language: - Any changes in the provision of the Immersion Regime are due to a commitment to ensure linguistic and social equity for all children, regardless of their background. The language is part of our identity and bilingual skills increase job opportunities and strengthen the economy. It aims to build strong linguistic foundations to maintain the Welsh language for future generations, ensure that children do not miss the opportunity to become fluent in Welsh through early action, link to education, culture, health and equality and maintain partnerships between schools, local authorities and parents to provide immersion pathways. We give families and learners a voice in the formulation and development of immersion arrangements.

8. Next Steps

- Consultation with key stakeholders see **5.2**
- Engagement with members of the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee, October 16th
- Motion to Cabinet
- Implementing the decision.

9. Appendices

Appendix 1: Estyn Report – Welsh Language Immersion Arrangements in Cyngor Gwynedd. Date of Inspection: March 2025

Appendix 2: Bangor University - Exploring the effectiveness of the Welsh Language Immersion model in Schools in Gwynedd: Detailed Case Study

Appendix 3: How we inspect (the inspection process) Welsh immersion arrangements in local authorities. For inspections from 2024.

Appendix 4: What we inspect: Welsh Immersion arrangements in local authorities. For inspections from 2024.

Appendix 5: Impact Assessment on the People of Gwynedd