

**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 37**

**Ymateb gan : Cyngor Bwrdeisdref Sirol**

**Response from : Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council**

**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 WESP within Blaenau Gwent is a strategic platform to promote and sustain Welsh Medium Education within the Borough. The local plan reflects a continued commitment to engaging key stakeholders in local action based upon the Welsh Government overarching Welsh Medium Education Strategic Plan. The December review of the local Blaenau Gwent Plan received the following appraisal from Welsh Government: The work is taken seriously and there is evidence of progress in important areas. The local plan is monitored twice per annum.

The monitoring of outcomes and school improvements remains the responsibility of the Council, whilst the role of supporting and challenging schools has transferred over to the Education Achievement Service (EAS). The EAS are an active member of the local forum.

The role of the Welsh Education Forum (WEF) is a key priority for Blaenau Gwent and the delivery of the plan is paramount to ensure the sustainability of Welsh Education within the Borough. Our key areas of consideration currently as a forum are: Sustainability of and synchronisation early year’s provision; ALN and SPLD provision and continual commitment to ensuring parental engagement.

The membership of the WEF involves officers from the Council and

key partners including: Mudiad Methrin, Early Years, RhAG, EAS and so forth. The forum meet termly and follow a concise terms of reference to ensure delivery of the plan. The forum holds officers to account on the delivery of the plan and looks to develop smaller focus groups in achieving key tasks.

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

The Council feel the local WESP is actively contributing, however, there is a requirement for partners to sustain their commitment to ongoing development locally. This needs to be continually monitored and would benefit from the sharing of practice between Councils Coordinated by Welsh Government, along with Wales-wide practice sharing forums that could inform funding, marketing and promotion.

**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 planning of school places within Blaenau Gwent both for both English and Welsh medium primary schools is based on demand and pupil forecasts. The role of the WESP within this is to support the marketing and promotion of Welsh Medium Education among parents from birth onwards. There is potential for the WEF to further inform this process by collaborating towards sustainability of exiting provisions e.g. via obtaining funding towards early years/ nursery transport.

The current situation in Blaenau Gwent is that we have 1 welsh primary within the Borough which has 30% surplus places. Previous demand surveys have not proved productive, with 2014 survey only resulting in a 3% response rate. Therefore the WEF are focusing on engagement as a key priority to promote and increase demand for Welsh Medium Education.

The LA's 21<sup>st</sup> century schools programme does not involve planned expansion of the existing welsh school or the development of a new welsh school. This is based on finance and demand; however, as 21<sup>st</sup>

Century Schools are represented on the WEF, the forum can influence any future Welsh Medium provision. In line with the Regional Welsh Medium 2 Project, Blaenau Gwent has secured further places at Gwynllyw for secondary age pupils via the restructuring of the catchment area, resulting in more evenly distributed provision for Welsh Medium pupils regionally.

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

To ensure delivery of the plan as previously mentioned, all partners must engage and commit to the delivery of the plan. A greater level of awareness around funding opportunities to support transport etc. in line with sustainability of provision is also required.

**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)?

The WESP is monitored regularly and partners are asked to update areas they are named against twice a year, partners receive individualised actions plans that form part of the full plan. Where limited progress is noted reasoning is required to justify this. The current arrangements suit the Council and its partners, however could benefit from wider practice examples.

It would however, be useful to again look at the arrangements on an all-Wales basis to share good practice in line with the practical application of process in delivering the plan.

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

Networking events to maintain the enthusiasm and engagement of stakeholders could further benefit the process.

**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)

Positive interaction with all parties involved within the WESP is key to ensuring the delivery. At present there is not enough information sharing on a policy related level via the plan. This is recognised locally and requires improvement. For example: One of the key aims is to increase the number of 7 year old children taught through the medium of Welsh. Early years and flying start strategies are paramount to ensure that families are aware of the availability of Welsh language provision for preschool children. The WEF now hold this as one of their core actions in developing moving forward.

Again as previously mentioned a networking event which brings all of these key policies together would benefit the WESP's local development, also ensuring regional and Wales-wide collaboration.

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

A re-focus on policy development is required to inform the WESP in moving forward.

**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.

Blaenau Gwent WESP promotes equality of access for all, focusing on the development of sustainable and high standards of educational provision through the medium of Welsh to all learner's. However, there are mitigating factors such as: nursery transport; ALN support/provision via the medium of Welsh and suitable placement of early years provision linked to continuity within Welsh education, which prevent full engagement on a Local Authority level, that need to be addressed. Again these are a key focus for the local WEF, but require further investment from all stakeholders to ensure progress.

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

Funding is key driver in creating equality of opportunity across Blaenau Gwent and ensuring promotion and sustainability of Welsh

Medium Education.

**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?

The recommendation would be for Welsh Government to look at sharing WESP's and practice across Wales, also focusing on key policy and other drivers in doing so.

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

It would be beneficial for stakeholders to be informed of the potential benefits of the WESP to their service areas etc by Welsh Government to ensure continued commitment.