

A report on

Welsh Language Immersion Arrangements in

Wrexham County Borough Council

The Guildhall

Wrexham

LL11 1AY

Date of inspection: December 2024

by

**Estyn, His Majesty's Inspectorate for Education
and Training in Wales**

This report is also available in Welsh.

About Wrexham County Borough Council

Name of provider	Wrexham County Borough Council
Local authority	Wrexham County Borough Council
Start date of inspection	09/12/2024

Context

There are eight Welsh-medium primary schools and one Welsh-medium secondary school in Wrexham local authority. At the time of the inspection, there were two Welsh immersion centres within the local authority, the Cynefin primary centre situated at Ysgol Min y Ddôl and a secondary centre situated at Ysgol Morgan Llwyd.

The Welsh immersion arrangements within Wrexham local authority have evolved significantly since 2018. Ysgol Morgan Llwyd has run an immersion programme for a number of years, which has enabled pupils from English-medium schools to move to Welsh-medium education by immersing them in the language in Years 7 and 8. The scheme is sponsored jointly between the school and the local authority.

In 2018, an outreach co-ordinator was appointed for latecomers to the Welsh language in primary schools. By 2020, the outreach co-ordinator had developed a flexible programme of support for latecomers and supporting the language of the Welsh-medium primary schools as a result of the lockdown period. In 2021, a late immersion grant was received and this was used to employ an additional assistant. The co-ordinator has now been released to develop the local authority's development plan and manage the latecomers team. In 2022, the secondary immersion provision came under the care of the local authority. There are now three teachers and one assistant supporting provision across the primary and secondary sectors, with the manager co-ordinating provision across the authority.

Summary

In a short period of time, leaders have established successful immersion arrangements for the local authority by using the government grant effectively. The inspirational leadership of the manager of the provision has created a supportive culture to promote the Welsh language across the local authority. A dedicated team promotes pupils' pride in the Welsh language and supports their well-being strongly.

Leaders forge strong relationships with local schools, pupils and parents in developing the Welsh immersion arrangements. For example, they work with schools to plan provision and support pupils and their families to transition successfully to Welsh-medium education.

Leaders promote staff's professional learning successfully. They research bilingualism practices enthusiastically, in addition to conducting professional learning in other schools. This has a positive effect on developing the Welsh language skills of staff and pupils across the authority. The centre manager seizes every opportunity to innovate in promoting the immersion arrangements to improve standards in pupils' oral skills. Although leaders are committed to developing immersion arrangements across the authority, they do not use self-evaluation and planning for improvement processes purposefully enough to set a clear strategic direction for the development of provision over time, particularly in the primary sector. Pupils' well-being support is a clear strength, with well-informed strategies that equip staff to support learners. These methods promote pupils' positive attitudes to learning and ensure that nearly all feel safe.

Staff's passion and enthusiasm promote a vibrant learning community and they provide stimulating and purposeful learning experiences for pupils. Staff are robust language models and support pupils purposefully. As a result, pupils feel happy and their attendance and behaviour are good.

Over time, provision supports many pupils to make at least good progress in their Welsh speaking skills. Most have positive attitudes towards the Welsh language and take pride in their ability to communicate multilingually. Most apply their skills purposefully across the curriculum.

Recommendations

We have made one recommendation to help the local authority continue to improve:

- R1 Plan more purposefully to ensure a clear strategic direction for Welsh immersion arrangements

What happens next

Not in follow-up

Following the publication of the inspection report, the local authority should update its plans to address the recommendations and to take account of shortcomings identified through the inspection process. The local authority should update its plans within three months of publication of the inspection report.

When the provider is invited to provide a case study

Estyn will invite the provider to prepare a case study on its work in relation to developing pupils' well-being to promote positive attitudes towards learning Welsh and supporting the development of their oral skills, to be disseminated on Estyn's website.

Main evaluation

Leaders have a clear vision to ensure that the Welsh language thrives in Wrexham and to promote the use of the Welsh language to all. In a short period of time, leaders have developed the local authority's language immersion arrangements successfully. They have used the government grant prudently to support the development of the Welsh language across the authority. The strong and inspiring leadership of the manager of the provision has created a supportive culture to promote the Welsh language across the local authority. She has high expectations of herself, pupils and staff. Leaders have developed an effective team of staff who are fully committed to the provision's values. They nurture pupils' pride in the Welsh language, alongside ensuring their self-confidence by supporting pupils' well-being and readiness to learn successfully.

Leaders forge strong relationships with local schools, pupils and parents in developing the Welsh language immersion arrangements. The secondary provision has a specific location with a clear plan in terms of the organisation of provision. The provision's staff forge early

relationships with pupils and their families and provide taster sessions at the end of their time at the primary schools successfully. As a result, the number of pupils in the secondary provision has increased significantly. In the primary provision, leaders work closely with the headteachers of local Welsh-medium schools in planning purposeful provision to meet the needs of latecomers and those pupils who need linguistic support. They trial a number of different programmes to support pupils' linguistic skills. They respond flexibly to support pupils, primary school and families. Through this intensive support, leaders meet the needs of latecomers purposefully and ensure that pupils do not leave the Welsh-medium education sector.

Overall, leaders have a sound understanding of the strengths of the Welsh language immersion arrangements and areas for improvement. They use a range of suitable activities to evaluate the standard of teaching and learning, for example through whole staff meetings to ensure consistency in, refine and adapt pupils' experiences across the learning ages. The centre manager seizes every opportunity to innovate in promoting the immersion arrangements to improve standards in pupils' oral skills. Although leaders are committed to developing immersion arrangements across the authority, they do not use self-evaluation and planning for improvement processes purposefully enough to set a clear strategic direction for the development of provision over time, particularly in the primary sector.

Leaders work effectively with staff from local schools to address national priorities, such as well-being, and promote the development of the Welsh language within the local authority. Leaders encourage staff to work with teachers across the authority's schools to undertake active investigations to look at the effect of bilingualism on pupils. They have recently visited Canada to see how the local communities promote bilingualism among the local community. Following the visit, they have begun to experiment with the use of microphones to support the development of pupils' oracy.

Leaders have created a positive culture and ethos to promote and support staff's professional learning. They provide rich opportunities for them to undertake a good range of professional learning which responds firmly to their individual requirements and pupils' priorities.

Spotlight: Develop the Welsh language skills of staff and pupils in English-medium schools

Leaders organise valuable opportunities to support professional learning across the authority by providing effective language acquisition training. Recently, they have promoted the development of the Welsh language skills of staff and pupils in some of the local English-medium schools successfully. The centre's staff tailor purposeful support to

meet the needs of individual schools and work together to provide stimulating activities to support the development of pupils' skills across the curriculum. As a result, staff's confidence in teaching Welsh has increased which, in turn, has a positive effect on pupils' skills. This has also led to an increase in the number of pupils who transfer to Welsh-medium secondary education each year. This is now significantly higher than the target set by the authority in the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP).

Supporting pupils' well-being is a clear strength across the provision. A very effective element of this is how leaders have developed innovative strategies to enable staff to be mindful of the effect of trauma. The specialist training they have received ensures that all members of staff are equipped to support learners. This ensures that they have a deeper understanding of the experiences of each of the learners and the ways in which they should deal with each learner, based on need. As a result, pupils feel happy and safe and are very willing to share any concerns with adults.

The immersion provision supports pupils in the next steps of their linguistic development effectively. In the secondary provision, for example, teachers prepare learners to be able to use their writing skills across the curriculum in mainstream project work. This has a positive effect on pupils' confidence as they acquire new linguistic skills. Pupils transition smoothly to the provision and to their next school by sharing relevant information, in addition to organising taster sessions and beneficial visits over time.

Over time, provision supports many pupils to make at least good progress in their Welsh speaking skills. Most have positive attitudes towards the Welsh language and take pride in their ability to communicate multilingually. Most apply their skills purposeful across the curriculum.

Most pupils, including pupils with additional learning needs and those who are affected adversely by poverty and disadvantage, gain confidence in their Welsh speaking skills. Staff undertake a range of intervention strategies successfully, which focus effectively on developing pupils' literacy skills in addition to their social skills and well-being. As a result, pupils are confident when contributing to their learning.

Teachers are robust linguistic role models and encourage and support pupils to use correct syntax and vocabulary. This, on the whole, has a positive effect on pupils' language development. For example, Year 7 pupils use relevant subject vocabulary, such as '*enwadur*' (denominator) and '*rhifiadur*' (numerator) purposefully when discussing fractions.

In the best practices, teachers' infectious energy and passion promotes a vibrant learning community that motivates and equips pupils to acquire the Welsh language. Teachers use

a good range of resources and effective multisensory teaching methods that facilitate pupils' progress purposefully. For example, they model the use of physical gestures to recall the letters of the alphabet skilfully. Staff respond purposefully to pupils' learning and adapt provision as necessary. However, at times, staff do not question pupils probingly enough. There is a tendency to over-use leading and closed questions and teachers' questioning methods do not provide regular enough opportunities for pupils to think more deeply or present more extended responses. There are purposeful arrangements for monitoring and tracking pupils' progress. Staff report to parents on their child's progress and the next steps in their learning in a timely manner.

Staff establish a close and supportive working relationships with pupils based on trust. The immersion classes are happy and friendly communities. There is an emphasis on promoting good behaviour, ensuring that pupils treat adults and their peers with courtesy. On the whole, staff have high expectations of pupils and provide learning experiences that challenge many pupils suitably. Teachers and support staff establish a stimulating learning environment that is attractive and fun. As a result, most pupils are happy at the provision and show respect towards the adults who help them to acquire the Welsh language.

The strong leadership of the Welsh immersion arrangements ensure that staff have a comprehensive knowledge of pupils' well-being and learning needs. They use this knowledge to plan an interesting curriculum that responds purposefully to pupils' needs and incorporates and celebrates the context, culture and heritage of the local area successfully.

Additional information

The provider's arrangements for safeguarding pupils do not give any cause for concern.

The provider's arrangements for the management of the site do not give any cause for concern.

Evidence base of the report

Before an inspection, inspectors:

- analyse the outcomes from the parent/carer and pupil questionnaires and consider the views of teachers, staff, leaders and headteachers of pupils' registered schools through their questionnaire responses

During an inspection, inspectors:

- observe teaching and other activities, including evidence gathered through learning walks
- meet pupils (past and present) to discuss their work and to gain their views on various aspects of the provider's work
- meet with staff, leaders, managers, headteachers of pupils' registered schools and others to evaluate the impact of the provider's work
- look closely at self-evaluation processes
- consider the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP)/ improvement plan and look at evidence to show how well the local authority has taken forward planned improvements
- scrutinise a range of documents, including information on pupil assessment and progress, records of meetings of staff and the management committee, information on pupils' well-being, including the safeguarding of pupils, and records of staff training and professional development

After the on-site inspection and before the publication of the report, Estyn:

- review the findings of the inspection alongside the supporting evidence from the inspection team in order to validate, moderate and ensure the quality of the inspection

Appendix 1: Numbers – quantities and proportions

The report makes references to different quantities and proportions e.g. ‘most pupils...’ or ‘very few pupils...’. We use these terms to describe quantities and proportions as outlined in the table below:

nearly all =	with very few exceptions
most =	90% or more
many =	70% or more
a majority =	over 60%
half =	50%
around half =	close to 50%
a minority =	below 40%
few =	below 20%
very few =	less than 10%

Copies of the report

Copies of this report are available from the local authority and from the Estyn website (<http://www.estyn.gov.wales>)

The report was produced in accordance with Section 38 of the Education Act 1997.

Every possible care has been taken to ensure that the information in this document is accurate at the time of going to press. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

Publication Section

Estyn

Anchor Court, Keen Road

Cardiff

CF24 5JW or by email to publications@estyn.gov.wales

This and other Estyn publications are available on our website:

<http://www.estyn.gov.wales/>

This document has been translated by Trosol (Welsh to English).

© Crown Copyright 2025: This report may be re used free of charge in any format or medium provided that it is re used accurately and not used in a misleading context. The material must be acknowledged as Crown copyright and the title of the report specified.

Publication date: 13/02/2025