

**P-05-888 Make GCSE Welsh Language compulsory in all schools in Wales,
Correspondence – Welsh Independent Schools Council to Chair, 18.07.19**



18th July 2019

Dear Mrs Finch-Saunders

RE: Petition P-05-888 Make GCSE Welsh Language compulsory in all schools in Wales

Thank you for your letter of the 5th July 2019, the contents of which are noted.

The Welsh Independent Schools Council and most member schools agree with most of what you are saying in the text of your petition that every child should have ‘the chance to learn Welsh’. Schools realise the importance of and see the value of the Welsh Language and are aware of certain professions which require GCSE Welsh for our students remaining in Wales.

My understanding is that the vast majority of independent schools in Wales do offer their learners the chance to have Welsh at Key Stage 3 and optional Welsh GCSE at Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 5 A Level. Many schools teach incidental Welsh.

As a sector independent schools are keen to give parents and pupils a choice in education. Independent schools are businesses and are market driven by parents and pupils and thus parental choice is key. The independent sector is good at adapting to what the learners and parents want and is market driven.

I would like to remind the Petitions Committee that independent schools are governed in Wales by the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003 and by virtue of their independence schools can follow a curriculum of their choosing and it is a dangerous precedent to impose subjects on the independent sector.

For those schools who do not offer GCSE Welsh, there are several reasons for this which I will outline below: -

- **The literacy needs of students** – not all students especially students in special school's study GCSE's and the focus is in a functional level in English only. Pupils have significant language and communication difficulties; the teaching of Welsh would complicate things further. Many of these learners have had very disrupted educations and have significant gaps in their learning so the whole focus is ensuring that they have improved literacy and numeracy skills in readiness for the world of work/college.
- Many special schools do not teach the Welsh language as a lot of their **learners are placed by English Local Authorities**, for these learners as they return to England at the end of placement they would never need a Welsh GCSE as Welsh is in no way appropriate to their culture, their experiences or their SEN profiles.
- For some schools a large percentage of students are **international students, where English is their second language**. As an international school, most of the students having no intention of ultimately living or working in Wales.
- Some independent schools are boarding schools and whilst many pupils are international, **there are more English students boarding than Welsh and they will return to England after their education.**
- Some **independent schools do not offer GCSE's** for example some schools offer the International Baccalaureate, the English Baccalaureate or the International Certificate of Steiner Education.
- Parental surveys have revealed that some **parents would prefer their children in independent schools in Wales to study a modern foreign language** as an alternative to Welsh. **Our Muslim schools' parents would prefer their children to study Arabic and Urdu as an alternative to Welsh.**

As CEO of WISC and having spoken to our WISC Chair, Stuart Hay we agree with the vast majority of the petition however the Welsh Independent Schools Council is strongly opposed to the final sentence of this petition 'Make Welsh Second Language GSCE compulsory in all school in Wales by law' for the reasons outlined above. We are very happy to speak to member schools of the benefits of doing Welsh and we are more than happy to promote and forward any Welsh Language literature and posters to our schools. We are also more than happy for a spokesperson to speak at our conference. However, any

threat to a schools' independence will be vehemently opposed. A schools' decision to teach Welsh should be the decision of the individual schools needs and not mandatory. Compulsory GCSE Welsh would not benefit all learners especially those with complex needs or international schools where English is a second language. There are also the cost implications - to a small school these would be large as more staff and training would be needed and as an independent school this would have to be paid for privately as they have no access to Local Authority training and funds.

Please acknowledge safe receipt.

Should you have any further queries, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Very best wishes

Emma Verrier
Chief Executive Officer
Welsh Independent Schools Council