



**Exploring the effectiveness of the Welsh Language Immersion model in Schools in
Gwynedd: Detailed Case Study**

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Key Terms

Term	Definition
Language Centre / Immersion Centre	The Language Centres provide an intensive Welsh language course for newcomers to enable them to assimilate with the bilingual society and fully participate in bilingual educational experiences. (Gwynedd, 2022)
Early Immersion	Early immersion means introducing and using the Welsh language as the only language of teaching in the foundation phase in Welsh-medium and bilingual non-maintained settings and schools. In best practice this means that the Welsh language is introduced purposefully to learners in specific language sessions, in addition to providing frequent opportunities for them to acquire and apply their Welsh language skills through rich experiences both inside and outside the classroom. (ESTYN, 2022)
Late Immersion	Late immersion means a provision for learners who join Welsh-medium schools or Welsh streams in bilingual schools who have not experienced a full period of early immersion in the Welsh language. These learners can be complete newcomers to the Welsh language or be re-engaging with Welsh-medium provision. (ESTYN, 2022)
Planning, Preparation and Assessment (PPA)	Teachers' specific time to plan and prepare, and therefore they are not on the teaching timetable for this period.
Content and Language Integrated Learning CLIL	CLIL is the method of going about it to learn a subject and the content of that subject, via the target language medium.

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Introduction

The aim of this comprehensive case study is to evaluate the impact and to scrutinise the provision of the current Immersion Education System in Gwynedd to see if it delivers on its promise and provides pupils in Gwynedd with the necessary foundation to acquire Welsh when embarking on their linguistic journey to becoming new speakers. This is a model based on the concept that is long established in the literature around linguistic planning, language policy and education of minority languages (Robert 2009; Hodges 2012, 2024),

"The aim of the Language Centres is to provide an intensive Welsh language course for newcomers to enable them to assimilate with the bilingual society and fully participate in bilingual educational experiences." (Cyngor Gwynedd, 2025)

The Context of the Immersion Provision in Gwynedd

In January 2023, the Immersion Education System in Gwynedd was significantly restructured. The provision used to have four immersion units for the primary sector and one for the secondary sector. The aim of the original immersion model was to offer an intensive Welsh language course for newcomers to enable them to fully assimilate with the bilingual society and be an active part of the county's educational life.

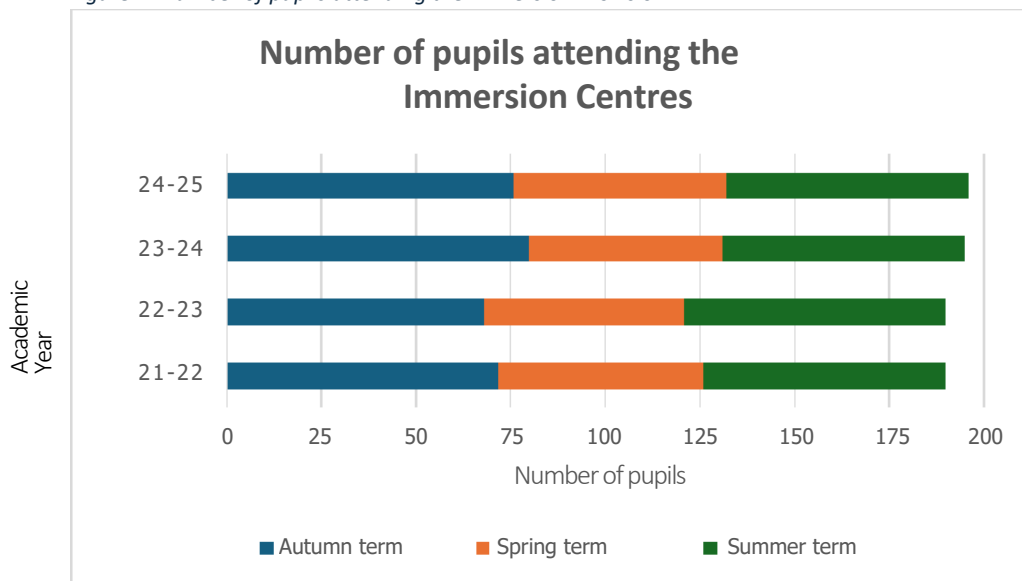
The previous immersion model provided a ten-week course for primary pupils and eight-weeks for secondary pupils, with children attending the centres for five days a week, without any contact with the mainstream school during the immersion course.

As a result of the decision made by Cyngor Gwynedd in July 2021, it was agreed to support the long-term vision for the new Immersion Education System until 2032 and beyond. Consequently, six new immersion centres were established and strategically located across the county's three areas of Arfon, Dwyfor and Meirionnydd.

Under the new arrangement, an intensive course of four days a week is offered to the immersion pupils over a period of ten weeks. The intention of this structure is to allow pupils to have regular contact with mainstream schools, and continue to interact with friends, staff and the wider social aspects of school life while also attending the immersion centre.

Pupils from Year 2 to Year 4 attend the Primary sector immersion centres and pupils from Year 5 to Year 9 attend the Secondary immersion centres. In addition, staff in the immersion centres provide support for pupils as they return to the mainstream schools on Fridays and following a period at the centre when they return to mainstream full-time.

Figure 1: Number of pupils attending the Immersion Provision



The number of pupils attending the immersion provision indicate a consistent pattern over the last four academic years, with a little growth seen over the last two years as shown in Figure 1.

Research Aims

Therefore, the principal aims of this research is to evaluate the effectiveness of the new Gwynedd Welsh language education immersion model. The research has been designed to answer the following four research questions:

- I. How suitable and effective is the model in ensuring pupils' use of the target language when they return to the mainstream school during the course?
- II. How effective is the model in terms of enabling learners to acquire Welsh sufficiently?
- III. Are there opportunities to further strengthen the Welsh language in the Immersion System and in the mainstream Schools?
- IV. How suitable and effective is the model when considering pupils' well-being during the immersion period?

Methodology

A mix of methods were used for this evaluation, with four different elements to provide qualitative and quantitative data: observations of the learning and teaching settings, on-line survey, focus groups and semi-structured interviews. The combination of mixed methods allowed the research team to gather rich data to evaluate the efficiency of the immersion model, and to answer the research questions.

Participants

The intention of the research was to recruit a variety of participants (pupils who attend the immersion centres, parents of pupils in the immersion centres and immersion centre and mainstream teachers) for the different elements of the study. The research was carried out in four language centres in Gwynedd, two for primary age children (Years 2-4) and two for older children (Years 5-9). Once the four centres were identified, pupils within the centres were recruited following receipt of consent from the parent / carer (see the Ethical Considerations section).

Following this, pupils in the mainstream schools were identified and we contacted them to facilitate the recruitment of pupils from the language immersion classes for the observations (see the Observations section). For the purposes of parent or carer recruitment, the language centres were asked to contact the relevant persons directly to invite them to participate in the research.

To recruit teachers, an invitation was circulated to every school and language centre across Gwynedd, giving them an opportunity to contribute to a focus group to discuss the language immersion provision or submit feedback via an anonymous on-line questionnaire.

Table 1: Overview of the Sample of Final Participants

Element of the project.	Final sample
Observations	15 Pupils
Pupils' Focus Group	21 Language Centre Pupils in 5 Focus Groups
Teachers/Centre Staff Focus Group	21 Language Centre Staff in 4 Focus Groups
Teachers/Mainstream Staff Focus Group	9 Mainstream Teachers in 3 Focus Groups
Parents/Carers Questionnaire	23 Parents/Carers
Number of Mainstream Schools observed	8 Schools
Number Language Centres observed	4 Centres

Observations

The study included observing pupils and teachers in two different educational contexts, namely the language immersion centre and the mainstream school. Observations were carried out on three pupils from each of the four language immersion centres together with their teachers, comprising four separate observation occasions: **two at the language centre**, and **two in the mainstream school**. Each observation session was structured as three specific steps:

1. formal observation in the teacher's classroom with the target pupil;
2. observation of group activity under the teacher's guidance, with the activity being chosen by the teacher as part of the lesson;¹ and
3. informal observation of the target pupils interacting on the school yard in a natural social context.

Figure 2 demonstrates the research observation timetable over the period of ten weeks.

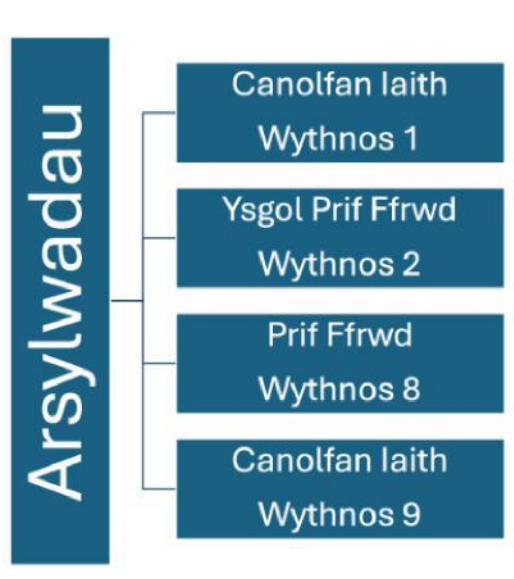


Figure 2: Design of the Observation Process

The Immersion Education Strategies Checklist (Fortune, 2014) was used as a framework for the observations, ensuring a structured and consistent approach to assess the immersion education methods of teaching across the provision. The observations have been framed around seven specific focuses deriving from the framework which scrutinises the key aspects of pedagogy to support the effective acquisition of language. In this case, the focus of the observations was the Welsh language. The seven elements of the observation were:

- Integration of Content, Culture, Language and Literacy

¹ Group activities were not seen in every observation

- Addressing language development and improving accuracy
- Creating comprehensible input
- Creating a rich learning environment in the target language
- Effective use of oral language by the teacher
- Promoting extended output by the pupil
- Responding to a range of needs

Parents/Carers Questionnaires

An anonymous questionnaire was circulated to every parent with a child attending one of the four language immersion centres. The questionnaire investigated the attitudes of parents regarding the immersion programme, including their views about the impact of the programme on their children's language development and well-being.

Pupils' Focus Groups

Face-to-face focus groups were held with pupils in the four language immersion centres, after receiving the consent of parents/carers as well as the consent of the pupils themselves. The sessions were recorded as audio only and were subsequently transcribed for analysis.

To ensure that this method was inclusive and accessible to pupils across the age ranges and language ability levels, visual images were used (coloured faces representing emotions - happy, neutral and unhappy) as props for the discussions.

The questions of the focus groups investigated a variety of aspects about the pupils' experiences during the language immersion period. This included their experiences of learning Welsh (positive or challenging elements, language use contexts), their views on the teaching methods and approaches (feelings about attending the language centre, specific learning strategies, and how they feel about returning to the mainstream school on the Friday), as well as the impact of learning Welsh on their lives, academically, in the home and in the wider community.

Teacher Focus Groups

Focus groups were held with staff from the language immersion centres as well as from the mainstream schools. One specific focus group was organised for teachers in the language centres, one for assistant staff at the centres and three focus groups for mainstream schoolteachers, with a separate group for each of the three areas in Gwynedd; Arfon, Dwyfor and Meirionnydd.

The focus groups were held virtually, via the Microsoft TEAMS platform, and they were recorded (as audio only) before they were transcribed in detail for further analysis. The questions used in the focus groups were adapted from a framework of interviews used in a previous study on Gallic immersion programmes (Duibhir, 2018).

Several aspects of key attitudes within the immersion provision were investigated, including the pupil's language proficiency and their attitudes to learning Welsh, consistency and communication between the centres and the mainstream schools, the efficiency of the current immersion model, together with professional learning opportunities for staff.

Ethical Considerations

This research was undertaken in accordance with the ethical guidance of the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2024). Ethical approval was secured prior to commencing the research from the Ethical Committee of the School of Education, Bangor University (ethical application number 21082024-1202). Every child attending the four language immersion centres was invited to be part of the research, and as the research included children under 16 years old, the consent of their parents or carers was obtained first. The consent of parents/carers was also requested for mainstream school pupils who were present in the classes where the observation process took place.

Every participant (pupils, parents and staff) received a comprehensive information leaflet that explained the purpose of the study, the reasons for being invited to take part, any possible risks, how the data would be managed and stored safely, together with contact details for the researchers should they have any questions or concerns.

It was made clear that contributors had the right to withdraw from the research at any time prior to the commencement of the process to analyse data, without having to give a reason. The confidentiality and anonymity of each participant were retained throughout the research process, by replacing any identifiable information (e.g. names, locations) with pseudonyms during transcription. Signed consent forms were stored in a locked cabinet at Bangor University with limited access for the researchers only, or on the University's secure drive.

Limitations

Although the research methodology gave an intensive insight to the immersion provision over a full term in the 24-25 academic year, it must be acknowledged that the background, abilities and the engagement of the immersion pupils previously with the Welsh language could vary from term to term. This study gave a strong insight to the viewpoints of teachers in the immersion context and the mainstream by offering an overview of the viewpoints that are consistent within the provision. The data collected from parents / guardians, pupils' data sets and observations in 11 offered an empiric view of the observation period and the specific pupils who engaged with the immersion provision **over the study period**.

Data from Observations

As was highlighted in the methodology, the observations in the Immersion Centres and the mainstream schools were a central part of this research's design to give an organic and comprehensive insight into the immersion system, the support and the experiences pupils experience.

The evidence collected from the observations by scrutinising the centres is presented, and then the mainstream provision, as can be seen in Figure 3, by proposing key implications of what was observed when considering the research questions.

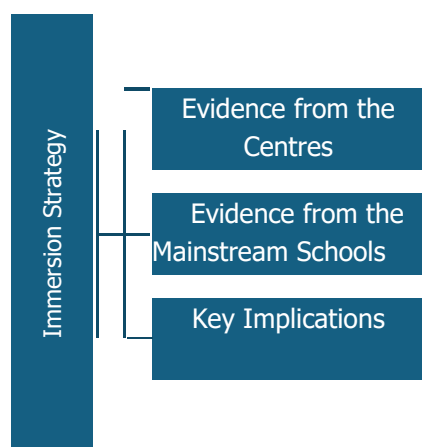


Figure 3: Overview of the Observation Model

No bespoke observation tool has been developed to observe the activities of immersion systems (Dublin College University, 2023), but an adaptation of the headings in the Fortune checklist (2014) was used to frame the observations and to report on what was observed. The observations have therefore been framed around seven specific areas that highlight key strategies when teaching in the immersion context.

The report will present the information collected during the observations at the centres, prior to the submission of what was observed in the mainstream schools. **It is essential to emphasise that the next part of the study presents data collected during the observation period only.** This included two observations in every immersion centre and mainstream schools that were part of the methodology for this study, as outlined in Figure 3.

Integration of Content, Culture, Language and Literacy

This section focuses on what was observed in terms of integration of content, culture and literacy within the immersion provision. We looked at the language aims that are specific to the development of learners that are also appropriate to the development and understanding of the culture, also any extended opportunities to acquire language outside the specific aims of the lesson were investigated. In addition, the use of purposeful

resources such as songs, poems, literature, and artefacts to support the learning of language and learn about culture.

Table 2: Immersion Education Strategies for the Integration of Language Content, Culture and Literacy

Elements that were investigated as part of the immersion model.
Specifying specific and suitable language aims in every lesson
Identifying cultural learning aims associated with the learning aims to develop language use.
Use of songs, poems, literature, rhymes, valid artefacts to teach language and culture
Evaluation of language and culture in every lesson

The Language Centres.

Several examples were seen of effective use of teaching strategies in terms of language integration, culture and literacy. The effective and consistent use of popular Welsh songs to support the learning were observed across the centres, together with the use of Welsh language television programmes. Some of the centres extended this use to be very effective use, by using the songs to recall prior learning (ref), be that through effective use of Welsh songs and rhymes, songs to learn the alphabet or the colours of the rainbow. Overall, pupils responded positively to this activity, and it appeared that they were familiar with the learning content (songs), which suggests a consistency in their use.

There are examples of learning extended language effectively, via identity games (labelling photos and pair matching games) to learn new vocabulary, before proceeding to form more orally complex sentences within the lesson context.

There was strong evidence of teachers intentionally setting language learning objectives, ensuring that the learners could understand and reinforce specific elements prior to their use in a wider context. A notable example was learning numbers before proceeding to a more extended task namely clock work or telling the time.

Regular use of popular Welsh music via the Welsh Language Charter fosters a cultural awareness amongst the pupils, but also enjoyment and an understanding of popular Welsh language culture. This regular use across the immersion provision reinforces positive values and attitudes towards the language and culture as these practices become a natural part of their school day. This reinforces educational practices that are embedded in the Welsh language culture and develops cultural expression as the pupils develop their language skills.

Implication

There is room to consider how media such as tv or video clips are used to further develop oral skills. The learning content can be planned in smaller blocks around the digital medium by considering the planning of oral tasks and activities during the watching process (see e.g. William and Thomas, 2017) to develop pupils' literacy skills further rather than watching whole programmes without a linguistic input.

Mainstream Schools

Mainstream schools used popular songs in informal contexts to promote language and culture effectively, e.g. during fruit time, or when pupils completed independent tasks. However, there was room to be able to better plan the use made of popular songs to specifically develop language skills. Interesting examples were seen of schools using Welsh language songs to frame the educational content with the final task leading to recording a performance of the song. However, in this example, the immersion pupils were not familiar with the song as they missed the preparatory period, therefore purposefully contributing was challenging for them.

Another example of mainstream schools identifying cultural learning aims linked to a specific theme was observed, e.g. Local Eisteddfodau. Although the educational content was relevant to the learners who were fluent in Welsh, the educational content was adapted to support the needs of the immersion pupils. Complex idioms were discussed, without language scaffolding for the immersion pupils. All in all, the use made of the target language was at an inappropriate level and much too complex for the immersion pupils. An opportunity was lost to explain the contexts of eisteddfodau effectively to a pupil who had no prior understanding. This led to the pupil disengaging from the lesson content and switched to use English.

Recommendation?

Addressing Continuous Language Growth and Accuracy Improvement

Table 3: Immersion Education Strategies to Address Continuous Language Growth and Accuracy Improvement

Elements that were investigated as part of the immersion model.
Encouraging and holding every student accountable to correct themselves/their peers
Addressing errors in oral and written language ²
Using a variety of effective feedback techniques including elaborating, metalinguistic cues, requests for an explanation, repeating, re-phrasing, clear correction and non-verbal cues.
Differentiating between feedback on form against meaning
Creating opportunities and activities to assist pupils to notice and produce correct language that is used less frequently orally and in writing.
Focusing on correcting language on the grounds of the linguistic aims of the lesson and the learners' developmental level
Balancing the use of feedback and the flow of the lesson

The Language Centres

² The focus during the immersion period is to develop oral skills.

Effective examples were seen at the centres of teachers addressing continuous language growth and improvement of accuracy. A range of teaching strategies were seen to be used to support pupils to correct and develop their language use to produce the appropriate forms. It must be emphasised that as the first lesson observation was during Week 1, the pupils' use of the target language was very scarce.

However, examples were seen of a teacher asking a pupil to repeat a pattern or word after it was pronounced correctly, giving praise for correct answers. Extensive use was also seen of other feedback techniques such as

- metalinguistic cues that draw the pupils' attention to specific language forms
- repetition and rephrasing responses to strengthen understanding
- clear correction and use of non-verbal cues such as making faces and facial expressions to support the message.

Overall, the centre teachers targeted corrections specifically for the pupil, to ensure consistent and relevant feedback for the child's developmental level.

Mainstream Schools

The strategies observed in the mainstream schools were not as extensive, relevant or effective as those in the centres. The use made was much more sporadic, with only a few schools striving to use strategies to develop language growth and accuracy.

Ensuring Comprehensive Input

Table 4: Immersion Education Strategies to Ensure that the Input is Comprehensive

Elements that were investigated as part of the immersion model.
Using body language, visual aids, objects or manual methods to convey meaning
Trying and using prior knowledge and experience with new themes
Using a variety of joint reading and joint writing activities and prior writing to make the language and content more accessible.
Breaking down information and complex processes into smaller chunks
Making consistent use of tasks that require learners to show their understanding
Choosing and adapting instructional material for the learners' developmental level
Establishing linguistic habits that give opportunities to repeat and extend language use

Language Centres

Robust evidence was seen in the centres of teachers ensuring comprehensive input by effective use of body language, *Total Physical Response* (TPR), images etc. These teaching methods facilitated communication and reinforced pupils' understanding.

Teachers were observed using body language regularly through movement, pointing, naming objects and expressing feelings through facial expressions (happy, sad) or gestures e.g. mimicking sleeping. Teachers and assistants modelled this use to reinforce the language, with the children also imitating them. Props and movement were also used regularly to reinforce the learning by reciting poems together or using props when submitting a lunch order.

Teachers in the immersion centres enriched the input with 'hidden' revision tasks e.g. by using beats during break time to keep the beat on the 'drum'. Repeating key words to a beat reinforced the vocabulary and concepts such as 'i fyny' (up), "i lawr" (down), "ymyl", (edge) "canol" (middle) and "ochr" (side).

The centres linked prior learning activities effectively with new themes to extend and reinforce pupils' understanding of the language, be that through songs, or visual props. Effective use was seen of strategies to break tasks down into smaller chunks to support the learning. An example of this was revising the vocabulary for 'dillad' (clothes) through labelled images, before proceeding to remind the pupils of linked vocabulary such as colour and size 'bach' or 'mawr' - (big or small). This was followed with specific questions from the teacher such as "*Pa liw trowsus sydd gan ...?*" (What colour trousers does ... have?) before the pupils constructed full oral sentences.

There was clear emphasis on regularly checking the pupils' understanding at the centre. Specific techniques were used such as setting class tasks before using digital resources, such as the interactive whiteboard, to revise and reinforce the learning. During these activities each individual learner had an opportunity to use the target language, ensuring that the teacher could also assess the individual progress of every learner.

There was a specific routine in the language centres, that was integral when establishing practices that reinforced language familiarity together with repetition opportunities. Of the morning sessions observed, the same routine was seen e.g. everyone greeting each other, ordering lunch, asking about the previous night's activities - '*Be wnest ti neithiwr?*' (What did you do last night?), with everyone responding in turn.

Some differentiated tasks were prepared in the language centres, and one example was seen by differentiating via colours '*Coch, Oren, Gwyrdd*' (Red, Orange, Green) which was an effective practice and offered flexibility to pupils when choosing a task. In a minority of cases the differentiation of tasks seen was not always sufficient to support the range of pupils. This was more apparent when trying to support older pupils in the Secondary immersion, where themes can be irrelevant or childish, or learners with different cultural backgrounds who did not always understand the Welsh contexts or 'popular' context of the learning every time. This made engagement with the educational input at times more challenging for some learners.

Implication

There is room to investigate the development of immersion resources to support older pupils.

Mainstream Schools

There were some visual resources to be seen on the walls of the mainstream schools to support pupils with the target language. One example was seen in the mainstream schools of a teacher using images to effectively reinforce the target language.

There are regular opportunities in the mainstream schools for pupils to engage with fluent speakers in the classroom, and this is good practice. Nevertheless, planning had not been done every time to support the individual language development level of the immersion pupils. This meant that the pupils could not effectively engage, and because of this it appeared that this had a negative impact on their confidence in the language.

Training is offered to mainstream staff by the immersion system to ensure that the input is comprehensive e.g. support to adapt work sheets, sharing the principles of immersion. No evidence was seen during the observations of work sheets that had been adapted linguistically for immersion pupils in the mainstream school.

Creating a Rich Learning Environment in the Welsh Language

Table 5: Immersion Education Strategies to Create a Rich Learning Environment in the Welsh Language

Elements that were investigated as part of the immersion model.
Extending pupils' language repertoires by teaching synonyms and contrary meanings
Exhibiting a variety of words, sayings, written text throughout the classroom and the foyers
Inviting native speakers to participate in the classroom
Providing a variety of reading material in the target language and resources such as dictionaries, thesaurus, encyclopaedia, etc.
Surrounding the learner with extensive oral and written language input ³

Centres

Evidence was seen amongst older pupils of teachers developing language use by teaching synonyms. These strategies came up naturally within the unit, e.g. when discussing playing football, the teacher highlighted the differences between 'ennill' (winning) and 'curo' (beating). 'Wnaethoch chi ennill'? (Did you win?) 'Chi wnaeth guro tîm Llanfairgogogoch'? (Was it you who beat the Llanfairgogogoch team?)

Consistent opportunities were seen in the immersion centres for pupils to engage with fluent speakers e.g. by interacting with kitchen staff when ordering lunch, or visitors to the centre.

³ The immersion provision does not focus on developing written skills; therefore, the written input of the language centres was not observed.

Implication

It is possible to consider developing engagement with fluent speakers by extending the language use and usual patterns as the pupils' fluency develops.

The centres make effective use by exhibiting words and sayings in the classroom. Every classroom has been designed effectively to support the immersion scheme with the imaginary village and the village characters exhibited, together with key words, labels for parts of the body, colours, verbs, a map of Wales and food charts shown. Objects in the classroom had also been labelled, to support pupils to be able to operate in the classroom and use the Welsh language.

Mainstream Schools

Visual use of language was observed in the mainstream schools. The language was introduced in a more curricular way in the mainstream e.g. maps, literacy coaches, poems and idioms etc. The type of content varied across year groups in the mainstream, according to age or progress steps, and therefore very often beyond the language level of immersion pupils. Therefore, it can be considered that the learning environment designed around the educational context had not considered simple language stimuli that impact the engagement of immersion pupils with the learning environment in the mainstream context.

Some examples were seen of mainstream schools surrounding the learners with extensive oral language input. One example was the morning assembly. Such a space is a valuable opportunity to immerse pupils in the school's oral language and culture when they return.

The resources shared by the language centres to support the Welsh language were not used effectively. Even though there are resources on Google Classroom, more often than not, the immersion pupils completed simple tasks that did not support language development, if they could not contribute to the class task when they returned to the mainstream school.

Implication

Planning language content and specific strategies to repeat and develop the target language of immersion pupils using the ready resources at the immersion centres, would strengthen the experiences for immersion pupils when returning to the mainstream.

Using Teacher Language Effectively (Target Language)

Table 6: Immersion Education Strategies to Use the Teacher's Language Effectively (Target Language)

Elements that were investigated as part of the immersion
Clear expression and pronunciation
Rephrasing and repeating messages in a variety of ways
Varying the tone of voice to reflect the messages
Intentionally recycling vocabulary and language structures of the past, present and future
Modelling the correct use of language
Limiting how much of the teacher's language is used

Immersion Centres

There are several examples of the teacher in the language centres using the target language effectively to support the pupils' learning. Strong and consistent examples of clear expression and pronunciation were observed to convey and support the sounds of the target language. Teachers in the immersion centres are confident with varying the language e.g. slowing down, changing the tone, to reinforce the learning.

Several examples of immersion teachers paraphrasing or repeating the language content if the pupil was unable to respond appropriately.

Although teachers and support staff at the centres make effective and very consistent use of the target language, it was considered that there was room to reduce the teacher's input at times, especially during group or pair tasks, for the pupils to have more opportunities to use new vocabulary or new patterns. This may possibly prepare them better to cope with using the target language in the mainstream environment. In addition, it was considered that there is room to develop the concept of 'time to respond', before the teacher or assistant gives the pupil the answer.

Mainstream Schools

In most of the observations it was seen that the teachers were clear in their expression and appropriate pronunciation to support the pupils' learning, but it was only in a minority of mainstream schools that teachers were seen to slow down and simplify the language to support the pupils with the Welsh language. Overall, there was a tendency for the teachers to switch to English when it appeared that the pupils were unable to respond rather than try to encourage the use of the Welsh language via possible various educational strategies

Overall, the mainstream schools (except for one; see Case Study A), did not plan and prepare by giving sufficient consideration to the immersion pupils. Opportunities were being lost to be able to support pupils' language development by preparing key vocabulary, simple and within the subject area, e.g. in a Physical Education lesson - '*mainc*' (bench), '*pêl*' (ball), '*pwytnt*' (point), etc.

Implication

There is an opportunity to consider developing professional learning pathways to support teachers with suitable strategies to develop the use of the target language effectively for immersion pupils.

Promoting Pupils' Extended Output

Table 7: Immersion Education Strategies to Promote Pupils' Extended Output

Elements that were investigated as part of the immersion model.
Planning and using enquiry techniques that encourage extended discourse and nurtures a higher level of thinking
Structuring and facilitating pupil-centred activities that promotes interest
Using activities that focus on outputs, such as role play, simulations, drama, debates, presentations etc.
Using a variety of proactive activities such as dyads, pair- thinking-sharing, small groups etc.
Promoting the Learning by and with peers, e.g. meaning peers, tutoring peers
Consistently communicating clear expectations and reinforcing those expectations
Fostering a non-threatening learning environment
Making effective use of waiting time during interactions

Language Centres

Positive practices were seen in the language centres of teachers using a range of strategies to try and promote extended output. It must be recognised that the timing of the first observation, namely Week 1, meant that it was very difficult for the teachers to use these strategies as many of the pupils had acquired so little of the target language.

Despite this, activities were planned in a fun way e.g. board games, role play etc, to try and gain the pupils' interest. However, some activities had not been structured and did not facilitate the interest of some Secondary pupils in the target language. Some unsuitable activities were observed for the interests and age of older pupils, e.g. watching television programmes that were suitable for younger children, the way pupils were allocated in groups, or board games that introduced childish characters.

The centres made very effective use of the *Class Dojo* award system when reinforcing clear expectations in terms of language use. The points system was woven as a natural part of the daily running of the centre's activities, and it was a powerful tool to reinforce learning amongst the pupils and develop extended use of the language.

Implication

There is room to consider the activities and interests of a range of pupils in greater detail when planning activities to promote extended language output, specifically in the Secondary immersion provision.

Mainstream Schools

Although there was evidence of activities in the mainstream schools that could promote extended language output, in most of the observations, these tasks had not been intentionally planned around the language requirements of the immersion pupils. Although there were examples of group work, often pupils were immersed without sufficient language to be able to contribute without additional language scaffolding, or support from the teacher.

Pupils' use of language in informal contexts, e.g. playtime, was mainly through the medium of English, except for one school that was observed.

Addressing Learners' Various Needs

Table 8: Immersion Education Strategies to Give attention to Learners' Various Needs

Elements that were investigated as part of the immersion model.
Including a range of language abilities, previous knowledge and social skills in flexible groups of pupils
Planning for the children's various needs, based on language and cultural backgrounds
Providing a range of uses, learning activities and a range of assessment tasks for the abilities and interests of pupils
Conducting a survey of the pupils' interests

The Immersion Centres

The range of language needs, ages and Additional Learning Needs (ALN) poses a challenge to the immersion centres in meeting the various needs of pupils. When pupils arrive at the mainstream school and the immersion centres, often there is no specific information available about them. This causes a challenging situation for the teachers as they support them and plan for differentiation.

There is a wide range of activities provided to support the needs of pupils in the immersion centres, but there is room to consider external factors further when planning and designing these bearing in mind the linguistic variety that are part of the immersion provision by now (see Figure 4 in the parents' questionnaires section).

Mainstream Schools

No specific strategies were observed in operation at the mainstream schools to support the specific needs of immersion pupils who were returning to the class. However, it was observed that there was huge pressure on 22 mainstream schools to support a range of language needs within the usual class, quite often with staffing challenges on Fridays.

It was observed in several cases that supply teachers led parts of the teaching on Fridays in the mainstream as it was preparation and assessment (PPA) time for the class teacher. There are a wide range of language needs in the classroom in addition to those that attend the language centres, which pose further challenges to the mainstream on Fridays.

Implication

There is room to look at good practice nationally when supporting multilingual learners in Welsh language and Welsh learning settings.

Conclusion

In the observations it was seen that there were numerous strengths in the Immersion Centres when supporting the language development of pupils in the Welsh language and in supporting the well-being of pupils. The pupils were happy in the learning environment, and they had created strong support frameworks amongst other peers who were learning the language. Evidence shows that mainstream schools found it difficult to support pupils to reintegrate successfully on Fridays. There were limited opportunities for the pupils to use and develop the Welsh language, reducing the efficiency of the immersion model under the current system.

Analysis of Parents/Carers' Questionnaires

This section analyses the results of the online questionnaire circulated to the parents of children attending one of the four language immersion centres. Parents were asked for their opinion on the immersion programme.

Of the 23 responses to the questionnaire sent to parents and guardians, English was noted as the main language of the home in 19 of the households. However, the presence of a wider linguistic diversity was recorded, with a total of seven languages being named by respondents. In five of these households, it was reported that the parents also spoke that language with their children at home.

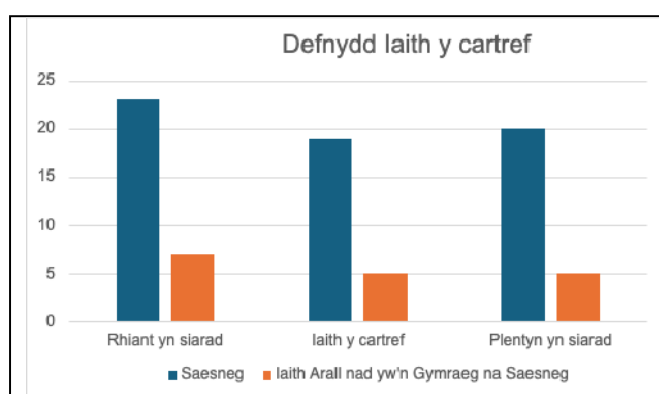


Figure 4: Overview of the Household Language

Parents' Attitudes to the Immersion System

All felt that there was value in learning Welsh, with the majority of parents expressing strong enthusiasm for the immersion system, describing it in words such as:

"Fantastic" (Parent 6 and 17)

"Very good" (Parent 8, 9 and 11);

"...that it's been very helpful" (Parent 10).

Several parents noted that their children enjoyed the experience and learned fast. Others mentioned that their children sang Welsh songs at home and enjoyed sharing what they had learned.

"My daughter really enjoys the learning, she seems to be picking it up very quickly after attending the language unit" (Parent 2)

"She's really enjoying it, sings the Welsh songs at home with her older brother and loves telling what she has learned and what it means when translated to English" (Parent 4)

The main benefits identified were having the opportunity for a new learning experience (n=6), in a safe and supportive environment.

"Fantastic opportunity for them to learn another language" (Parent 16)

"Excellent opportunity for them to develop Welsh in a 'safe' environment, as in it's [sic] directed for learners" (Parent 18)

"Wonderful learning opportunity, the teaching of Welsh will support him through school" (Parent 3)

Some elaborated on this by saying that the opportunity given not only supported their learning but also helped as the children gained confidence and integrated into the school and the wider community with eight parents mentioning this as an advantage.

"It's a great idea, it will help him integrate more in his school, and in his village" (Parent 5)

"It is helpful in integration and socialising" (Parent 18)

Parents were asked about any potential concerns they had surrounding sending their children to the immersion centre. Less than half the parents expressed initial concerns about the current model (n=11), with some feeling that taking pupils out of mainstream school could be challenging for the children, citing concerns about the social impact, e.g. missing their friends and social circles. However, it wasn't a persistent worry among parents, as they noted that pupils made new friends quickly at the immersion centres.

"They had only been at their 'new' school a few weeks before moving to the unit, so would miss new friends. This hasn't happened, they've just made new friends" (Parent 14)

"Missing friends, social circle from school but Fridays have maintained this" (Parent 17)

"No concerns regarding the unit itself. Mainly not being able to settle in their new school but that will come" (Parent 22)

Some parents were worried about the negative impact on their children's academic and educational progress under the current model, due to the time away from the main curriculum, especially perhaps for children who

had just moved to the United Kingdom (UK) or their Mainstream school, with some children taking longer to settle into their primary school after attending the unit.

“For these few weeks it might affect his studies in the village school. My child only came to the UK in May this year so immersion in the Welsh unit is one more stress for him to cope with, even though I wholeheartedly support the work of the unit” (Parent 4)

“10 weeks away from the main curriculum focus, although we are fully aware the language barrier was a concern before attending the unit” (Parent 11)

However, less than half of parents raised any concerns, with the majority seeing the benefits of attending the immersion provision or seeing an opportunity to extend the immersion period so that pupils were at the centre for a longer period.

“Maybe not long enough.” (Parent 8)

“No adverse issues of missing mainstream school, mainstream school states he uses Welsh at school...” (Parent 11)

Very few parents raised concerns about the age range in Secondary centres, particularly in terms of social interaction between year nine pupils and Primary children.

“I'm not sure primary children should be mixed with Secondary especially before Christmas. My child cried when she was told there was no Santa. She was also told she was an attention seeker by older pupils” (Parent 5)

Almost half of the parents indicated that they supported their children with learning Welsh at home. Examples were shared of pupils completing tasks at home on *Google Classroom*, with most of the support they needed coming from parents who were also learning Welsh, other family members (older siblings, grandparents), and *Google Translate* as a useful resource.

The majority of parents reported an increase in their children's knowledge of Welsh, at home and in the community, since attending the immersion centre.

Pupils' Well-being in the Immersion System

Parents were asked about the impact of attending the immersion provision on their children's well-being. A minority of parents (n=7) reported seeing a difference in their children's well-being. Those changes were positive ones, with four declaring that their children appeared happier and more confident.

“Happier and more confident when in the community, attending events where Welsh is the primary language, though he still may need clarification as his learning continues” (Parent 12)

“He was very shy now he is more relaxed and happy there is no stress anymore” (Parent 13)

The parents reported that their children were excited that they were meeting new friends at the centre and building positive social relationships that contributed to their sense of belonging.

“They are excited learning a new language and meeting new friends at the centre” (Parent 21)

While the above quotes do not specifically refer to the efficiency of the current immersion model in supporting pupils' well-being, it does demonstrate the positive impact of the immersion provision on pupils' confidence and development within the local community.

Conclusion

It can therefore be seen that the attitudes of the majority of parents towards the immersion provision are very positive. Enthusiasm and a strong appreciation of the opportunity for their children to learn Welsh in a supportive and safe environment were expressed.

Although initial concerns were expressed, key advantages such as support for their children to integrate into the local community and develop confidence in using the language in an educational and social context were seen as broader strengths.

Thematic Analysis of the Focus Groups

In developing the research methodology, it was decided that the research questions called for an inductive analysis approach to examine in detail how the immersion model influenced pupils' use of Welsh and their linguistic journey on their return to mainstream schools. Given the complexity of the individual responses to the immersion model, it was essential to consider an approach that would capture a range of perspectives, experiences and challenges in their entirety, rather than forcing and framing them within a pre-prepared theoretical structure, e.g. through a deductive coding method.

The inductive analysis method offers a structured but flexible approach to collating and analysing themes emerging directly from the data, in order to understand how effective the model is in ensuring pupils' use of the target language in the mainstream. This method can highlight patterns of linguistic behaviour, the challenges faced, and the most effective support strategies.

Similarly, in assessing the effectiveness of the model in enabling learners to acquire the Welsh language adequately, the inductive method outlines which factors facilitate or hinder the successful acquisition of Welsh.

By exploring the themes without a theoretical restraint, it provides an opportunity to delve deeply into the patterns, which include the opportunities and challenges in the attempt to strengthen the Welsh language in the Immersion System and in mainstream schools. In addition, in terms of understanding the influence of the model on pupils' well-being during the immersion phase, inductive thematic analysis allows pupils' voices to emerge naturally, highlighting any emotional or social impact within the model in line with the research questions.

As there is no fully established theoretical framework for measuring the impact of the immersion model across all these areas, it is essential to use an approach that enables the data to shape our understanding of the situation. The insights generated through the inductive method can, in due course, set the foundations for further research or the development of future theoretical models.

The Immersion Model and Pupils' Well-being

During the inductive analysis process, several emerging themes jointly appeared highlighting a number of further considerations in the future implementation of the current immersion model, particularly when considering pupils' well-being in the immersion provision. One significant concern is the time constraints and the reduction in teaching and learning time, as the model has been reduced by 20% in the language centres (with the exception of year 7, 8 and 9).

Exposure to the Target Language and Contact Hours

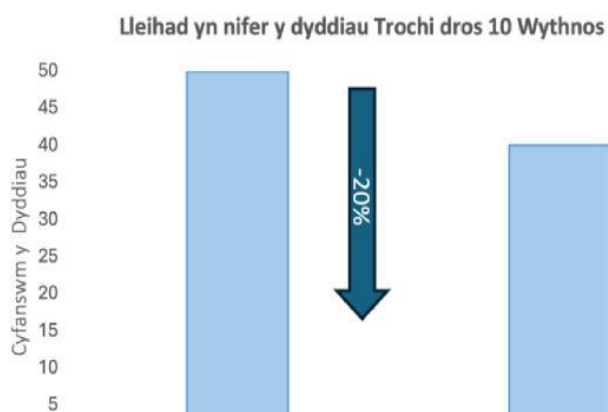


Figure7: A Reduction in the Number of Immersion Days in the Primary Provision

to This reduction in learning hours and educational contact can make it more challenging for pupils to acquire the Welsh language effectively, reducing their exposure language-rich interactions, while also reducing the opportunities to consolidate their use of Welsh (see further discussion in the Mainstream section).

Research suggests that effective language immersion methods depend on consistent and sustainable exposure (Baker and Wright, 2017), and a reduction in contact hours could reduce the impact and long-term success of the model, particularly considering that there are fewer contact hours for pupils in language centres, but that linguistic progress is expected to remain as it was under the previous system.

However, the standard of pedagogy and curricular work is equally important when considering exposure to the target language (Genesee, 2013), and it is vitally important that all exposure to the language, whether in the language centres, or in the mainstream school, is an opportunity to expose pupils to the target language in a purposeful manner. Not being in the immersion centres should therefore not mean that the pupils do not continue to develop their language skills.

A Sense of Belonging and Peer Relationships

Another theme that arises from the analysis is the importance of learning from peers and social integration in language learning. Pupils in immersion centres benefit significantly from interaction with their peers, as social engagement fosters language development and a sense of belonging (García & Lin, 2017).

Pupil 13

"I feel really settled in here. And I have all my friends. And it's really fun learning Welsh because we get to do activities and acting and lots of things that make me feel happy when I learn Welsh."

Friday can be problematic for pupils returning from immersion centres to mainstream schools, mainly due to the nature of the day's activities. In primary schools in particular, Friday *can be* a day for completing the week's work, along with rewarding the week's positive behaviour through 'Golden Time'. Research shows that flexible education methods such as this can cause challenges for teachers, particularly in terms of lesson planning, assessing pupils' progress and ensuring learning progression (Maxwell et al., 2020). Effective communication between the mainstream school, the centre and parents is essential to ensure the success of such models (Parsons & Lewis, 2010). Flexible education arrangements rely on strong systems that ensure consistency in educational experiences and minimise potential disruptions to pupils' learning progression (Ofsted, 2019).

Some teachers emphasise that it makes no difference which day is chosen for returning to mainstream school, as the nature of the model itself poses significant challenges.

Nevertheless, it is worth considering what the impact of continued contact with the mainstream school is when a pupil returns to the mainstream school full-time.

Implication

The efficiency of the model needs to be strengthened in terms of reconciling structures around the 'flexible' model and the return to the mainstream. There is room for centre staff and mainstream schools to collaborate more closely to ensure that the structure of the current model improves consistency around nurturing relationships and pupils' well-being.

Consistency of Provision in Mainstream Schools

There is a sense of comfort and security within the immersion centres, which are typically small in size, in contrast to the challenge of reintegrating into mainstream classes, especially in larger schools. Some pupils displayed uncertainty about integrating back into this context, and the challenge of being able to use the

Welsh language, especially in the face of other challenges such as a lack of resources, confusion in communication processes where the exposure and linguistic support therefore do not persist.

Pupil 3

"I don't understand most of this stuff. So I'm just there, trying to figure out what it is."

Pupil 13

"Because [unclear] substitute people... It's quite hard. The substitute teacher doesn't know you come here."

In a minority of cases, mainstream teachers were seen to engage with the materials shared by the immersion centres through the digital medium. However, there are practical challenges in trying to implement educational strategies to support the use of the target language in the mainstream class on Fridays.

It was highlighted that these challenges were more present for larger mainstream schools.

Nurturing Relationships and Informal Interaction

The inductive analysis shows that there are concerns around emotional well-being and the potential mental pressures that pupils may experience during the ten-week block, especially when they return to the mainstream school on Friday.

Pupil 12

"I've got a little bit of friends to play with. But it's quite annoying because they always like talk, and I don't know what they're talking about 'cause normally they're talking about what they did yesterday or something."

The movement from small, familiar groups in the immersion centre to a larger context, with peers that they do not know so well, can have negative influences on pupils' well-being where the relationships with peers are not as well established in the mainstream. Evidence from the study suggests that changing the learning venue on Friday increases anxiety rates, while reducing confidence, undermining pupils' willingness to interact with the language (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014). Several examples were seen in the observational data of immersion pupils being isolated when they returned to the mainstream school.

Language Support and Curricular Engagement

Some immersion teachers highlighted that visiting the mainstream schools on Fridays is very often difficult, noting that the visiting period can coincide with the times when pupils engage with tasks or activities they enjoy.

Immersion Teacher 9

"I feel that Friday morning is better and that the afternoon is slightly harder. Because in the afternoon they have golden time. And I feel, oh, I'm taking these young children out of golden time. And that's the time they've enjoyed and they look forward to most, and they're not able to take part."

This can therefore disrupt the pupils' engagement with these enjoyable activities. There are many examples where pupils are taken out of creative and recreational tasks such as 'Golden Time'. Socio-psychological elements are key when considering pupils' feelings about learning the Welsh language, in particular integrative motivation (Baker, 1997) (Baker, 2011). 'Golden Time' is usually associated with relaxation and leisure time, which reinforces the concept of integrative motivation and disrupting these experiences can contribute to further frustration and negative feelings (Deci & Ryan, 2000), and consequently to a negative impact on pupils' well-being, and their overall progress.

This aligns with research showing that language learning is linked to emotional experiences, and negative associations can restrict the pupil's motivation and long-term engagement to continue acquiring the Welsh language (MacIntyre et al., 2019).

Pupil 3

"Last week, I had to send a poster to ALDI, and I could win £20. But I didn't get to finish it."

It is therefore fair to note that the qualitative data displays a complex correlation between the structural design of immersion models and pupils' well-being. The effectiveness of the model depends on careful considerations around transition processes, social integration, and emotional support. The patterns observed show that there is definitely room to revisit the model, examining well-being and emotional assurance alongside language development, to ascertain how appropriate and effective any model is in supporting pupils' well-being on their return to the mainstream school on Friday.

Implication

There is room to look at more hybrid models that use digital technology to support immersion pupils' engagement with the mainstream school for a while, before returning more gradually towards the second half of the immersion block. There is an opportunity for the immersion provision to work with experts to develop a hybrid provision.

Immersion for a range of ages

The term Early Immersion usually refers to the start of education through the medium of Welsh from the Foundation Phase up to the age of seven. Welsh is used as the sole or main language of teaching across all activities for young children (Estyn, 2022). Immersion teachers usually introduce the Welsh language through rich experiences based on play, songs, stories and daily routines.

Concerns were raised among some mainstream teachers when it comes to early immersion, and the inclusion of Year 2 children in immersion provision. Some teachers felt that the inclusion of Year 2 children in the immersion provision was challenging.

Age remains a contentious issue in the literature when considering the appropriateness of early immersion (Genesee, 2013). Genesee (2004) argues again that early immersion provides space to exploit young children's natural ability to learn a language, arguing that language teaching methods such as Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) are easier to implement as the educational space is more experimental and learner-centred, perhaps compared to the Secondary sector, where greater proficiency in language skills is required to correspond to the more complex curricular content. Again, there is room to consider developing and supporting mainstream staff to develop appropriate and effective educational strategies.

Overall, research does not demonstrate any disadvantages from early immersion, but instead highlights advantages (Steele et al., 2017; Trebits et al., 2021; Genesee, 1983; Genesee & Jared, 2008). A key consideration is that offering all children the opportunity to be immersed in the local language ensures a fair and inclusive offer, an offer that can ensure that the pupils are able to fully engage with the language and the local area, while also becoming new speakers, increase the number of Welsh speakers, and in turn, contribute to the realisation of some of the aims of Theme 1, Cymraeg 2050, A Million Welsh Speakers (Welsh Government, 2017, p. 32), including the academic skills in the long term.

Socio-economic background can influence children's educational success, but immersion programmes can help mitigate these inequalities for children from less privileged backgrounds (Trebetis et al., 2021). It is essential to ensure that the immersion provision is adapted appropriately where necessary to fully meet pupils' needs.

Effective implementation depends on teachers who are specifically trained in immersion methods and on the availability of appropriate educational resources.

Progression in Learning

The new immersion model very often leads to challenges in supporting academic development within the 10-week model. This is true in terms of pupils' development in their acquisition of the Welsh language, but also in academic work in mainstream schools. As already highlighted, losing 20% of exposure at the centres elicited negative responses across the qualitative data, but also means challenges when returning to mainstream school in terms of progression and engagement over the ten weeks. Some pupils returning to school in mid learning cycle (on Fridays) found it challenging to engage with the work at the mainstream school (e.g. modelling, drafting, re-drafting) leading to challenges in supporting learning experiences and applying work appropriately on Fridays.

Teacher 1

"The children have been working on something all week. It's the same with mathematics. If we have been teaching a mathematical skill all week, they arrive on Friday when we are solving a problem or reasoning, they haven't been here for those steps either...they are put in a difficult position when they come in."

Strong practices were seen in some mainstream schools, where focused planning through scaffolding or personalisation of the curriculum supported learning on Fridays. There is room to consider sharing these robust practices across the mainstream schools, to ensure a fair opportunity for every immersion pupil to be able to apply the language in challenging academic contexts outside of the immersion centre effectively.

However, challenges with lack of staff (teaching and support) meant that, more often than not, mainstream schools were not in a position to provide tailored support for the pupils returning on the Friday.

Staffing challenges on Fridays in mainstream schools are a major barrier in trying to support immersion pupils with the usual curriculum but also with their progress in the acquisition of the Welsh language. Evidence was seen in this study that it can be challenging for mainstream school teachers to be able to provide appropriate language support for the pupils.

Although mainstream schools acknowledge that valuable materials are available to support pupils' language development, they do not have the staffing resources to use the resources and support effectively.

Teacher 1

"Well, we don't have the staff to be able to give time to sit down... to go through that work either. Year 3, one teacher, 28 children. As I say, we just don't have the staff here to be able to release people to be taking the children."

Staff at the language centres and staff at the mainstream schools expressed concern that pupils were missing out on structured sessions on Fridays at the language centres (e.g. script work, role play etc) which is so crucial in language acquisition. The impact this has on pupils' confidence on their journey towards becoming fluent must be taken into account.

Immersion Teacher 10

"Normally, the Friday morning would be spent revising the language patterns throughout the entire week, and on Friday they would do the script, and act the script. But by now, we feel, or I feel that this time isn't available, that something has to go every week, if that makes sense, that there isn't as much opportunity for them to be revising as we used to on Friday morning."

Although some schools drew on resources distributed by the centres to support the pupils' language development and support their return and integration back to the mainstream schools, there was inconsistency in the level of support pupils received on Fridays at the mainstream schools from the class teacher.

Resources

The immersion centres shared the content of learning and support resources with the pupils and the mainstream schools via *Google Classroom*. The mainstream schools engaged with the digital materials on *Google Classroom* and found it to be a useful medium for sharing information and key language patterns. These resources are found to be useful to support pupils' immersion upon returning to the mainstream school, and evidence of these being used on the Friday was seen in very few observations.

Teacher 2

"We get material through from the (immersion) teacher. Then at the end of the week she sends the language patterns that have been covered the previous week. They are useful with everybody, to be completely honest."

However, not every mainstream school could engage with the materials on *Google Classroom* at all, with some schools finding it difficult to include the language learning content in the educational focus on the Friday.

Teacher 3

"Although I try and share it with everybody and that the materials are extremely useful, it's difficult to try and fit it in just for one, in a way."

Most immersion teachers found there to be limited support resources, especially so to support secondary-age pupils with the language, or learners who have passed the beginner's level of learning the language.

Immersion Teacher 5

"There's certainly a huge gap in the market in terms of books for Welsh learners. There are simple beginner ones, ones we use to teach them to read, such as Sali Mali, for example. But there's a jump after then. And I feel that there's a void there."

When discussing the availability of general resources to support teaching and learning in immersion, mixed feedback was received. It was noted that there were useful resources on Hwb, but that they were difficult to access. It was noted that digital developments to support immersion pupils with their reading skills would be welcomed, and that it could be argued that there was space to develop further resources in this respect.

Immersion Teacher 1 and 3

"Teacher 1: There's a lot in English, Reading Eggs to help with reading, Darllen Co. in Welsh. It would be nice if someone created something for immersion pupils. With something like Darllen Co., which they use when they go back to school but is perhaps too difficult for them when they go back. It might be nice; it would give an opportunity to create something specifically for immersion learners."

"Teacher 3: Yes, that's it. Effectively, one has to create their own resources, in that respect."

Pupils' Progress

Teachers and pupils alike acknowledged the value of the immersion provision in terms of developing pupils' Welsh oral skills, emphasising that the immersion provision provided robust and invaluable support towards pupils' language proficiency.

Pupil 1

"When I first joined, well, when we first joined, they said in a meeting in school, they said, "You won't be fluent, but you'll know a lot. And I was thinking I might not catch it in time. But I think I've learnt a lot so far."

Pupil 2

"Some of my friends who have done the Welsh unit, and they told me that you won't learn everything. You won't learn like how to write in Welsh, but if you get caught in a conversation, you'll know. If you need to talk, you're good. You learn most of the basics and most of the stuff you'll need."

The qualitative data highlighted that high-quality work takes place within the immersion centres, which leads to a considerable increase in fluency that could not be achieved to the same extent within a normal educational context in mainstream schools.

Teacher 1

"The strength lies in the fact that we could never do the work they do in ten weeks in a mainstream school."

However, some teachers expressed concern that the new 10-week model was less effective, noting that perhaps pupils' progress in their language skills is now not as solid as it used to be under the former system. According to the views of some teachers in this study, some pupils had difficulty incorporating the Welsh language into school life after leaving the immersion provision.

The immersion centres currently assess pupils' progress in accordance with the National Literacy Framework and the oracy strand for the purpose of tracking and assessment. There is a national intention to look at these measures in accordance with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).

Implication

There is an opportunity to further explore how pupils use the Welsh language and integrate back to the school, a year after having been engaged in the immersion scheme.

Pupils' Motivation

The themes emerging from pupils' interviews showed that the learner's voice highlighted positive experiences at the Immersion Centre which are supported by purposeful second language teaching strategies.

The data showed that the attitudes of most pupils towards being at the immersion centre and towards learning Welsh were positive. It became obvious that overall, pupils enjoy learning Welsh and find the teaching strategies to be effective in developing enjoyment and motivation, without feeling too pressurised.

Pupil 2

"So I'm grateful that we do it in fun songs and fun ways and games and stuff instead of someone pushing us to do it and pushing us to do it."

Pupils expressed that they enjoyed engaging with the teaching approaches, particularly language games, songs etc.

The centres made good use of the 'Class DoJo' reward system, which motivates pupils more so to use Welsh and to which pupils responded very positively. The reward system had been clearly structured and inter-weaved naturally into a range of teaching and learning activities during the day and week.

The centres had designed the reward system to reinforce their teaching methods to support pupils with their acquisition of the Welsh language, even when they were being rewarded.

Immersion Teacher 8

"They are given a target at the beginning of the week, say 80 points, and they are given one point for good effort in singing, or for sitting down nicely at the table. Or for speaking Welsh in the playground, which might be three points."

The Teacher's Input and Immersion Methods

There was evidence of the immersion teacher using language effectively, by slowing down and breaking down language patterns, and modelling correct use. Effective use of these language teaching strategies is helpful as pupils develop their understanding of the language. Pupils described how immersion teachers used comprehensive input in a positive manner, which is effective in ensuring that appropriate language scaffolding is in place to support pupil fluency (Tedick & Lyster, 2019).

Pupils noted that specific instructions around basic skills and knowledge to develop fluency were useful e.g. understanding the Welsh alphabet, which is crucial to support pupils' development in their pronunciation of the target language.

Pupils noted that the use of strategies at the centres such as pattern repetition was a valuable practice, and this highlighted effective language teaching practices which enabled pupils to understand meanings instinctively.

Pupil 1, 2 and 3

"Pupil 1: Even if they say something you don't know, then they kind of slow it down and say it again, emphasise every word, and then you figure it out."

Pupil 3: Yeah. 'Cause they don't say a Welsh word like diolch and then tell you that it means thank you. They say it and say it and say it, and then you just know that it is thank you."

Pupil 2: Yeah. You just process that, and you understand."

An analysis of teacher focus groups reinforced the pupils' positive attitudes towards their experiences at the language centres. There is a strong relationship between pupils' positive attitudes and motivation and the focused second language teaching methods used by teachers at the language centres.

Immersion Teacher 8

"You know, saying the word or the first word just to cue them in, to remind them. I think that helps. Pictures, there are a lot of pictures aren't there, on the wall. Writing, pictures, using gestures, whatever, things like that."

A variety of activities were being provided in the immersion provision, and a system and routine were planned purposefully, e.g. pupils phoning the canteen to order lunch, a reward system being constantly reinforced.

The classroom environment had been purposefully planned, demonstrating consistency across the centres in terms of the use of the educational space to provide visual clues in the form of pictures and key vocabulary on the walls to support pupils.

Teachers at the immersion centres were confident in choosing and selecting appropriate strategies to support pupils' language acquisition, whether through body language, gestures, repetition, which is crucial to develop long-term understanding and language acquisition. Another strength was that the immersion teachers' competence in using these strategies meant that there was no reliance on using English in class.

Immersion Teacher 7

"Simplify and mime things if they don't understand. And only say the English word if necessary. And then you just repeat the Welsh words lots of times. Yes, repeat, simplify. Model the language to them. They get a sample of the question. "

The language provision and support for pupils as they returned to mainstream schools was not as robust. No structured professional learning offer had been provided for the staff of mainstream schools to be able to develop the necessary skills to develop pupils' language development effectively within the new immersion model. Consequently, no consistent use of second language learning strategies were observed, such as purposeful and effective use of the target language, language modelling, use of visual clues, or use of adequate resources to support children's language development.

Professional Learning

Some members of staff at the language centres engaged in international discussions on second language teaching and shared good practices through national networks. However, professional learning pathways in language immersion are few and far between at a national level for immersion staff. It appears that engagement with international good practice depends on individual efforts or the leadership of centres at a local level rather than a national vision and professional learning pathway.

Immersion Teacher 4

“Personally, I have been doing much research of my own into English as an additional language, also in the Basque Country, and seeing what the principles are in America in terms of learning Spanish as an additional language there.”

In addition, many staff at the centres used intervention programmes such as ELSA. As a result, staff at the centres noted that they incorporated language patterns effectively into well-being support strategies.

“I have planned language into circle time lessons to look at the well-being element with the children, for us to do it through the medium of Welsh, building on language patterns from week one, looking at emotions and building on that.”⁴

Implication

The lack of structured Professional Learning opportunities for mainstream school staff hinders their ability to fully support pupils attending the immersion system. The implications for upskilling mainstream staff who will be supporting the pupils during the immersion period were not given due consideration when developing the new model.

Communication

Despite there being robust procedures in place in an attempt to share crucial information between the language centres and the mainstream schools, as seen in Table Eight, it appears that the information was not reaching the relevant staff.

Table 9: Activities to support school staff and parents during the model

Support Programme for Staff and Parents	Communication between the Centre and Mainstream School
Before the pupil arrived at the centre	Immersion Teacher going to the mainstream school to meet the child and class teacher
Open Morning before starting the course	Pupil and parents visiting the centres

⁴ These strategies were not observed in use during this study.

	Local providers, e.g. Dysgu Cymraeg GO, Menter Iaith present to share information about extra-curricular events to support the learning of Welsh
Week 1	On-line meeting to support mainstream teachers and staff Share timetables Share access to <i>Google Classroom</i> Share effective immersion strategies with mainstream teachers Share language patterns
Week 6	On-line meeting to support mainstream teachers Share further language patterns Opportunity to discuss and share information
Week 10	Open morning at the centre Parents, class teacher and headteachers invited
Week 11	Staff at the centre attend mainstream school to share the children's work Present completion certificate to the immersion pupils

Although the language centres share the learning material through a digital medium such as *Google Classroom*, the information and resources did not always reach the mainstream class teacher, and the attendance of mainstream schools at the support events varied.

Teacher 1

"Interviewer: How does the class teacher know about the language work and the level of the work being completed at the immersion centre for you to be able to refer to on the Friday in lessons?"

Teacher: I don't think they know in that respect."

Immersion Teacher 4

"If the headteacher, obviously, shared the information with all members of staff in terms of a child's linguistic ability, shared the language pattern and that teachers used the same language patterns every Friday and in lessons, then there would be potential. But it's inconsistent."

Although some examples of weekly e-mails are shared by teachers at the centres, it appears that mainstream schools find that these messages are irregular, and that key information does not reach the right class teachers.

Teacher 2

"I don't receive something every week. I did a few weeks back for a while, and at the beginning for a while. Therefore, I don't receive anything on a weekly or fortnightly basis. But that e-mail, there is one e-mail with five units or something in it, I'm sure."

It also appears that teachers at the centres are uncertain at times as to who are pupils' class teachers, especially when it comes to larger mainstream schools or secondary schools, causing further challenges when sharing crucial information about development and providing support for the pupils' progress and well-being.

Immersion Teacher 1 and 2

"Teacher 1: I e-mail the class teachers too. You won't get a reply from everybody. Only some reply to e-mails, to tell you the truth."

Teacher 2: I try to e-mail the class teachers. But if I'm not sure who the class teacher is, then I ask the headteacher to forward the message."

Teacher 1: It's difficult in a big school, isn't it."

It also appears that informal conversations were the main method of communication when updating mainstream schools on pupils' weekly progress on the Friday, except for the programme highlighted in Table 8. There were no formal weekly meetings or structures in place to share information between both settings.

Immersion Teacher 6 and 7

"Teacher 6: Just a quick chat. Nothing formal as such, just to report back. And then sometimes they have questions about the individual or language patterns and so forth. But no meetings. I only have that kind of conversation."

"Teacher 7: I wouldn't say that it's something that happens every week on a Friday, that you talk to every teacher and discuss, because a lot of the time, they don't have time, and you don't have much time either..."

Such informality, although useful for small schools where engagement and sharing information is easier and happens naturally, can be problematic in larger establishments, leading to patchy or insufficient communication. In the larger schools, staff often found it difficult to keep in regular contact, relying heavily on contact with headteachers or administrative staff to share key information, further affecting the support and consistency of communication to ensure the well-being and development of staff attending the centres.

Immersion Teacher 3

"Also, in terms of communication, I think it depends on the school. I go to three schools. There are a few schools where I perhaps see the teacher every week because I have to go through the class to go to the room where I work with the child. But there's a school where I only see the secretary, and that's it, because everybody's busy etc."

The practice of sharing weekly language patterns through platforms such as *Google Classroom* was welcomed. However, the way these resources were distributed and used was still inconsistent, depending largely on the initiative of individual staff in the mainstream schools rather than robust organisational processes and structures.

Teacher 2

"I like that we get to see the resources and what they have been doing from one week to the other. More so than what we were told before they were there. It was more of a period where they were there for a while and then came back and that was it. At least now we get to see the patterns."

Immersion Teacher 2

"Every headteacher and class teacher have been invited to the Google Classroom that we use at the unit so that they can use those with the entire class if they want."

Although staff from the immersion centres attend mainstream to support immersion pupils further on Fridays, there was no opportunity to communicate and work with the mainstream class teacher every time. This was a missed opportunity to share information between one learning setting and the other to ensure the richest experiences for immersion pupils. There was a perceived lack of understanding between some members of staff about the learning content being completed at the immersion centres, meaning that ensuring continuity and pupils' engagement with the language at mainstream was less effective than it could have been.

Teacher 1

"No, we don't have a clue, well I don't, what they do in class all week, to be completely honest."

Implication

There is a need to develop systematic structures to improve communication across the provision by all key stakeholders, including the mainstream schools. Tightening collaboration systems can not only improve the consistency and quality of the educational provision and learners' outcomes in terms of their acquisition of the Welsh language, but also sustain their academic engagement in other curricular areas over the ten weeks.

Extra-curricular Use

There are processes in place to seek to coordinate between the leisure provisions on a local level and Welsh language support for the immersion pupils. There is evidence in this study of close collaboration between the language centres and organisational bodies e.g. The National Welsh Language Learning Centre, Menter Iaith, to introduce clear support structures for families to support their children when acquiring the Welsh language.

Nevertheless, this study has highlighted challenges when seeking to ensure a Welsh language provision jointly with local leisure services.

Teacher 1

"It is very difficult in this area in terms of the fact that many of the clubs and activities are held in English."

Implication

Consideration could be given to developing a programme of language enriching activities for the immersion pupils and their families in collaboration with leisure services, local clubs and organisations, Learn Welsh - North West and Menter Iaith.

Extra-curricular Opportunities in the context of Education

Pupils' informal use or use of language tended to be English at nearly all the schools that were observed, even among pupils who are not part of the immersion provision. In nearly all the situations that were observed, the bulk of the evidence notes that English is the school yard's informal language, at mainstream school and at the immersion centres.

Pupil 13

"I don't really speak Welsh with my friends. Nobody speaks Welsh when they're out of the classroom."

It was seen that pupils' attitudes towards using the Welsh language in mainstream schools tends to be more negative than attitudes towards its use in the Language Centres, with pupils highlighting that peers do not speak with each other in Welsh, and that English is the natural language of their friendship group.

Immersion teacher 5

"And I do try to ask those I think who would tell me the truth. And there's very little Welsh. I think it's a habit, and it doesn't just happen with other friends and children either. Staff and teachers also are just used to it (Speaking English)."

The lack of use of the Welsh language by pupils across the mainstream schools that were observed was a cause for concern. This means that integrating the immersion pupils to use Welsh in the mainstream space is more challenging, and places them in a space that is a complete contrast to the language environment of the immersion centres.

Nonetheless, the data shows that smaller sized schools find it easier to monitor language use in more informal contexts, namely on the school yard.

Teacher 2

"We're a small school as well, we have (x number) pupils here from Nursery to Year 6. Therefore, it's easier for us to hear if they are speaking English during dinnertime or on the school yard, and that we remind them again rather than needing to implement a major strategy to ensure this. It is easier for us to monitor it."

Evidence suggests that some pupils are more likely to use the Welsh language when living in smaller communities where the language continues to be used socially in the local area.

Pupil 1

"It depends who's there for me. Because I know quite a few people in my village. So, like, if I know them as like a friend or something, I would speak like a whole conversation with them, and then they'll help me learn if I say something wrong."

The pupils who attend the immersion centres in the secondary sector note the value of the Welsh language in terms of casual employment, while others emphasise the importance of being able to communicate with people in the village through the medium of Welsh, recognising support for the language and their journey to acquire the language locally.

"I have a job at the (name of local pub), so people speak to me in Welsh. I have to say, "I can't speak Welsh yet." So it will help me communicate with people."

Home Attitudes and Support

The data highlights the significant impact of family attitudes and activity on the language progress of pupils who learn Welsh in the immersion centres. There are examples of parents and other members of the family getting to grips with learning Welsh themselves to support the children and engage with the community, which nurtures stronger engagement with the language outside the classroom and encourages active use of the language in the home.

Pupil 13

"I tell my mum and dad what I learnt today. And I do with my brother sometimes, but not much because, usually, he's messing around somewhere other than with me. I just speak Welsh with my mum and dad. My dad's learning Welsh on Tuesdays."

Pupil 1

"My parents are going to a Welsh class, so we all try and help each other."

In several cases, pupils shared what they have learnt with their parents and siblings, strengthening the use of the Welsh language beyond the classroom. This emotional and practical support contributes to the pupils' confidence and linguistic motivation.

Immersion Teacher 4

"Parents' attitude is important, isn't it. It feeds in to so much."

Additionally, the data noted that teachers witness a difference when positive attitudes towards the Welsh language come from the home, and when the Welsh language's social and cultural value is recognised by parents, the pupils' attitudes towards learning the language is more positive.

Pupil 2

"Pupil 2: My nan knows a lot of people in (village name omitted), like here and about, so she introduces me to people, and more than half of them probably only speak Welsh. And, obviously, I speak back, and I try to do it. They're normally quite impressed when I speak it 'cause they don't know that I'm learning Welsh."

***Interviewer:** And how does that make you feel?*

***Pupil 2** Definitely happy and proud. I'm progressing. I'm learning. I'm not at a stop point where I don't know anything. I'm moving forward in my knowledge."*

The data highlighted the importance of the attitudes of the older generation in supporting pupils to learn Welsh, along with family support to nurture positive attitudes towards learning and using the Welsh language. Often, learners relied on the linguistic capital of older members of the family, especially grandparents, who enable valid opportunities to use Welsh in the community.

Further evidence showed that a pupil's family takes an active part in supporting the pupil to learn the language outside the immersion centre by using digital resources such as Google Classroom to strengthen the learning at home. These examples suggested that family members, especially in

Welsh-speaking communities, operate as positive linguistic models and offer emotional and practical support that contributes to the learner's linguistic development and confidence.

Conclusion

The evidence gathered shows that pupils enjoy attending the immersion centres and witness progress in their ability to use the Welsh language. Nevertheless, teachers at the language centres and at the mainstream schools feel significant frustrations around the immersion model in its current form. The design of the current model has not fully considered the pupils' well-being when they return to mainstream. Teachers at the centres, mainstream teachers and pupils alike often feel frustrated with the model, be that due to missing engagement time in a specialist space, insufficient time to complete tasks, or lack of systems to transfer information effectively enough.

While a range of very robust practices, and specialist language teaching methods are used across the immersion centres, the support available in the mainstream varies a lot, with some robust and effective practices to be seen, but there are other practices that do not succeed in supporting the pupils efficiently enough when they return on a Friday.

This next section presents two Case Studies that attest to the range of experiences seen as part of the observation data that was collected for this study.

Case Studies

Case Study 1

Background

Child A, a pupil in Year 6, moved to the local area during the summer of 2024. The language of the home was English, and they were enrolled at a small primary school which provided education in mixed year classes. Pupil A began attending the Language Immersion Centre at the start of the autumn term, following a two-week period in the mainstream school.

Early Weeks: Weeks 1-2

During the first week at the Immersion Centre, Child A was very enthusiastic and responding well to the immersion education, by engaging robustly, displaying a willingness to answer questions and using the Welsh language confidently. They quickly established positive relationships with peers showing their obvious delight in contributing to class activities.

Upon their return to mainstream school during the second week, Child A was participating in a class task in a small group with two other pupils. After only two weeks of experience in the immersion programme, they demonstrated a firm commitment to speaking Welsh. The pupil was able to communicate basic needs (such as asking to go to the toilet) in Welsh with confidence but was more hesitant in trying to answer questions in front of the whole class. On a small group level, they were much more confident, using strategies such as code-switching (English and Welsh) and working with peers to overcome any linguistic barriers. The teacher provided continuous support by providing feedback, encouragement and modelling the language regularly.

During 'play time' or 'Amser Aur' (golden time), Child A used Welsh independently in activities, e.g. mathematical activities on a computer, although the use of English was also prominent in the social interaction.

Development during Weeks 8-9

Upon returning to the mainstream school in week 8, the school's Welsh-speaking ethos was apparent and effective in strengthening and developing Child A's linguistic confidence. They used Welsh naturally when communicating with staff members and peers, only relying on code-switching when they were uncertain or expressing more complex ideas. The staff always responded in Welsh. This encouraged Child A's use of the Welsh language.

During rehearsals for the Christmas show, Child A demonstrated an obvious ability to participate in Welsh cultural activities. They used visual strategies, such as following the teacher's lead, to cope with uncertainty, and they clearly enjoyed it when familiar with the content.

By week 9 in the Language Centre, Child A was able to introduce themselves confidently by using basic Welsh sentences in front of the class. Child A was able to make effective use of language strategies, asking for support in Welsh first. The teacher's consistent support enables Child A to overcome linguistic barriers by developing confidence and independence when using the Welsh language.

Generally, Child A demonstrated significant increase in confidence and engagement with the Welsh language as a direct result of a structured immersion programme and the mainstream school's continuous support. Child A established positive and strong relationships with peers and staff members, demonstrating enthusiasm and an appetite to learn and use Welsh.

Case Study 2

Background

Child B was a pupil in Year 5, who had moved to the local area recently. The language at home was English and the child had enrolled at a large primary school which provided education per academic year. Pupil B began attending the Language Immersion Centre after spending three weeks at the mainstream school.

Early Weeks: Weeks 1-2

Pupil B engaged appropriately with the Welsh language during the Week 1 observation. Although Pupil B was not confident in using the language, they were willing to engage with fun activities in the classroom, or oral tasks with peers. Pupil B responded to the teacher's questions, despite not being confident in doing so. There was an effort to use the Welsh language with teachers and support staff, e.g. to ask for equipment or permission.

In Mainstream, Pupil B was observed at the beginning of a lesson, where children in the class were asked to express what they had enjoyed during the week. The children in the class raised their hands and discussed the matter with enthusiasm. However, Pupil B did not appear to follow and continued with their colouring work without participating in the discussion. The teacher naturally repeated the children's responses and used techniques to reiterate the learning e.g. clicking fingers and pointing towards sentences on the whiteboard. Although Pupil B did try to engage with the task towards the end, they were not actively included in the discussion.

When Pupil B was given instructions, it was done so through the medium of English. There was no opportunity for Pupil B to complete the same work as the rest of the pupils in the class, and there was a tendency to draw attention to this, highlighting the difference rather than attempting to use inclusive immersion teaching methods to support pupil B to acquire the language.

When the teacher was not supervising the group's interaction in the classroom, the pupils turned to English and Pupil B was not part of those discussions either. The situation continued on the school yard, with pupils interacting in English, and Child B playing alone until they were joined by two pupils from another class, who also attended the immersion unit. Pupil B interacted with those two pupils and other pupils in English.

During a Maths lesson, Pupil B worked on a task that was different and easier than the task given to her peers in the class. Later, when half the class moved to a drama lesson, Pupil B continued to work alone without any further guidance on the work.

There was an example of Pupil B attempting to use the language when asking to go the toilet in Welsh, but rather than praise Pupil B for using the language, Pupil B was reminded to use 'os gwelwch yn dda' (please) at the end of her sentence.

Development during Weeks 8-9

Upon returning to the mainstream school in week 8, the children were all rehearsing for the Christmas show in the hall. However, Pupil B (along with the other immersion pupils) had been instructed to work on *Chromebook* to complete the work set by the immersion unit. Pupil B was unsure of the procedure for using laptops and whether a laptop had already been allocated for Pupil B. Additionally, there were other difficulties in trying to log in (e.g., could not find a password). Pupil B appeared unsure and confused, and needed support from the administrative team to assist them with the work.

Upon returning to the hall to join the other pupils, Pupil B was told to sit on a bench at the back of the hall, separate to the remainder of the class. Pupil B was again asked to work on a different task to the remainder of the class. Although Pupil B appeared happy and was communicating in English with other peers who were also pupils in the immersion provision, Pupil B was asked to be quiet and there was no opportunity to use the target language in a classroom environment. There was no support to encourage use of the Welsh language as a social language or as a means of communicating with staff or other pupils.

On the school yard, Pupil B and one other member of the immersion unit looked happy and were engaging in social play with other children. They were part of the same group and displaying signs of social integration. All communication between the children was done in English.

Pupil B's case demonstrates complexity in trying to support immersion pupils in the mainstream settings in a meaningful way. Further opportunities need to be considered when supporting every immersion pupil at mainstream school in terms of accessing the Welsh language, and in terms of the culture of the school, the classroom community and the broader school and when developing relationships with staff and peers.

By week 9 in the Language Centre, Pupil B was demonstrating much more confidence in interacting with other pupils and in using the Welsh language. Nevertheless, there was a tendency to use English with peers in the classroom even unless the teacher reminded the pupils to use Welsh. Pupil B's language when interacting informally on the school yard was English.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

This study has highlighted several strengths within the immersion provision. There are robust teaching methods in place to support pupils on their journey to becoming new speakers. There is effective collaboration between the centres and organisations, such as Learn Welsh - North West, to support families with learning the language.

The pupils who attend the centres enjoy them overall and view it as a positive experience. Nevertheless, research has highlighted challenges and defects in the current 10-week model.

This detailed study has highlighted that most key stakeholders, including immersion teachers and leaders in mainstream schools, find there are defects in the current model, which is impacting the effectiveness with which the pupils acquire the Welsh language, as well as their well-being and academic engagement when they return to mainstream education on Fridays.

The next section will highlight the main findings that emerged around the research questions, **before presenting four recommendations to Cyngor Gwynedd** to develop the immersion provision in accordance with the research questions.

How suitable and effective is the model in ensuring pupils' use of the target language when they return to the mainstream school?

The current model is not as effective as it could be in ensuring pupils' use of the target language when they return to mainstream schools on Fridays. At most of the observed locations, there was a lack of focused planning to support the immersion pupils when they returned to the mainstream school to use the language.

There was evidence of pupils returning to mainstream settings and the Welsh language not being sufficiently reinforced. More often than not, pupils completed work that was unsuitable on the mainstream day, and rarely engaged with the usual curricular content, nor were they given the opportunity to intentionally apply the target language.

Undoubtedly, Welsh was not the informal language of most of the school pupils in mainstream contexts (with the exception of some smaller schools in rural communities), and this was particularly true outside the classroom e.g. on the school yard.

There is room to strengthen communication structures between the language centres and the mainstream schools when planning and preparing curricular content across the ten weeks, to support the pupils' linguistic development in Welsh, but also in subjects across the mainstream curriculum for them to have a better understanding of the content of what they are learning on Fridays.

How effective is the model in terms of enabling learners to acquire Welsh sufficiently?

It was firmly noted that losing ten days from the traditional immersion timetable in the Primary sector does have an impact on pupils' confidence and engagement with the language and it also impacts their well-being. Supporting the pupils was challenging for the mainstream teachers, and the school structures did not generally facilitate or reinforce this gap in the immersion pupils' education in an effective manner.

Nevertheless, by securing investment to support this vision and model, there is a foundation here to develop a model that would embed immersion education across the local authority's schools and within teachers' pedagogy. By drawing on the robust practices observed at the language centres and investing in better systems to develop professional learning opportunities for mainstream school staff, amending this model could lead to an immersion provision that would lead the sector, nationally and beyond.

Are there opportunities to further strengthen the Welsh language in the Immersion System and in mainstream schools?

Although good practices to strengthen the Welsh language have been observed and noted in the language centres, there is certainly room to strengthen these opportunities on Fridays. Resources were shared by the immersion centres through mediums such as Google Classroom, however; these resources do not necessarily always reach the relevant mainstream class teachers who support the immersion pupils. Time is also a factor for mainstream teachers who have received the resources but find it challenging to familiarise themselves with the work and prepare around it. The language centres are not necessarily aware of the curricular work or themes followed in mainstream provision, therefore there are no opportunities to reinforce the mainstream education at the centres or during one-to-one sessions in the mainstream. By redesigning support arrangements, this could be an opportunity to strengthen collaboration and information sharing between the two settings.

Although most schools that were observed make use of the Language Charter resources, the informal use of English among pupils in mainstream schools is currently an enormous challenge across the schools that were observed in the local authority. There is room, therefore, to consider broader plans to implement the Welsh language more robustly in these spaces, and not in terms of immersion pupils only. Without due attention to pupil's social use of English, there is a risk that the progress achieved by immersion pupils from Monday to Thursday is futile if the use of the Welsh language is not normalised in mainstream schools.

There is close collaboration between some key stakeholders and the immersion centres, but these could be strengthened further by also securing input from the mainstream schools when identifying suitable extracurricular opportunities in the local communities for pupils and their families to be able to learn and use the language.

How suitable and effective is the model when considering pupils' well-being during the immersion period?

Attending the mainstream schools for a day a week, especially during the initial weeks when they do not have a strong grasp of the language means that the majority of pupils feel insecure when returning to the mainstream school. This can have a negative impact on pupils' well-being in some cases. The pupils are happy at the immersion centres, and they nurture strong relationships with their peers, which appears to be more challenging in the mainstream.

Recommendations

1. There is a need to revise the current immersion model to ensure sufficient contact hours for pupils in immersion spaces, and that they do not receive fewer contact hours in their journey to fluency. We recommend examining well-being and emotional assurance alongside pupil language development when planning the model. There are opportunities to consider developing the use of digital technology to support continuous contact with the mainstream rather than returning to the mainstream during the first half and integrating gradually with the mainstream during the second half of the immersion block as a further consideration. It is suggested that the model of returning to mainstream on Fridays should be revised to returning on Mondays with an opportunity to feed language models that are linked to the pupils' class work and provide opportunities to make use of that language by maintaining contact virtually.
2. Consideration should be given on both a national and local level to how to strengthen professional learning pathways for mainstream teachers, supply teachers and assistants to develop effective immersion education strategies to support Welsh language acquisition in cooperation with the immersion centres and experts and embed them in the pedagogy of all teachers. With the advent of Yr Athrofa as part of the Education Bill (Wales), Adnodd (Welsh Government) and the new national plans for Professional Development for teachers, it would be appropriate to ensure that immersion pedagogy is an integral part of this support for teachers.
3. More effective collaboration structures should be developed between the language centres and the mainstream schools during the immersion period and beyond. There is room to look at how the immersion staff can be used in the mainstream on Fridays to support and assist the pupils more effectively within the mainstream school, rather than removing the pupils from the classroom to work in isolation with the immersion teacher.
4. It is recommended to explore whole-school methods in the mainstream schools to boost children's confidence when using the Welsh language. Particular attention should be given to the linguistic culture of the school yard, as this informal environment is not only central to the linguistic development of immersion pupils, but also to the school ethos.

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