

Education and Lifelong Learning Committee

Newtown High School, Powys – Development of Welsh-medium Education

Newtown is a very anglicised area of Wales. The historical arrangement of Welsh-medium education in the town was a Welsh-medium unit attached to one of the town primary schools. At the age of 11 pupils then had to transfer 13 miles by bus to Llanfair Caereinion in order to continue their Welsh-medium education. This gave parents a stark choice of having their child educated in English within the local community and with their friends, or in Welsh at some distance.

The Governing Body of Newtown High School felt that this arrangement failed to give sufficient choice to parents, and hampered the development of the Welsh ethos at Newtown High School by removing a vital part of its natural intake – less than 1% of the intake are currently from Welsh-speaking homes. Over the preceding years the school had attempted to win the hearts and minds of parents, some of whom were hostile to the Welsh language, by a gradual development of the language – avoiding a situation in which parents felt the language was being thrust upon them. Links with S4C, minority European Language Days, developing the non-language cultural strands, and stressing the opportunities that Welsh-speakers had in the work place all contributed to this, to the extent that the introduction of the compulsory Welsh course at Key Stage 4 produced not a single letter of complaint from parents.

In September 2001, a new Welsh-medium primary school Ysgol Dafydd Llwyd was opened to replace the previous primary unit. To coincide with this Newtown High School offered the option for pupils to receive part of their education through the medium of Welsh. Two families took up this option for their children starting with us in Year 7. The subjects of Art, Geography and History are studied through the medium of Welsh, with Welsh-speaking tutors seeing the pupils each day and for PSE lessons. A very positive response has been received from the families, who are not themselves Welsh-speaking, and the projected number for next year is 8 pupils. It is also hoped to persuade the parents of good Welsh second-language pupils attending the school to allow them to join these classes.

To summarise, we have had to develop the language in a very diplomatic way to keep all parents "on board". We are at the very earliest stage of our curriculum project (Year 1), but the initial signs are encouraging and there is now something tangible for other parents and pupils to see, which should encourage others to participate. We hope that the development will have a spin-off in terms of enhancing the Welsh ethos of the school as a whole to, in turn, improve

the enrolment in the Welsh-medium courses.

Glyn Hughes

Headteacher