

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 16

Ymateb gan : Rosalyn Davies

Response from : Rosalyn Davies

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 for Wrexham, has a lot of evidence within its own figures that there is significant growing demand for Welsh medium education. I am concerned that there is not enough detail in the WESP about how it is going to meet that, which will affect all levels of education, in a fashion that encourages and supports the language. In particular, the figures that are used, suggest the growth are already ahead of the present picture and the council is lagging behind.

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

The WESP reads that surveys are used to support the planning process, which at present educate roughly 13% of children through the medium of Welsh. This seems at odds with the comment that the respondents of the survey indicate that 21.7% of parents would like to see their children educated in Welsh. In other WESPs there is an approach of adopting full surveys every 2–3 years to try and work out the demand (location as well as overall numbers) – which if adopted would offer the council better sight of the trend amongst parents. This step should be essential given the expected developments which will add to the existing pressure areas, and also look to explore areas of opportunity for the language.

Anecdotally, I would expect that there is a level of unmet need/area of potential growth within the Gresford/Rosset region, as the nearest Welsh schools to them will be taken up by those living nearer (Plas Coch/Bro Alun) – I suspect many parents here don't even try as they would only be offered a school further away,

which would be logistically harder to manage and puts parents off.

It is an interesting point, given the problems that have occurred at nursery and reception this year – as at present this pressure is being seen/reported as a blip, yet the WESP figures already indicates that parental preference is higher than current capacity.

It is not clear from the WESP that it is understood where the demand is within Wreccsam, and given the new developments in the areas where there is existing pressure this is essentially in order to adequately plan, and target pressures, unmet need and develop new opportunities.

Some parents do not drive, so asking them to travel 20/30 mins on a bus to access a school contravenes it's own WESP, and I would assume strategies to reduce travelling.

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 highlights that there is growing demand, and also some of the necessary increases in capacity to meet this demand, however it raises questions about whether it will fully meet demand appropriately. It seems that the WESP is not ambitious enough given some of its own figures, and locality isn't being taken into account.

There is also a concern that the growth will create problems sooner than outlined in the WESP, for the only Welsh secondary school in the county (Ysgol Morgan Llwyd), further the numbers projected for Morgan Llwyd suggest that it will be increasing figures to super school status, which is a cause for concern given some of the problems that super schools have had within the county.

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

Planning the right capacity depends on being clear about the demand and where it is, something that does not come across in the WESP.

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)?

Not all parents in Wreccsam who want a Welsh education for their children are able to access it, I'm not sure from looking at the measures how this is currently being monitored.

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

An additional measure that could be adopted – ought to look at the number of applications for Welsh education (whether first choice or other), and whether those children subsequently took up a place or not.

There are a number of parents this year who did not get into Welsh schools as either their first or second choice, and the offers that they did receive were at schools too far away so subsequently took up places at English schools. The council response has been that this is their choice to do so – however, this is not in keeping with the spirit of the over-arching Welsh government WESP, of encouraging and allowing the language to flourish. Those parents may have opted for an English medium school for logistics (they may not drive/able to travel 30mins across town to get to a place) or fear over whether they will have to move their child again at reception (if they know that they are one of the last few places).

It is part of the WESP for Wrexham that pupils should not have to travel too far for their local school, as this is something that will put off parents from accessing Welsh education.

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)

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

Promoting the language in the early years is really important, funding cuts to Mudiad Meithrin which promotes pre-school activities across the county should be re-considered. There are also no language and play provisions available through the medium of Welsh in Wrecsam. Both of these make it more difficult for families to choose a path right at the beginning, where their children can become fluent in Welsh.

Recently when members of the public have asked questions in Welsh to the council, the responses have been in English – which is not in keeping of the spirit of a language for living.

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.

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

Failure to address the demands of a locality, mean that some will be put off the path of Welsh education at the outset, if there are insufficient places in the areas of highest need at nursery level. Some parents do not drive, so asking them to travel 20/30 mins on the bus at peak travel time to get to where there is a space, will put parents off – and if those parents then subsequently settle their child in an English medium school, they will be unlikely to move them for reception – even though transport costs may be funded at that point.

I don't think it is good enough for the council to state that they are unwilling to look at options at nursery level, on the grounds that the same issues exist in Welsh schools – it is different because there are fewer Welsh schools, so the impact to the parent of not getting a place at their local one is far higher in terms of logistically being able to attend.

This will also put off parents who work, as travelling a distance to/from schools can create a barrier to accessing Welsh 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?

Stronger surveys at the early years to ensure a high response in order to assess demand (0–2) years, to be repeated every 2–3 years to ensure that this informs demand at the nursery and reception levels, and that this leads to appropriate capacity being provided.

Question 7

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

- It is clear in the coming years that there will be a need for additional secondary provision in Wreccsam, it is really important that to ensure the promotion of Welsh that if this is to be provided on a second site that it is a Welsh medium school – it is a real challenge in an area where the dominant language of the home for the majority of pupils is English to ensure that Welsh is encouraged at every opportunity. A dual stream school would dilute the Welsh language.
- Admissions policy – unless capacity is factored in to meet demand, the admissions policy ought to be reviewed to look at those applications where there is a clear desire to seek education through the medium of Welsh (i.e. applying for 3 Welsh medium schools on the application, rather than applying for 1 because it is convenient, and then 2 English schools)
- Wrexham should consider adopting the categorisation of schools that exists within other counties. Currently, schools are either designated Welsh or bilingual, which is misleading as the subjects at the bilingual schools will be based in English not Welsh (with the exception of Llanarmon & Cynddelw) – this would ensure that clarity for parents.
- Some of the routes that parents are being asked to travel in order to access Welsh education are hazardous by foot (Summerhill to Plas Coch), so it will increase the traffic in and around Plas Coch school as parents will opt to drive rather than walk, and obviously those who don't drive will probably be put off settling their child into Plas Coch.