

Update – Notice of Motion presented by Councillor Rhys Tudur

The Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on [14 September 2023](#), gave consideration to a notice of motion presented by Councillor Rhys Tudur which was adopted by the full Council on [4 May 2023](#), namely:

“In order for the Council to be innovative in its method of monitoring the implementation of Welsh medium education and progress in detail and effectively in our schools, I ask the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee to consider the most appropriate way of gathering data and monitoring the Welsh-medium provision in every secondary school against the baselines of the categories in which the schools are included.”

See below, for information, minutes of the discussion on the item 'Gwynedd Category 3 Secondary Schools Scrutiny Investigation Report' at the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee's meeting on 14 September 2023. The Scrutiny Investigation report can be viewed by following this link -

<https://www.gwynedd.llyw.cymru/en/Council/Documents---Council/Scrutiny/Gwynedd-Category-3-Secondary-Schools.pdf>

6. GWYNEDD CATEGORY 3 SECONDARY SCHOOLS SCRUTINY INVESTIGATION REPORT

The Cabinet Member for Education, the Head of Education Department, the Assistant Head: Corporate Services, the Assistant Head: Secondary and the Head of Gwynedd's Immersion Education System were welcomed to the meeting.

The Chair of the Investigation, Councillor Paul Rowlinson, presented the final report of the Gwynedd Category 3 Secondary Schools Scrutiny Investigation and members of the scrutiny committee were asked to consider the content, make observations and ask any relevant questions, proposing any amendments and approving the report.

The Chair of the Investigation suggested that the section on GwE should not be discussed in detail, as it was understood that GwE disagreed with some of the issues identified, but it was emphasised that Recommendation 17 only requested further discussion between the Education Authority and GwE.

The Chair of the Investigation thanked the Investigation Team, and especially the Lead Officer, for their work, and thanked the staff, pupils and governors of the three schools for giving of their time to present the evidence.

The Chair thanked the members of the Investigation for their work. The members were then invited to ask questions, offer observations, or propose amendments to the report.

Special thanks were given to the pupils of the schools for their willingness to speak extremely openly with the members of the Investigation.

It was emphasised that there was a need to give more support to organisations that helped children and young people to speak Welsh socially, such as the Young Farmers

and the Urdd, and to present them in a positive way in the schools. It was noted that Cyngor Gwynedd had lost its youth clubs and that it was necessary to find out what social opportunities were available to encourage the use of the Welsh language.

It was suggested that the figures in Appendix 5 seemed incredibly good, and it was asked where the data was obtained from. In response, it was explained that the data was submitted to the Authority by the schools. In response to a further question on the same matter, it was confirmed that the members of the Investigation had not challenged the figures in any detail, and that they had accepted the data submitted by the schools.

Concern was expressed that the three schools selected did not give a picture of the situation in all Gwynedd schools, as all three of them were mostly in indigenous Welsh communities, and it was suggested that there were other schools in Gwynedd that would have reflected a very different scenario.

Concern was expressed at parents' ability to refuse Welsh-medium education for their children, thereby depriving their children of the opportunity to have a good career and live in the area in the future. It was also noted that it became evident during the Investigation that the schools were under great pressure to offer English-medium provision, as parents threatened to move their children to Ysgol Friars or Ysgol Tywyn (which were category 3T schools) otherwise. It was believed that it was necessary to look in more detail at this influence and the impact of the option of going to Ysgol Friars or Ysgol Tywyn on other schools in Gwynedd. Sadness was expressed that some parents and pupils did not have confidence in our language, and it was suggested that it was high time that the Education Authority, the schools and the headteachers took a very strong stance and refused parents to move their children to the category 3T schools, and insisted that the Welsh language was sufficient in our schools as a medium. It was also suggested that it might be easier for the schools to refuse requests from parents to move their children if this was sold as the Authority's policy, rather than the school's policy.

With regard to those parents who refused Welsh-medium education for their children, it was asked what affordable and accessible provision was available for them to learn the language themselves, so that the problem did not arise in the future. In response, it was noted that:

- With regard to the parents who were committed to their children attending the centres for latecomers, there was a Welsh for Adults tutor present at every open morning in order to show parents the provision available for online and face-to-face learning, together with the resources available for them to help their children.
- These arrangements had now been running for over a year and a half and many had registered for Welsh lessons with their children.
- The Service organised a face-to-face meeting and a virtual meeting with Hunaniaith to promote social events in the different areas in order to encourage parents to take advantage of opportunities to practise their Welsh with their children.

It was noted that it was encouraging to witness and feel the commitment of the staff and pupils to Welsh-medium education and that this gave reason to be optimistic about the future.

It was stated that the members' respect and admiration for the sincerity of the vast majority of the schools' staff, and the Council's officers, who committed to trying to get the children completely bilingual, should be noted. If there were complaints about anything, it was certain that no one was complaining about individuals, but there were possibly a few systems, sometimes within our control and sometimes outside of our control, that let us down.

It was noted that the report gave the impression that everything was on track in terms of the data, but also highlighted a number of problems, possibly anecdotal at the moment, and perhaps more data and hard facts were needed, rather than just anecdotes.

The opinion was expressed that some recommendations needed to be strengthened, e.g. the Language Policy. It was believed that mentioning bilingualism opened the door to considerable ambiguity, and if we were in favour of Welsh-medium education, then Welsh-medium education for it, with English being taught as a subject to the highest possible standard. Otherwise, we opened the door to complaints and requests. In terms of the data regarding the Welsh-medium provision, it was emphasised that this should be a standing item on the agenda of every meeting of the Secondary Headteachers' Forum, instead of us requesting for this to happen once a year, as stated in the recommendations.

It was noted in the recommendations that there was a need to strengthen collaboration with agencies. There was mention of the Curriculum for Wales, GwE and the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol, but what about Careers Wales?

It was noted that no data had been seen regarding the number of latecomers who entered the secondary schools in year 10 or 11, and therefore had not attended the language centres. It was suggested that a separate study was needed on that, looking at methods of including young people and providing additional support for them, such as half an hour of immersion in Welsh at the beginning of each school day.

It was noted that it must be borne in mind that the schools could only do so much in the current financial climate, but that our language was suffering due to austerity and budget cuts in Westminster.

It was noted that the data suggested that parents and learners wished to change the medium of education from Welsh to English as the learners approached GCSE and A Level, and it was asked, as well as the marketing campaign for the parents of the children who arrived at the schools, whether it would also be beneficial to run a separate campaign for the learners themselves. Such a campaign could be carried out in conjunction with key partners such as the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol and Careers Wales, encouraging the learners to follow their courses through the medium of Welsh by making the link between the Welsh language and better-paid jobs. Examples of successes could also be looked at, e.g. individuals from non-Welsh-speaking households who now worked through the medium of Welsh.

The Cabinet Member was invited to respond to the main findings and recommendations of the Investigation, and was asked to confirm whether or not she accepted the recommendations. The Cabinet Member noted that:

- The discussion and the report were extremely valuable, and she wished to reiterate the thanks to the members of the Investigation and the schools that had participated.
- There were many very encouraging aspects to the report, as well as aspects that needed to be looked at further.
- There was a clear overlap in places with the Education Strategy and the work that needed to be done on the Education Language Policy, and this was to be very useful as it would shed light on a few other pieces of work where it was possible to draw things together.
- The reference to the social opportunities to use the Welsh language, and that the schools were part of their communities, rather than existing in a bubble, was welcomed.
- The reference to defining bilingualism was extremely important as the way Gwynedd operated was very different, and there may be a lack of understanding of that by some individuals/organisations.
- She felt very passionate about the work to support the transitional schools, and very much welcomed anything that drove that forward.
- Any move to strengthen the method of data collection was going to help the Authority with its strategic work.
- The reference to promoting the offer from the Welsh Government to provide free Welsh lessons for teachers who wished to develop their Welsh skills was a very important request.
- She welcomed the fact that there were parents of latecomers who chose to learn Welsh alongside their children as that could change the whole linguistic shape of a family.
- She was extremely passionate about anything that strengthened the opportunities for people to acquire a language, and welcomed the many references to that in the work.

In conclusion, the Cabinet Member confirmed that she accepted the recommendations of the Investigation in principle and wished to take the report to the Cabinet for discussion due to the overlap with the Education Strategy and the Education Language Policy, and the likely need for a resource to realise certain pieces of work, such as strengthening the linguistic provision/support for latecomers who joined in year 10 or 11.

After the committee had formally approved the report, and also decided to receive an update from the Cabinet Member on implementation per recommendation at the meeting of 21 March 2024, the Chair noted:

- During the period of the Investigation, at its meeting on 4 May 2023 the full Council adopted the following notice of motion presented by Councillor Rhys Tudur:

In order for the Council to be innovative in its method of monitoring the implementation of Welsh medium education and progress in detail and effectively in our schools, I ask the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee to consider the most appropriate way of gathering data and monitoring the Welsh-medium provision in every secondary school against the baselines of the categories in which the schools are included.

- Considering the work of the Investigation, and specifically Recommendations 1 and 2, the committee needed to come to a conclusion on whether there was further work to be done, or whether what was presented by the Investigation met the requirements.

As what was requested in the notice of motion was being addressed through the recommendations of the Investigation, and the Cabinet Member and the Department were considering whether action would be taken, it was agreed that there was no further work for the committee to do at present to respond to the notice of motion.

RESOLVED

- (i) To approve the Gwynedd Category 3 Secondary Schools Scrutiny Investigation Report.**
- (ii) To receive an update from the Cabinet Member on the implementation per recommendation at the meeting on 21 March 2024.**
- (iii) To accept that what was undertaken by the Investigation answered the requirement in terms of the notice of motion presented by Councillor Rhys Tudur to the Full Council on 4 May 2023.**