

Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru | National Assembly for Wales

Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg | Children, Young People and Education Committee

Cyllido Ysgolion yng Nghymru | School Funding in Wales

SF 23

Ymateb gan: Comisiynydd y Gymraeg

Response from: Welsh Language Commissioner

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the consultation on school funding in Wales.

The education sector is central to the Welsh Government's strategy of achieving a million Welsh speakers by 2050. One crucial aspect of the strategy is to increase the number of pupils in Welsh medium education. The projection towards a million Welsh speakers is premised on increasing the percentage of pupils receiving Welsh medium education from the current figure of 22% to 30% by 2031 and 40% by 2050. A second key aspect of the strategy is to reform the way Welsh is taught in English medium schools. The Welsh government indicates that it is the introduction of a new curriculum for Wales that will drive the required changes in this respect.

The *Cymraeg 2050* strategy has significant implications for local authorities, specifically in terms of educational policy. For example, the national strategy for expanding Welsh medium education will require local authorities to open more Welsh medium schools, to expand current Welsh medium schools, or to move schools along the linguistic continuum. Such changes will have obvious implications in terms of securing a sufficient number of teachers with the requisite skills to teach in such schools. There will also be obligations placed upon local authorities as a consequence of the second strategy of reforming the way Welsh is taught in English medium schools. For example, it might be the case that such schools will be expected to deliver an increasing share of the curriculum through the medium of Welsh. Not only will such changes have implications in terms of ensuring sufficient staff have the linguistic skills to deliver such a curriculum, but also in terms of the resources needed to support a reformed curriculum. It is clear that local authorities' ability to implement such changes, and thus contribute to the *Cymraeg 2050* strategy, will be severely undermined in the absence of sufficient funding from the Welsh Government.

I am aware that local authorities' education revenue is primarily derived from the annual local government settlement and also through council tax and non-domestic rates income. Although this funding is un-hypothecated, the size of the overall budget will directly impact how much funding local authorities have to allocate for various expenditure budgets, for example the education budget. This will, in turn, impact local authorities' capacity to achieve some of the Welsh

Government's key policy objectives, for example those of *Cymraeg 2050*.

According to the recent article by the Assembly's Research Service on 'School Funding in Wales' the total budget received by local authorities from the Welsh Government has decreased by 1.3% (real terms) between 2017-18 and 2018-19. The research also indicates that there has been a reduction of 7.9% (real terms) in the budget allocated by local authorities to the education sector between the years 2010-11 and 2018-19. These figures raise the question of whether current funding arrangements are sufficient to allow local authorities to drive the far-reaching changes required to achieve the Welsh Government's *Cymraeg 2050* strategy. Not only is it imperative that there is enough funding to delegate directly to schools, but also that local authorities have a healthy remaining budget to drive central policy objectives. This central education budget is crucial in terms of promoting and facilitating access to Welsh medium education, for example through funding free transport for pupils in Welsh medium schools. The recent article by the Assembly's Research Service indicates that the size of local authorities' central budget (the sum remaining after funds have been delegated to individual schools) has decreased significantly over the past decade. It is likely that the pressure placed upon the education budgets of local authorities have led some to reconsider and to consult on transport policies (for example), which could negatively impact Welsh medium and bilingual education. There is clear evidence therefore, that insufficient funding has already impacted on local authorities' ability to sustain their current support for Welsh medium education. This raises crucial questions regarding whether current funding arrangements are sufficient to enable local authorities to significantly increase the support and promotion of Welsh medium education, in line with the policy objectives of *Cymraeg 2050*.

Whilst ensuring sufficient core funding is crucial, it is also important to consider other funding streams open to the statutory educational sector in Wales. For example, I am aware that the Welsh Government uses the education budget to distribute grants which focus on delivering on key policy objectives and priorities, and have agreed to invest £100 million over the current Assembly's term. I am also aware that the funding provided to regional consortia contributes towards supporting Welsh medium and bilingual education. Furthermore, the Welsh Government has recently invested £30 million for capital projects relating to Welsh medium education. Considering that the Welsh Government received bids that amounted to £103 million, it is clear that there exists a demand for additional funding for the purpose of expanding Welsh medium education across Wales. It is also crucial to ensure that the 21st Century Schools and Education Capital Programme is used strategically to expand and support Welsh medium and bilingual education in Wales.

Whilst the above funding streams have contributed significantly towards strengthening the position of the Welsh language in the education sector, I believe there is a need for a more consistent, long-term, and substantial funding

strategy to support local authorities in contributing to the *Cymraeg 2050* strategy. It is likely that such a strategy will need to consider various ways in which this could be achieved, which would include the core funding streams as well as more focused funding grants. In this context, it is imperative that further consideration be given to how such funding streams could be aligned to facilitate the implementation of Welsh in Education Strategic Plans of local authorities.

I hope the above comments prove useful as you scrutinise the current school funding arrangements in Wales.