

1 September 2022

1. **Has the current statutory framework for Welsh in Education Strategic Plans (WESPs) improved since the recommendations published in December 2015 following the 'Inquiry into Welsh in Education Strategic Plans' by the Children, Young People and Education Committee in the Fourth Senedd?**

Our members inform us that the seven outcomes within the new system (within the framework of each WESP) are clear, concise and orderly, taking into account the specific areas that need attention in order to develop the appropriate provision required.

Nevertheless, it appears in some WESPs that the responsibility for responding to the challenge will lie substantially with third sector stakeholders (for example *Yr Urdd*, *Menter Iaith*) as well as the consortia and not so much with the local authority. This is arguably as a result of cutting, or redeployment of the Welsh in Education Grants in 2015. This is evident in the abolition of the *Athrawon Bro* teams (Consultant Teachers of the Welsh Language) in many local authorities who were responsible for leading, training and managing language development within the local authority schools. Therefore, as a result of the withdrawal of this grant, schools are reliant on fragmented, inconsistent and potentially substandard resources so as to deliver the WESP.

2. **To what extent do Welsh in Education Strategic Plans contribute to the outcomes and targets set out in the Welsh Government's Welsh Language Strategy – Cymraeg 2050?**

Our members inform us that It is necessary to consider this question in the context of the "Language Guidance on school categories according to Welsh-medium provision" Document<sup>1</sup> being a non-statutory document. For example, there is no mandatory requirement on (what used to be in 2007<sup>2</sup>) Category 5, 4 and 2 schools to undertake the *taith iaith* to become a Category 3 school by 2032 in the primary sector.

It therefore appears that any measurable growth against targets may be in newly registered Welsh-medium schools and not in schools that have English as their main language of learning and teaching due to the above reason.

3. **How are local authorities responding to changes to guidance on school categories according to Welsh-medium provision, and are they meeting the Welsh Government's ambition to increase Welsh-medium provision in English-medium and dual-stream schools?**

The provision for a local authority to prepare a ten-year Plan, the first to have effect from 1 September 2022 subject to the Welsh Ministers' approval, is enshrined in The Welsh in Education Strategic Plans (Wales) Regulations 2019. It has been documented in the press<sup>3</sup> and in Senedd speeches<sup>4</sup> that the draft WESPs submitted by the Local Authorities vary in substance and ambition. The Minister's view that "*We've gone as far as we can within the current WESP framework, and further improvements to that framework will be considered as part of scoping work on a Welsh language education Bill.*" may see even further revision of WESPs within the Welsh language Education Bill alongside other provisions to achieve the ambition of Cymraeg 2050: Welsh language strategy.

Anecdotal evidence from members suggests that the main issue local authorities face in their attempts to establish a successful Plan is the obstructions of Governing Bodies. A local authority may well have prepared an ambitious and excellent Plan, but maintained schools will have the veto of their Governing Body on such a Plan and in some cases Plans may have been watered down so that they find adoption in certain schools.

<sup>1</sup> <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2021-12/guidance-on-school-categories-according-to-welsh-medium-provision.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-02/defining-schools-according-to-welsh-medium-provision.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/cymrufyw/62149623>

<sup>4</sup> <https://record.senedd.wales/Plenary/12902#C442641>

This hindrance for local authorities is of course due to substantial powers enshrined to governing bodies of maintained schools under the Local Management of Schools (LMS) which is a vestige of the 1988 Education Act. There is little if any room within the provisions of LMS for local authorities to be able to circumvent situations as described above.

A solution to this (as well as a solution to other educational issues) would be the introduction of secondary legislation that would deprecate LMS. This would allow the local authority, as the direct employer, to:

- install WESPs that are fit for purpose; and
- redeploy staff according to the needs of the school and the skills of that employee

#### **4. What challenges lie ahead in the planning and development of Welsh-medium provision, ahead of a proposed Welsh Language Education Bill?**

NASUWT's concerns with both the recent revision of non-statutory guidance around school categories according to Welsh-medium provision as well as the Cymraeg 2050 Strategy itself remain in place for any potential implications and/or unintended consequences of the Welsh language Education Bill's provisions to accelerate the planning and development of Welsh-medium provision, in that:

- a. In terms of re-categorising schools in terms of Welsh-medium provision:
  - the NASUWT was concerned about the potential implications and/or unintended consequences for the education workforce in rationalising and/or accelerating the process of transition between school categories. The concerns of the Union were heightened by the lack of detail in relation to the costs and funding streams associated with the transition to the new categorisation model as well as funding the eventual progress along the categories.
  - Any proposed changes may further accelerate the change from one category to another at such a rate as to adversely affect the employment of teachers - specifically those who are not fluent enough in Welsh to be able to deliver the needs of the employer to the level required by the new category. Governing bodies will need to plan its workforce in line with the guidance so as to increase the number of teaching staff able to teach Welsh as a subject and teach through the medium of Welsh, yet with no affirmation that extra funding will be available to aid this workforce transition. NASUWT notes, though, that a transitional category can exist for a maximum period of 10 years, and that such categories should be identified to aid monitoring and identify the support required from stakeholders to assist progression including identifying additional and dedicated funding which will be provided for such education settings to assist in their transitioning via increased staffing and training by providing the necessary resources and infrastructure changes.
- b. In terms of the Cymraeg 2050 Strategy, the NASUWT maintains that the Welsh Government must continue to:
  - Identify additional and dedicated funding which will be provided for education establishments to assist in meeting the strategy through increased staffing and by providing the necessary resources and infrastructure changes. This would require sufficient additional capital and revenue funding;
  - Provide an assurance that the significant increase in the number of teachers and early years practitioners who are able to teach through the medium of Welsh would be realised through additional staffing and/or access to courses to enable existing post-holders to learn the Welsh language through paid release from their teaching or support duties;
  - Give a binding commitment that no members of staff would be under threat of losing their livelihood if they were not able to gain sufficient grasp of the language to enable them to teach through the medium of Welsh, where they are currently employed in either English-medium or bilingual schools;
  - Ensure that the Vision is taken forward on the basis of mutual respect and tolerance of the workforce and that the legislation envisaged will provide an unequivocal basis for organisations to act in support of the language.

To be clear, NASUWT do not have any evidence that our overarching concerns regarding challenges faced in the planning and development of Welsh-medium provision are being realised. However it is important that these potential issues remain central to future plans and provisions.

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