

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 01

Ymateb gan : Awdurdod Lleol Rhondda Cynon Taf

Response from : Rhondda Cynon Taf Local Authority

**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 Welsh Government's overarching WMES was published in 2010 and states that it will set the national strategic direction and establish and maintain the supporting structures of Welsh medium education and training. Are the supporting structures sufficient and do they provide local authorities with the resources, support or clarity needed to fulfil their role? By now some of the vocabulary is out of date and inconsistent with current educational terminology. Whilst the accountability for school improvement for all learners remains with the local authority, the work to support and challenge schools is commissioned through the Consortia. Funding via the EIG (WEG element) is allocated on a consortium basis with an increasing focus on school to school working) but there is no recognition within the WMES of these major changes. Categorisation of schools drives the level of support and challenge provided to schools but the fundamental contributors to school improvement and standards of learner achievement, in any language, is dependent on effective leadership and management of schools and high quality teaching and learning in the classroom. There is a shortage of excellent leaders, teachers and support staff in the Welsh sector which can impact on the standards achieved in both first language and second language Welsh.

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

Little account appears to be taken in WMES of the different context of LAs across Wales.

Whilst I can comment from an RCT perspective it would be useful if WG could produce a position paper on every LA's performance over the 5 year life span

of the WMES

Are there areas of good practice we could learn from? Does DFES have a clear overview of what is happening across Wales to avoid officers in each LA working in silos?

**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 strategic planning of all provision in English and Welsh medium is dependent on forecasted pupil numbers and surplus places identified in schools via WG formula. In our experience forecasting demand for future provision based purely on parental questionnaires is not a reliable enough source of robust information because of poor response rates and the gap is too wide when compared to actual take up. More accurate forecasting is achieved when coupled with trends.

In the current financial climate expanding existing schools or planning new builds is not a realistic option unless the evidence for demand is documented and robust. Several partners outside the LA may disagree with this.

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

Too early to predict because the statutory status of the WESP is relatively new.

The WESP as a document is unwieldy and may have more impact if split to consider different elements in different ways with different timescales.

**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 involves gathering information from a wide range of service areas, aspects of which (School Improvement) are commissioned on a regional basis. Time scales to update every year are too tight.

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

We appreciate that the accountability for improving standards remains within the Local Authority however, the reviewing and monitoring of target setting and standards in relation to educational outcomes could be undertaken by the CSC on a regional basis.

There are other service areas and partners who contribute to the WESP, e.g. workforce development, colleges, school organisation, etc. who do not currently operate on a regional basis, therefore the WESP template could be modified to reflect the two areas?

**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)

Including partners and officers from the above service areas in the WESP Strategic Planning Group at a local level is critical to ensure that other policies and legislation are taken into account when the WESP is compiled and updated. Attendance to the Planning Group is good and consultation takes place when changes/modifications are made. Responses to consultation on the WESP from others outside the immediate group is however poor.

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

Unclear whether joint working across departments in WG are as robust as they could be. A variety of WG departments have a role to play in influencing developments, e.g. WG officers should question the access to, and quality of Welsh Medium delivery in Flying Start, Communities First, etc. If WG funds a programme then there is a responsibility to monitor and QA for adherence to all WG priorities. Other WG policies and legislation need to give a clear steer on matters relating to Welsh medium provision and be more prescriptive.

Time scales are extremely tight, especially when feedback from WG is delayed to allow modifications, translation, local scrutiny, etc. to take place before publishing.

**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.

Welsh medium schools have comparatively low FSM percentages.

The WESP in itself would deliver on such a wide agenda. The WESP in conjunction with other strategic, local and school plans are better placed to evidence such progress in standards.

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

WESP does not require reporting on FSM gap. Should it?

Better quality of leaders, managers and workforce to teach/support in the Welsh medium sector and Welsh second language in English medium schools.

The same issues arise in the FE and HE sectors as well as community tutors who can deliver to a high standard through the medium of Welsh. This can't just be addressed by LAs, it requires wider government input.

**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?

Appreciation of the diversity of the reporting requirements of the WESP across regional, local services and partners.

The strategic group who meet and are committees has to be large to encompass all views but as a result may not have the desired impact. The sheer number of contributions needed from a variety of stakeholders, all with their own agenda to populate the WESP is a challenge.

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

May consider changing the format of the plan and using other mechanisms to report on standards achieved by learners using data captured elsewhere. Data on pupil progress is reported to WG elsewhere part of the template could be pre-populated.