

Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru | National Assembly for Wales
Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg | Children, Young People and
Education Committee
Ymchwiliad i Gynlluniau Strategol Cymraeg mewn Addysg | Inquiry into
Welsh in Education Strategic Plans

WESP 06

Ymateb gan : Cynrychiolydd Cymdeithas Llywodraethwyr Sir y Fflint
Response from : Flintshire Governors' Association Representative

Question 1 – What are your views on whether Welsh in Education Strategic Plans are contributing to the outcomes and targets set out in the Welsh Government's overarching Welsh Medium Education Strategic Plan?

The requirement to produce a WESP prompted the resurrection of the FCC Welsh Education Forum, which had been dormant for some years. It has a wide-ranging and high profile membership: a full range of LA officers, chaired by the Chief Officer and the Executive Member, and including P/S Headteacher representatives from both W and E medium sectors, F.E., Urdd Gobaith Cymru, Menter Iaith, GwE, SYFFLAG (Welsh medium sector lobby group), as well as FGA. The WESP, updated annually, is a comprehensive document and has been acknowledged as such by WG. Strong on vision and aspiration, it remains to be seen how far, and how fast, it can be implemented. As a heavily anglicised border county, Flintshire has one Welsh medium secondary school and 5 primaries, all but one of which are currently undersubscribed. It is unclear how far this is due to relatively low profile: as with Catholic education, there tends to be an assumption that the schools cater for adherents. However, research has revealed that a significant proportion of parents (30%+) in the Deeside area would opt for Welsh medium education if it were available within two miles. A new satellite school (managed and governed, for the time being, from the existing W medium school in Flint) was opened in September 2014 in Shotton, and early take-up (nursery/reception) is encouraging.

If you believe that WESPs are not contributing sufficiently, how do you think this could be resolved?

The obstacles are practical and financial, as well as cultural; the WESP itself makes a positive contribution.

Question 2 – What are your views on whether WESPs are (or have the potential) to deliver the required change at a local authority level (for example delivering provision to meet any increased demand for Welsh medium education)?

The WESP provides a rationale for development. Further research is needed to ascertain whether, and where, there is latent demand (i.e. lack of awareness) for Welsh medium education. Conversely, there is evidence that, in the east of the county (effectively suburbs of Chester), pupils in the Catholic sector are opting to transfer to the Chester High School specifically to avoid the requirement to learn Welsh (2nd language).

If you believe that WESPs are not, or don't have the potential, to deliver change, how do you think this could be resolved?

Cultural change could be fostered, but it cannot be rushed (still less imposed). Positive promotion could increase take-up, but risks a backlash – particularly as financial pressures are severe in both sectors, making pupil numbers crucial to viability.

Question 3 – What are your views on the arrangements for target setting; monitoring; reviewing; reporting; approving; and ensuring compliance with delivering the requirements for WESPs (and the role of the local authority and the Welsh Government in this regard)?

WG response to the annual revision tends to be slow. Target-setting is of dubious value, e.g. to increase the numbers of pupils in W medium who take GCSE's through the medium of Welsh (already 100%). Despite the strong commitment at LA level, the WG policy remains a low priority for a council threatened with financial meltdown.

If you believe there are problems in this area, how do you think they could be resolved?

A number of promotional initiatives are in hand, with considerable success so far. The advent of the Urdd Eisteddfod in Flint in 2016 will provide excellent promotional opportunities, and plans are in hand to maximise these.

Question 4 – What are your views on whether WESPs evidence the effective interaction between the Welsh Government's Welsh-medium education strategy and other relevant policies and legislation*?

(*for example school transport policy; 21st Century Schools programme; A living language: a language for living – Moving forward policy statement; Flying Start; planning policy)

Free transport is provided statutorily to the nearest Welsh medium school (unlike the Catholic sector – a contentious issue). 21st Century Schools plans do not currently involve the Welsh medium sector, given current undersubscription; however, projected numbers may prompt a requirement for a second secondary school in the early 2020s.

If you believe there are problems in this area, how do you think they could be resolved?

Question 5 – What are your views on whether the outcomes of WESPs deliver equal outcomes for all pupils, including for example, primary/secondary pupils or children from low income households.

There is no apparent detriment to any group.

If you believe that the outcome of WESPs do not deliver equal outcomes, how do you think this could be resolved?

Question 6 – If you had to make one recommendation to the Welsh Government from all the points you have made, what would that recommendation be?

WG has a role to play in cultural change, but must seek to encourage change rather than to dictate.

The most effective protective measure (see below) would be to ban the absorption of W medium schools into federation with E medium schools.

Question 7 – Do you have any other comments or issues you wish to raise that have not been covered by the specific questions?

Over 80% of pupils in W medium schools in Flintshire come from English-speaking homes. Consequently it is always an uphill struggle to ensure that the natural means of communication in schools is Welsh, particularly outside of formal lessons. Pressures on schools in both sectors (size, viability,

difficulty of recruitment particularly at HT level) are prompting the LA to consider federation – facilitated by recent WG legislative change in this area. It cannot be too strongly stressed that any federation involving E and W medium schools would have the effect of swamping the W sector, and must be specifically excluded – even where physical proximity might make this a superficially attractive option. The W medium high school shares a site (and certain facilities e.g. sports centre, playing fields) with its (much larger) E medium neighbour. While excellent relations are maintained, a policy of strict segregation of pupils is necessary to maintain the Welsh ethos. One of the W primary schools occupies the same building as an E medium school. The threat to federate prompted the formation of SYFFLAG (Sir y Fflint Addysg Gymraeg) to defend the interest of the sector, under direct threat at the time. It is vital that W medium schools remain separate if they are to stand any chance of promulgating the use of Welsh as *lingua franca* in an anglicised area such as Flintshire.