

**National Assembly for Wales**  
Children, Young People and Education  
Committee

**Inquiry into Welsh in Education  
Strategic Plans (WESPs)**

**Executive Summary**

December 2015

Cynulliad  
Cenedlaethol  
Cymru

National  
Assembly for  
Wales



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Children, Young People and Education Committee  
National Assembly for Wales  
Cardiff Bay  
CF99 1NA

Tel: 0300 200 6565  
Email: [SeneddCYPE@assembly.wales](mailto:SeneddCYPE@assembly.wales)  
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# Children, Young People and Education Committee

The Committee was established on 22 June 2011 with a remit to examine legislation and hold the Welsh Government to account by scrutinising expenditure, administration and policy matters encompassing: the education, health and wellbeing of the children and young people of Wales, including their social care.

On 22 January 2014, the Assembly agreed to alter the remit of the Committee to include Higher Education. This subject will continue to be included in the remit of the Enterprise and Business Committee, with both committees looking at Higher Education from their particular perspectives. The Committee was previously known as the Children and Young People Committee.

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## Current Committee membership:



**Ann Jones (Chair)**  
Welsh Labour  
Vale of Clwyd



**Angela Burns**  
Welsh Conservatives  
Carmarthen West and South  
Pembrokeshire



**Keith Davies**  
Welsh Labour  
Llanelli



**Suzy Davies**  
Welsh Conservatives  
South Wales West



**John Griffiths**  
Welsh Labour  
Newport East



**Lynne Neagle**  
Welsh Labour  
Torfaen



**David Rees**  
Welsh Labour  
Aberavon



**Aled Roberts**  
Liberal Democrats  
North Wales



**Rhodri Glyn Thomas**  
Plaid Cymru  
Carmarthen East and Dinefwr



**Simon Thomas**  
Plaid Cymru  
Mid and West Wales

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The following Member was also a member of the Committee during this inquiry:



**Bethan Jenkins**  
Plaid Cymru  
South Wales West

## Executive Summary

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1. Welsh in Education Strategic Plans (WESPs) have the potential to deliver a significant increase in the numbers of children and young people being taught and studying for qualifications through the medium of Welsh. When WESPs were introduced, stakeholders saw this potential and welcomed them. However, many of those stakeholders are disappointed by the lack of impact WESPs have had in practice. For them, the story of WESPs so far is one of a missed opportunity. More worryingly, there are growing concerns they are not fit for purpose.

### **How effectively do the Welsh-medium Education Strategy (WMES) and WESPs work together?**

*“We have already acknowledged in the last two Annual Reports on the Welsh-medium Education Strategy that we would be unlikely to meet all the 2015 targets. Against that background, it seems unlikely that those targets which will not be met in 2015 will also be met in 2020 without improved planning and action at local authority level.”*

Minister for Education and Skills

2. This statement by the Minister for Education and Skills illustrates a fundamental challenge for the WESP system. Welsh Government sets national strategies and targets for Welsh-medium education, but local authorities are responsible for translating those strategies into tangible outcomes at a local level. This creates complexities in terms of accountability.

3. The Minister recognises that Welsh Government’s targets cannot be delivered without local authorities, but nothing we heard during the inquiry suggested that Welsh Government and local authorities are working together sufficiently in order to achieve the targets in the Welsh Medium Education Strategy (WMES). It is unclear how Welsh Government intends to support the “improved planning and action” that is necessary to meet its targets.

4. There is an urgent need for better partnership working between Welsh Government and local authorities. When local authorities are failing, intervention by Ministers will be necessary, but the starting point must be improved partnership working. Without this, and a shared commitment to delivering targets, it is difficult to see how Welsh Government’s aspirations for Welsh-medium education will be delivered.

**Recommendation: Welsh Government must ensure that WMES targets are reflected in WESPs and be more robust in its approval of WESPs to ensure they reflect Welsh Government's ambitions.**

**Recommendation: Welsh Government must clarify how it intends to work in partnership with local authorities to deliver its Welsh Medium Education Strategy.**

***Linguistic outcomes, definitions and categorisation***

*"I think there are weaknesses, if we fixate ourselves on the idea that there are things called 'English-medium settings', 'bilingual settings' and 'Welsh-medium settings'. What really matters is: does the individual acquire the language skill?"*

Minister for Education and Skills

5. Clarity about what constitutes Welsh-medium education and securing the best linguistic outcomes for pupils were concerns for many contributors. We note the Minister's view, but it is clear that the nature of the language provision in a particular setting does have an impact on linguistic outcomes for pupils. More importantly, all of the different types of provision that are available, and any consequent impact on linguistic outcomes, must be absolutely clear to parents who are making decisions about their children's education. Local authorities must be more proactive in ensuring this information is available.

6. The Minister said these issues would be reconsidered in the light of the Donaldson review, but it is currently unclear how the implementation of this review will address them and provide solutions. Further, we share the concerns of contributors who cautioned against waiting several years for any new system to take effect – the lack of progress in increasing the number of pupils receiving Welsh-medium education is a problem that exists in the here and now and needs to be addressed.

7. We note the comments made by local authorities and others about the challenges they face in changing the language category of a school. Contributors believed that this complex process was creating an additional barrier to responding to the needs of communities. Welsh Government should work with local authorities to examine the length of time it takes to change the language category and ensure the process is as efficient as it can be.

**Recommendation: The Minister should clarify how the recommendations of the Donaldson review will address the variance in the linguistic outcomes of different types of provision.**

**Recommendation: The Minister should review and publish new guidance on definitions of provision and school's linguistic categorisation.**

**Recommendation: The Minister should review the process for changing a school's category, with the aim of simplifying it.**

**Are WESPs sufficiently effective in supporting the national strategy?**

8. Like several contributors, the Committee accepts it is probably too early to come to a definitive view about the impact and effectiveness of WESPs. However, the Welsh Language Commissioner's concerns that significant weaknesses are coming to light should not be ignored by Welsh Government and must be addressed.

### ***Transparency***

9. There was a perception among a number of contributors that the WESP system is not sufficiently transparent. It is difficult to assess if a WESP has been amended and, when amendments can be identified, it is impossible to know whether they were made in response to recommendations by Welsh Government or because the local authority itself had decided amendments were necessary. This should be addressed so that all changes and the reasons for them are clear to stakeholders.

10. To increase transparency and improve accountability, local authorities should publish an annual report outlining progress against the actions they are taking to meet the targets in their WESPs. The report should include details of any modifications made to a WESP, including whether they have been made as a result of recommendations by Welsh Government. Given that the WLGA/ADEW indicated that this would not be a burden on local authorities, the Committee anticipates it will happen voluntarily. If not, the Welsh Government should require local authorities to publish annual reports.

11. In the context of partnership working and to increase transparency, Welsh Government should also publish annually information reflecting its role in the process.

**Recommendation: Welsh Government should hold discussions with local authorities about timescales and arrangements for publishing annual reports on the progress of WESPs.**

**Recommendation: Welsh Government should publish information relating to its role in the approval of WESPs, including details of its response to each Local Authority's WESP and, where appropriate, the reasons why a WESP was referred back to a Local Authority for modification and actions taken by a Local Authority as a result.**

### ***Assessing demand for Welsh-medium education***

12. We understand assessing demand is complex and that a one-size-fits-all approach will not work. We note the Minister's comment that assessments have, so far, been "reasonably robust". However, several contributors, including local authorities, had doubts that current approaches are as reliable or as robust as they should be. Concerns were raised about the timings of assessments and the provision of inadequate information to parents, which meant they were not able to respond in a meaningful way. Further, it is difficult to understand how assessments with very low response rates can be used as the basis for effective planning.

13. Contributors pointed to the dual role local authorities have in both assessing the demand for Welsh-medium provision whilst also promoting its growth. There was a strong view that local authorities have struggled to fully grasp this dual role. This must be addressed.

**Recommendation: The Welsh Government should be clearer with local authorities about its expectations in relation to the promotion of growth of Welsh-medium education so that all local authorities buy into the Welsh Government's ambitions.**

**Recommendation: Before the next iteration of WESPs, Welsh Government should review the processes for assessing demand to ensure they are more robust. Processes should include provision to consult with children and young people, in accordance with the UNCRC.**

### **Are the roles and responsibilities clear in relation to WESPs?**

14. The Committee explored whether there was sufficient clarity about the roles and responsibilities of Welsh Government, local authorities, regional consortia and others in relation to WESPs.



### ***Promotion and awareness raising***

15. Promoting and raising awareness of Welsh-medium education was a key issue for many contributors to the inquiry. In the Committee's view, this must happen on a number of different levels if it is to be effective. The Welsh Government must take responsibility for promotion on a national level; local authorities should undertake promotional work on a local level that is tailored to their communities; finally, there is a role for schools to ensure they are engaging with the parents in their localities.

16. The Committee is not persuaded that the Welsh Government's promotional work on a national level has been effective and believes that it is vital that it raises its game in this regard.

17. Local Authorities must be more proactive in making meaningful information available to parents about the different types of provision in their localities. Without an understanding of what is available, parents are being put in a position where they are not able to make informed decisions about their children's education.

**Recommendation: Welsh Government should develop and publish a strategy relating to the promotion and awareness of Welsh-medium education at a national and local level. The strategy should include tools that can be used and adapted by local authorities and schools.**

### ***Welsh-medium education Fora***

18. All contributors to the inquiry believed that fora had the potential to play a vital role in the delivery of WESPs. However, there was a view that the potential is not being fulfilled because of a lack of consistency in terms of approach and membership. Contributors felt that Welsh Government could do more to assist local authorities in sharing good practice and in maximising the effectiveness of fora. This would be consistent with the principle of partnership working outlined earlier in this report. The Welsh Government should clarify the role of regional consortia in relation to WESPs.

19. The Committee believes that fora should be open and transparent and that members of the public should be able to attend their meetings if they so wish. Fora should also publish information on the work they have undertaken.

**Recommendation: Welsh Government should work with Local Government and stakeholders to strengthen the role of fora so that they**

**are more effective. Fora should be open, representative and should report annually.**

**Recommendation: Welsh Government should clarify the role of regional consortia in relation to WESPs.**

***Powers to intervene***

20. Some stakeholders felt strongly that the Minister should intervene where local authorities are not meeting the targets in their WESPs. It was recognised that such intervention should not be necessary if the WESP system is working correctly and delivering increased provision at a local level.

21. The Committee sought legal advice about whether the Welsh Ministers are able to intervene and take action if it was considered that a local authority was failing in its duty to prepare and implement WESPs correctly. The Committee was advised that the power for Welsh Ministers to intervene under section 21 of the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013 could be used in relation to WESPs.

**Recommendation: The Minister should use the powers available to him under existing legislation to intervene where local authorities are failing to deliver their WESPs.**

**To what degree do WESPs reflect the range of Welsh Government policies relevant to Welsh-medium provision?**

22. The Committee considered whether Welsh Government's policies are being co-ordinated to deliver Welsh Government's aspirations for Welsh-medium education.

***Flying start***

23. We note the concerns raised by contributors about the lack of Flying Start/Dechrau'n Deg places through the medium of Welsh (or mixed provision) compared to the Welsh Government's targets for 7 year olds and believe this may have a significant impact on progression from childcare to Welsh-medium early-education provision. Children from low income families will be hardest hit by this lack of provision. Again, this is an example of a national strategy not being aligned with local delivery.

**Recommendation: Welsh Government should outline the reasons for the deficit between the percentage of Welsh-medium places available under**

**Flying Start and its target for 25 per cent of seven year olds to be taught through the medium of Welsh by 2015 (and 30 per cent by 2020). Welsh Government should explain how it will address the deficit.**

***School and learner transport***

24. Contributors had significant concerns about this issue, particularly around the introduction of travel fees for post-16 students to Welsh medium provision. The Committee acknowledges that this is a complex area, but it must be addressed by Welsh Government so that its learner transport policies are supporting, not undermining, the delivery of its Welsh medium education strategy. It may be that the Learner Travel Measure needs to be reconsidered, to ensure that legislation aligns with the objectives of WESPs and the WMES.

**Recommendation: Welsh Government to outline how it intends to ensure that transport arrangements for Welsh-medium and bilingual education support the delivery of its WMES targets.**

***Additional Learning Needs***

25. There appears to be significant gaps in provision for pupils with additional learning needs who wish to be educated through the medium of Welsh. There is also regional variation in levels of provision. Welsh Government should consider how to address these issues, including whether it may be appropriate to introduce regional organisation of additional learning needs provision.

**Recommendation: Welsh Government to outline how it will address Welsh-medium provision for pupils with additional learning needs and whether the forthcoming Additional Learning Needs Bill would be an appropriate vehicle to do so.**

***Further education – post-16.***

26. We agree that further education provision should be included in WESPs to strengthen the continuum from early years to further education provision. This may also help to address concerns relating to the capacity of a bilingual workforce.

**Recommendation: Welsh Government should reconsider its Welsh-medium education strategies with a view to ensuring that the importance of post-16 education is reflected in them and in turn within local authority WESPs.**

### ***Donaldson review***

27. The Committee notes the Minister's view that the implementation of the Donaldson review will have significant implications for Welsh-medium education. However, the Committee believes that, in the meantime, the Minister must ensure that opportunities are not lost due to a focus on systems that will be implemented in several years' time. A loss of focus over the next three to five years will have a significant impact on Welsh Government's ability to fulfil its aspirations.