

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	23 March 2023
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Relevant Cabinet Member	Councillor Beca Brown

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 This report is presented at the request of members of the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee.

1.2 By means of this report, background information is presented about the vision of the immersion education system, along with providing answers to the questions of the scrutinisers received in advance about the arrangements for the immersion education provision in Gwynedd.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 On 10 June 2021, the following were brought before 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.

A copy of the report and appendices can be obtained by following the links below:

[Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee Report](#)

[Appendix 1](#)

[Appendix 2](#)

2.2 Following that, on 6 July 2021 we went before the Cabinet asking them to approve and implement the vision of the *“Immersion Education System towards 2032 and beyond”*, including to invest £1.1 million of Welsh Government Welsh-medium education capital funding to establish new immersion education sites in Tywyn and Bangor, as well as improving existing facilities at Porthmadog, in accordance with the report.

A copy of the report and relevant appendices can be obtained by following the links below:

[Cabinet Report](#)

[Appendix 1](#)

[Appendix 2](#)

[Appendix 3](#)

3. SCRUTINISERS' QUESTIONS

3.1 *Why does Gwynedd not have a plan in place to ensure that there is immersion progression for children who move from 'cylchoedd meithrin' to primary schools? Children are not sent to Immersion Centres until they reach year 2.*

The aim of the Language Policy is to ensure that all pupils within the county have the appropriate linguistic skills in Welsh and English. The expectation is the same for every school. As part of the policy, the 'Cylchoedd Meithrin', under the guidance of Mudiad Meithrin and the Authority in terms of nursery education provision and the Foundation Phase, implement immersion principles to ensure that children from a very early age will acquire the Welsh language as soon as possible, or further nurture their confidence and skills in the Welsh language. It is therefore expected that nursery children up to the age of 7 are immersed in the Welsh language completely naturally within the provision of the 'Cylchoedd Meithrin' and the mainstream provision of the Foundation Phase of our schools here in Gwynedd. This is to account for pupils not being referred to the Immersion System until they reach year 2.

3.2 *Previously, I understand that Language Centres immersed children for an entire week. Anglesey continues to immerse for five days per week. Now, in Gwynedd, children return to schools for a few days per week. Why have you changed the previous arrangement?*

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
- Work 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

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.

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.

Work 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.

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.

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 extended across the system.

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.

3.3 *When children who are being immersed in a Centre go back to the schools for one day or more per week, in what way would they be further immersed in the schools?*

Pupils return to mainstream schools every Friday. System staff will spend one session/lesson supporting them in their class. The level of support varies and depends on the individuals and their class. In some schools the teachers ask for support within the class to help the latecomers cope with a cross-curricular task in Welsh. At other times the class teachers send the child along with a group of pupils who would also benefit from the support to a separate room to practise patterns - play specific games to reinforce vocabulary, pattern or syntax. In addition the staff of the centres prepare specific activities based on what was learned at the centre during the week. This is an opportunity for the child to assimilate his/her linguistic skills on a simple level to begin with and this is also an opportunity for the class teacher to have access to resources that are also suitable for other children within their classes. These regular visits are an opportunity for the teachers in the mainstream and the peers of the latecomers to understand the immersion process and see the children's development and progress over time. It is also an opportunity for the individuals to gain confidence and get used to the Welsh language outside the walls of the centre. The staff in the centres present the language in a visual way using many different gestures and expressions to convey meaning - gradually returning to mainstream schools is an opportunity for the learners to become more independent over time and try to cope gradually without all the scaffolding they have in the language units.

3.4 *What is the extent of the 'immersion method' training available to primary teachers and assistants?*

3.5 *Do teachers use and espouse the 'immersion method' or do they continue to use the 'sandwich' method which makes extensive use of English?*

In the primary schools, most teachers use effective immersion methods. At the beginning of the educational year, specific training was held for the teachers and Foundation Phase assistants of each school in each cluster within the county. The training was based on the principles of successful immersion in the Estyn Report: *'Welsh Immersion Education - Strategies and approaches to support 3 to 11-year-old learners'*. During the training the teachers of the language units modelled the principles one by one and showed examples of

how to use them effectively. In addition, an Oracy in Welsh plan was shared that mapped a linguistic journey across Progression Steps 1 and 2. As a follow-up to this training we will hold a session for KS2 teachers expanding the plan to include Progression Step 3.

3.6 Do teachers make actual use of their ability to refer children (except for latecomers) to be immersed?

- **Are there annual statistics of how many children (excluding latecomers) each school refers to the Immersion System and how many of those children went to Immersion Centres?**
- **If teachers make few referrals to the Immersion System, what kind of further encouragement does the Council believe should be given to ensure that teachers change their habits?**
- **What is the extent of the Language Refreshing that the Language Centres offer to 'mainstream learners'?**
- **Which indicators do the Council, Schools and the Centres use to ensure that the Language Refreshing has been successful?**

The main purpose of the Immersion Centres since their establishment in 1984 is to support newcomers to acquire the Welsh language through intensive immersion. However, the staff of the Language Centres over the years have responded to calls from time to time from schools for assistance to develop or encourage the oracy skills of learners who are not newcomers. In addition, Cefn Coch language centre held a language refresher course in the summer term from time to time, in response to a demand from schools that the centre served, with a specific focus on year 6 learners who were transferring to secondary school.

Statistics on the number of learners referred to the Access Forum April 2022-2023

Baseline Assessment of learners who attended the Language Units	No Welsh at all - just moved to Gwynedd	A very elementary knowledge, e.g. days of the week, some colours - having spent less than six months in Gwynedd	Understands Welsh but very lacking in confidence. Has spent more than a year here in Gwynedd and within the education system
Summer Term 2022	22%	19%	59%
Autumn Term 2022	58%	12%	30%
Spring Term 2023	58%	27%	15%

4. DEVELOPMENTS IN THE IMMERSION EDUCATION SYSTEM

4.1 Cynllun ABERWLA

This scheme was started with funding from the Welsh Government's Immersion Revenue grant in 2021-2022. Author and former children's laureate for Wales, Anni Llŷn, was commissioned to write a new Immersion Plan for the county's latecomers. This was a great opportunity to update the current plan within the language centres which dated back to the 1980s but which was also innovative in its day. Receiving the Welsh Government Immersion grant has enabled us as an Immersion Education System to incorporate elements of the new

plan on a digital virtual platform which gives the work a completely new and innovative look. Animated Technologies, an animation company from M-SParc Gaerwen, has been working hard with us to make this vision a reality.

The plan created by Anni is full of creative buildings, e.g. garage, Huw Panad's café and gadget shop together with interesting characters. The aim for the future is therefore to create all these digitally on the virtual platform in order to enrich the learners' experiences as they acquire the Welsh language. A request for further funding on behalf of the Department has been approved by the Welsh Government to develop this project to its full potential. We will continue to work with Animated Technologies and Bangor University to extend this innovative and revolutionary resource in the language immersion field. The resource will foster healthy attitudes towards the Welsh language as an everyday language and a living language, supporting our latecomers here in Gwynedd but available to be used all over Wales! The Government has already increased the immersion grant to Gwynedd by £150,000 in order to share the project nationally and work is ongoing with three local authorities to trial the educational resource. This is a very exciting time for us here in Gwynedd in the field of language immersion and we look forward to launching the finalised Plan on the virtual platform at the National Eisteddfod of Wales, Llŷn ac Eifionydd, to be held in Boduan in 2023.

4.2 Bangor Catchment Area Foundation Phase Immersion Project

Receiving the immersion grant from the Welsh Government has also allowed us to employ a teacher for a period of three years to operate as an outreach teacher to provide a Welsh-language immersion service to embed the essentials of language immersion in the Foundation Phase in the more Anglicised areas of the county, e.g. Bangor - and specifically Ysgol Ein Harglwyddes. The role of the teacher is to jointly plan, train and teach in the context of the essentials of language immersion. She presents appropriate immersion language patterns to all classes in the Foundation Phase at Ysgol Ein Harglwyddes and models linguistic planning across the Areas of Learning and Experience, and implements those plans within the zones in order to ensure opportunities for the learners to reinforce the language patterns in various contexts, e.g. Language patterns - progression steps 1 and 2.

This investment undoubtedly contributes to the Education Department's commitment to increase the provision of Welsh at Ysgol Ein Harglwyddes and therefore act on the requirements of the language categorisation process of non-statutory schools. The legacy of this investment over time is that the confidence and proficiency of the staff to teach through the medium of Welsh will increase significantly. In addition, the project will be an immersion provision plan for the future. The teacher's input will also be a means of starting the process of changing the image and culture of the school during a period of preparation to move to a new building in Glanadda as a result of investment from the Sustainable Learning Communities programme. The teacher will also be responsible for establishing a partnership with Ysgol Santes Helen in Caernarfon which is also a Catholic School, but a naturally Welsh-medium school, in order to share good practice and promote collaboration to provide curricular and extra-curricular experiences within faith schools.

4.3 Years 5 and 6 Learners' Support Pack to encourage them to choose a Welsh-medium Education route as they transfer to secondary school in the Bangor catchment area.

In the Bangor cluster we have a cluster of primary schools feeding two secondary schools, namely Tryfan and Friars. Traditionally Tryfan has been admitting children who are confidently bilingual and keen to follow an education path through the medium of Welsh. On the other hand, Friars has provided bilingual education with the emphasis in favour of English. In the current categorisation process, Tryfan falls into category 3 and Friars into category 3T. Linguistic diversity within the catchment area's primary schools also exists, although all of them with the exception of Ysgol Ein Harglwyddes naturally fall into category 3. In light of this we as an Authority have strategic plans to encourage and direct more learners to choose a Welsh-medium education route. Our aim with this project is therefore to increase the number of learners over the course of three years who choose to follow a Welsh-medium route when transferring to secondary school in Bangor. Achieving this goal will contribute towards Outcome 3 of the Gwynedd WESP which is 'more children continuing to improve their Welsh-language skills when transferring from one stage of their statutory education to another'.

The Welsh Government Immersion Grant investment 2022-2025 will enable us to establish partnerships with Urdd Gobaith Cymru, Sbarduno and Cwmni'r Frân Wen to offer specific provision to years 5 and 6 pupils of target schools in the Bangor catchment area.

We will offer an interesting, exciting and appealing provision over two terms to the pupils over time to ignite their interest through the medium of Welsh and to improve and reinforce their skills in the Welsh language to become confident to be able to follow a Welsh-medium secondary education route when transferring from primary to secondary but also embedding their desire to do so, seeing the educational, social and economic benefits.

4.4 Transition pack from the Language Centres back to the mother school.

Following the establishment of the new Immersion Education System here in Gwynedd, we have restructured the course for latecomers and children who lack confidence in the Welsh language within our language centres. We now offer a primary and secondary course for four days a week over a period of 10 weeks. By doing this it enables us to offer support and an after-care service to the children as they return to their mother school regularly. This gives them the opportunity to keep in touch with their friends and also familiarise themselves with what is happening within the curricular context of their class. In addition, this transition day promotes the contact and relationship between the staff of the language units and the staff of mainstream schools. In order to facilitate arrangements and offer the best support to the learners we are currently creating a support package to assist the learners in the mainstream during the immersion course.

The package of cross-curricular resources is based on the principles of immersion and offers learners regular opportunities to practise and reinforce language patterns, syntax and vocabulary.

The pack is available on Hwb's digital platform in the form of a Google Classroom which is a familiar resource for our teachers in the centres and schools. The resource has a digital format, and the provision is wide-ranging and in multimedia form to ensure enriching

experiences for the latecomers and their peers in the mainstream to acquire and reinforce language patterns and vocabulary.

5 NEXT STEPS FOR THE IMMERSION EDUCATION SYSTEM

5.1 Over the coming years, we will:

- Extend the virtual Aberwla project nationally.
- Create short courses during the end of the summer term and the beginning of the autumn term specifically for learners who are transitioning from primary to secondary.
- Continue to foster professional enquiry skills among the staff of the System when creating case studies in the context of Immersion as a further development to the Webinars developed in 2022.

6 RECOMMENDATIONS

6.3 Members are asked to:

- provide any observations on the immersion education provision in Gwynedd, and the next steps for the Gwynedd immersion education system.