

Committee	Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee
Title of Report	Education and the Welsh language: A new vision for the Immersion Education System towards 2032 and beyond
Date of meeting	10 June, 2021
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Relevant Cabinet Member	Councillor Cemlyn Rees Williams

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1** The School Standards and Organisation Act (2013) became law in Wales on 4 March 2013. The Act places a statutory duty on Local Authorities to prepare and submit a Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP) to Welsh Government. These initial plans came into effect on 1 April 2014 for a period of three years up to March 2017. These plans outline the way Local Authorities intend to achieve aims and targets set by Welsh Government and which are outlined in the Welsh Medium Education Strategy.
- 1.2** During 2017-18, a consultation period was held on the Welsh in Education Strategic Plans (Wales) Regulations 2019 together with the draft Guidelines. This means that the new WESP will come into force in September 2022, and that they are 10-year planning documents.
- 1.3** Over the past few months, the Education Department has been working on the content of this new WESP, with the intention of holding an informal consultation on it, before moving on to a public consultation in the autumn.
- 1.4** Immersion education is pivotal to the Gwynedd education language policy and the new WESP and, consequently, the new vision presented for the immersion education system towards 2032 and beyond, is pivotal to the delivery and success of the WESP and the associated outcomes over the next ten years.

2. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 2.1** In this report along with the associated appendices, the following are presented to the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee:
- A proposed new immersion education system and vision for Gwynedd
 - A copy of the Summary Report: Gwynedd Language Centres' Pilot Scheme for reference.
- 2.2** As a result of this report, the Cabinet Member for Education is eager to receive the observations of the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee on his vision for the immersion education system towards 2032 and beyond:

"My vision is to have a Welsh-medium and bilingual education system that puts the needs of all our learners at the heart of our provision.

I would like to see a flexible immersion education system, which provides first class education and training, supporting new learners to successfully acquire the Welsh Language, as well as ensuring high quality provision, experiences and support through the medium of Welsh that responds to the needs of the learners and their families, and will enable them to develop as independent and confident bilingual learners and to succeed and thrive."



Cemlyn Rees Williams
Cabinet Member for
Education

3. THE CASE FOR CHANGE

3.1 The main case for change and the need for a new vision for the Gwynedd immersion education system can be summarised to the following fields, and further details about these can be found below:

- Place the learner's needs at the centre
- Modernise the provision and make it contemporary
- Working in partnership
- An opportunity to create a first-class learning environment
- New opportunities as a result of COVID-19
- Lessons learnt as a result of the Pilot Scheme implemented at the request of the Cabinet.

3.2 Place the learner's needs at the centre

- The need for the system to promote the achievement and welfare of Gwynedd newcomers to acquire the Welsh language while keeping in contact with their local school and peers at the same time.
- The need for the system to be able to assist parents and carers to understand the value of Welsh-medium education to support their children.

3.3 Modernise the provision and make it contemporary

- The need for the system to respond to the needs of the learners and the curriculum.
- The need to invest in the infrastructure for the system including digital resources.

3.4 Working in partnership

- The need for the Education Department and schools to work in partnership and take joint ownership of the immersion education system.
- The need for the immersion education system to provide guidance, support and resources to schools to enable them to support learners to make further progress in terms of their Welsh language confidence/skills.

3.5 An opportunity to create a first-class learning environment

- An opportunity to invest £1.1million of Welsh Government Welsh-medium education capital grant into the immersion education system, improving the learning environment and infrastructure.

3.6 New opportunities as a result of COVID-19

- Blended learning provision i.e. the Language Centres provided blended learning as a result of the numerous lockdowns, namely face-to-face teaching at school, live learning sessions via Teams, together with work on Google Classrooms. This was recognised as excellent practice by Estyn.
- The schools are asking for immersion education expertise and resources to support the Welsh language to be disseminated across the system.

3.7 Lessons learnt as a result of the Pilot Scheme

- The pilot highlighted the need to consider the welfare of learners, and keep in contact with their peers; many are finding it difficult to blend in back at their local school after their time at the Centre.
- The need to strengthen the relationship with schools to enable further progress in terms of support for language development.

3.8 Therefore, based on the case for change, our vision for learners who are new learners of the Welsh language is that they have:

"Access to an excellent immersion education system that provides flexible and sustainable learning experiences of a high standard that equips them as independent learners who have the information and Welsh language skills to enable them to move forward.

To provide an effective transition from immersion education to the local school, ensuring a high standard of experiences and support through the medium of Welsh, that responds to the needs of learners and their families to enable them to succeed and thrive."

3.9 Our vision is to have an immersion education system that places the needs of learners at the centre of our provision. We would like to see a flexible system, which provides first class immersion education for the learners, nurturing their Welsh language skills to enable them to succeed and thrive in our schools, becoming confident bilingual speakers.

3.10 Details about the objectives that form the basis of the vision are provided in Appendix 1, namely:

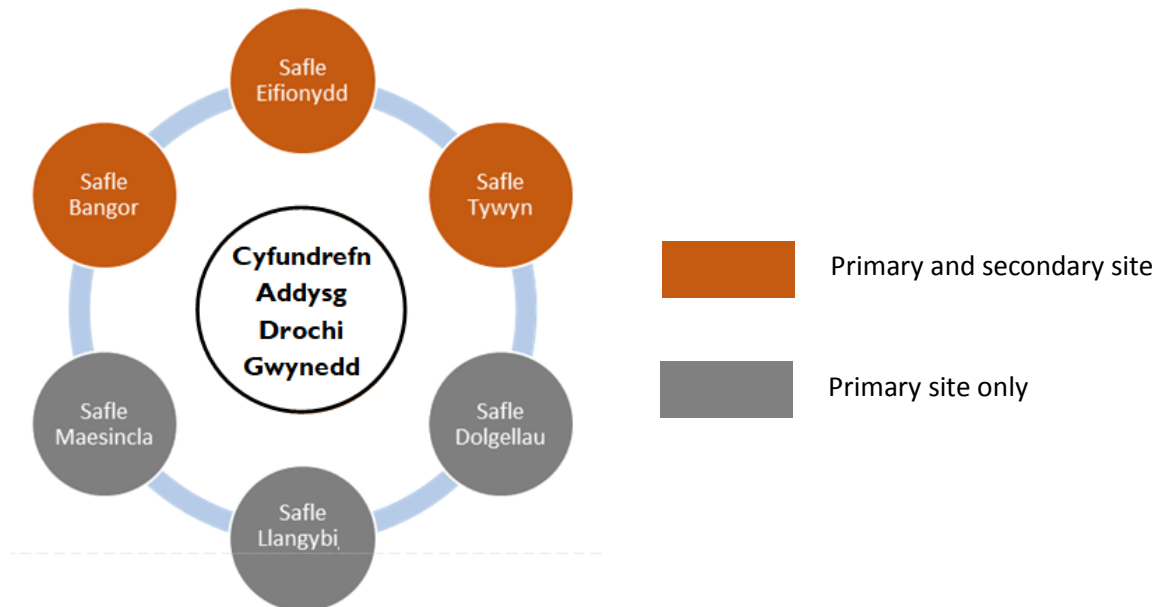
- Teaching and Learning
- Learning Environment
- Curriculum
- Support for Learners
- Financial Resources

3.11 In order to deliver the vision, purpose, aim and objectives, we hope to invest £1.1m of Welsh Government Welsh-medium education capital grant into our immersion education system in Gwynedd to ensure a state-of-the-art learning environment, with modern facilities for 21st century learners and educators.

3.12 This capital investment will facilitate the establishment of two completely new immersion education sites in Gwynedd, located in strategic areas of the county and areas of linguistic significance, namely Tywyn and Bangor. It is also intended to improve the facilities in the Eifionydd immersion education site which again is strategically located in the centre of the county. These three immersion education sites will offer primary and secondary provision jointly, bridging years 5-9.

3.13 It is also intended to relocate the Dolgellau Language Centre to a larger site in order to offer the provision to more children, and the Dolgellau site, together with Llangybi and Maesincla, will provide immersion education to years 2-4 of primary schools.

3.14 As a result of the investment, six sites will offer provision to primary age learners and three sites will offer provision for secondary learners, with flexibility between the sites as needed.



4. THE VISION FOR THE IMMERSION PROVISION

4.1 In the new system, the on-site primary and secondary immersion education provision will be a 4 day-a-week provision, for a period of 8-10 weeks. This would be a means of ensuring that the immersion provision can be maintained in full for the three school terms.

4.2 Learners will attend their local school for one day every week, which would be a way for the learners to continue contact with their local schools, ensuring continuation of their immersion education in Welsh there, as well as having full access to the curriculum.

4.3 For one day a week, when the learners attend their local school, the staff of the immersion education system would be available to support the learners in the schools, assist in the other immersion education sites, provide support for the learners from a distance, give guidance to the schools to support the learners, as well as create and provide resources in response to the need of the Welsh-medium education field and immersion education more generally.

4.4 For the remaining period in every term where the learners will return to their local schools, the immersion education system staff will implement a full programme of blended learning, namely face-to-face teaching at school, live learning sessions via Teams, as well as distance learning via Google Classrooms to ensure additional support for the learners to assist them to make further progress to acquire the Welsh language at school.

5. FUNDING THE VISION TOWARDS 2032 AND BEYOND

5.1 It is intended for the Immersion Education System towards 2032 and beyond to be funded from three different sources, namely:

- EIG Grant
- Schools (central)
- Education Department

5.2 EIG Grant

This is the core grant to fund the Immersion Education System, however, as is known, as a result of inflation and an increase in costs, this grant alone is not sufficient to fund the provision in full.

5.3 Schools

The immersion education system is a specialist service and pivotal to the implementation of the Gwynedd education language policy. Consequently, it is intended to ask for a financial contribution from the schools which will be a means of ensuring joint-ownership and a fit-for-purpose immersion education system towards 2032 and beyond.

5.4 Education Department

The Education Department already contributes to the costs of the service, and this contribution will continue, through:

- Match funding for the EIG grant
- Contributing towards the transport costs to the immersion provision.

6. SUMMARY

6.1 Above all else, the Immersion Education System towards 2032 and beyond is seen as pivotal in preventing the decline in the number of Welsh-speakers in Gwynedd by:

- providing pioneering and outstanding immersion education to new-comers to the County which will enable them to thrive with their peers in our bilingual education system and consequently they will be able to blend into the Welsh and Welsh-speaking society of their local school without feeling that they are 'different' or excluded from the usual experiences of their peers;
- providing support for families to embrace the Welsh language, support the education of their children, and benefit from cultural and community experiences through the medium of Welsh;
- supporting and equipping our schools to nurture our learners' skills and confidence in the Welsh language;
- supporting and equipping our schools to nurture positive attitudes towards the Welsh language.

6.2 For reference, a copy of the Summary Report: Gwynedd Language Centres' Pilot Scheme is provided in Appendix 2.

7. NEXT STEPS

7.1 During June, it is intended to hold an informal consultation on the vision for the immersion education system towards 2032 and beyond with key stakeholders.

7.2 The Cabinet Member for Education will consider the observations received as part of the informal consultation, together with the observations of the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee, prior to presenting the vision to the Cabinet.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 Members are asked to:

- give observations on the proposed vision for the immersion education system towards 2032 and beyond.