

A report on
Welsh Language Immersion Arrangements in
Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council

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by

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

This report is also available in Welsh

About Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council

Name of Provider	Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council
Local authority	Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council
Start date of inspection	21/10/2025

Context

The Welsh language immersion provision is relatively new, having been introduced in 2023 with one lead officer and two teaching assistants employed centrally. The leaders' initial vision was to develop a peripatetic model as opposed to opening a dedicated immersion centre(s). This was based on consideration of available resources, geographical challenges and anticipated demand for the service.

Over time, numbers of pupils accessing the service have increased and the provision now employs a lead officer and five teaching assistants. At the time of inspection, pupils across six schools were receiving support. Leaders have developed beneficial links with officers responsible for the local authority's Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP), to fully integrate their work with the local authority's strategic direction for the development of the Welsh language.

The curriculum within the immersion provision has been developed over time. The provision includes an initial 'Taith Iaith' programme where pupils receive one to two hours per day of intense Welsh language immersion support over approximately 20 weeks. These pupils also receive further support within their mainstream classrooms through the 'Ôl-ofalaeth' programme. In addition, those pupils who do not require the full immersion provision are supported via the 'Siarad Sionc' programme that offers a bespoke curriculum on an individual or small group basis.

Although the Welsh language immersion programme does not currently include pupils who attend secondary schools, leaders continue to evaluate the demand for this along with the provision for primary school pupils, in line with their WESP targets.

Summary

Leaders have established purposeful and inclusive Welsh immersion arrangements that promote pupils' well-being and confidence in acquiring the language successfully. They articulate a clear strategic vision that aligns well with local and national priorities for developing Welsh-medium education. Through effective collaboration with schools, staff and families, leaders ensure that pupils are supported effectively as they develop their Welsh speaking skills.

Staff are committed and enthusiastic advocates for the Welsh language. They have high expectations of what pupils can achieve and this supports pupils to thrive as learners and emerging Welsh speakers. Staff promote and establish a welcoming learning environment where pupils feel safe and valued. Pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning are highly positive, and provision for their well-being is a notable strength.

Staff model the Welsh language effectively and, on the whole, use purposeful teaching strategies that support the systematic development of pupils' language skills. As a result, most pupils, including those with additional learning needs and from low-income households, make strong progress from their individual starting points. In a very few sessions, activities do not proceed at a brisk enough pace and do not challenge pupils consistently enough. Most pupils have positive attitudes towards the Welsh language and take pride in their ability to speak Welsh. Over time, pupils are increasingly fluent and confident when using Welsh in formal and less formal situations and apply their skills purposefully across the curriculum.

Leaders have developed suitable processes for monitoring the quality of provision and have an appropriate understanding of the main strengths and areas for development. However, monitoring activities do not always focus closely enough on the impact of teaching on pupil outcomes.

Beneficial professional learning opportunities support staff to develop their knowledge and understanding of how pupils acquire language and how to promote pupil well-being effectively. Opportunities to share the most effective aspects of teaching with staff across the immersion provision, such as the use of effective questioning techniques and strategies to support pupils with additional learning needs, are less well developed.

Recommendations

We have made two recommendations to help the local authority continue to improve:

- R1. Enhance monitoring processes to ensure a sharper focus on the effect of provision on pupil outcomes
- R2. Further develop professional learning opportunities for staff

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.

Main evaluation

Leaders have established purposeful Welsh language immersion provision that enable pupils to acquire the language systematically and develop as confident Welsh speakers. They promote an inclusive, nurturing ethos that emphasises well-being and developing pupils' confidence. As a result, most pupils are engaged in their learning and make sustained progress in their Welsh speaking and listening skills. This in turn supports pupils to apply their skills across a range of contexts.

Leaders articulate a clear strategic vision for the development of the Welsh language immersion provision that aligns well with the priorities of the WESP. This vision is based on nurturing a strong sense of the value of learning Welsh and making learning fun. Leaders share this vision suitably and establish effective partnerships with school staff and families to support pupils' acquisition of the Welsh language. This shared sense of purpose contributes positively to the quality and consistency of provision across Welsh-medium schools.

Leaders are passionate advocates for the Welsh language. They have high expectations of themselves and others and aspire to continually enhance the provision over time. Leaders ensure a suitable range of processes to monitor the quality of provision including observing teaching sessions and regular discussions with staff. These arrangements ensure that leaders have a suitable understanding of the provision's strengths and areas for improvement. They use this understanding to set appropriate development priorities. At times, monitoring activities do not focus sharply enough on the impact of provision on pupils' outcomes.

Across the provision, staff develop effective working relationships with pupils based upon trust and mutual respect. They establish calm, supportive learning environments that encourage pupils to experiment with language and take risks with new vocabulary. Staff model the Welsh language purposefully and use a range of teaching strategies effectively. This supports pupils to learn new vocabulary and sentence structures purposefully and to apply them accurately in both formal and less formal situations.

In most sessions, teaching engages pupils successfully and develops their skills progressively. Staff use an appropriate range of teaching strategies to reinforce learning. The skilful use of repetition, songs and interactive activities supports pupils to recall language patterns confidently. The 'recasting' approach used to highlight errors sensitively is a strength of the provision and contributes effectively to the development of pupils' fluency. In the best practice, staff plan activities that proceed at a suitable pace and provide appropriate levels of challenge. In a very few examples, the pace of learning is too

slow and tasks do not challenge pupils sufficiently. In these instances, a very few pupils lose concentration and do not make as much progress as they are capable of.

Staff use resources, including outdoor areas and digital tools, to support pupils' learning creatively. For example, they use interactive games effectively to reinforce vocabulary and promote collaboration. In the strongest examples, learning activities are adapted skilfully to reflect pupils' interests and their stage of development, ensuring that learning remains purposeful and motivating.

Arrangements to assess pupils' progress are coherent and purposeful. Staff use a range of assessment strategies effectively to track pupils' progress. They use this information well to identify the next steps in learning and adapt teaching to meet the individual needs of pupils. Staff collaborate closely and information about pupil progress is shared purposefully with staff in the mainstream class to support consistency and continuity in pupils' learning. They question pupils skilfully to probe understanding and encourage pupils to expand upon their answers. In a few cases, questioning is over-directed and limits opportunities for pupils to think independently.

The well-designed curriculum supports the progressive development of pupils' Welsh language skills such as language patterns and sentence structures effectively. The 'Taith Iaith', 'Siarad Sionc' and 'Ôl-ofalaeth' programmes ensure that staff provide learning activities that meet the needs of most pupils well. Learning experiences provide rich opportunities for pupils to practise using the Welsh language in useful authentic contexts, for instance through sports, creative arts and community-based activities. This supports pupils' ability to transfer skills confidently in everyday situations. A variety of resources, such as the 'Cardiau Clebran' are used creatively to further consolidate and extend pupils' learning.

Most pupils make strong progress from their individual starting points, including those with additional learning needs or from low-income households. They listen attentively, respond enthusiastically and use relevant vocabulary with increasing accuracy. Pupils show high levels of engagement and perseverance, and their enthusiasm for learning Welsh is evident in their willingness to use the language spontaneously. They demonstrate growing pride in their achievements and in their identity as Welsh speakers.

Pupils' well-being is a clear strength of the provision. Staff know pupils well and support them sensitively, creating a calm and inclusive atmosphere where pupils feel safe and valued. Pupils know who they can turn to for support and feel that staff treat them fairly. Almost without exception, pupils behave well and treat others with respect and kindness. This contributes to a positive learning culture where pupils are encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning and actions. Purposeful opportunities for staff and

pupils to celebrate reaching language milestones further reinforce pupils' confidence and their motivation to succeed.

Leaders promote a culture of professional learning purposefully and staff value the support provided by leaders. They benefit from regular opportunities to share effective practice and participate in relevant training. Professional learning activities focus suitably on developing staff's understanding of how pupils develop their language skills over time and how to support pupils' well-being. Effective practice is shared suitably with staff in the mainstream provision. Professional learning to enhance staff's understanding of using effective questioning techniques and supporting pupils with a wider range of additional learning needs is at an early stage of development.

Leaders allocate resources, including grant funding, appropriately to maintain and further develop the immersion provision. This supports the creation of stimulating learning environments and the provision of effective learning resources. Strategic planning is informed suitably by national priorities and leaders have a clear commitment to developing pupils' well-being and Welsh language skills.

Overall, the Welsh immersion provision provides pupils with a strong foundation to acquire and use the Welsh language with increasing confidence. The inclusive ethos, effective teaching and clear sense of purpose contribute positively to the development of pupils' skills and well-being. Leaders and staff are committed and enthusiastic about promoting the Welsh language and culture, ensuring that most pupils leave the provision as confident and capable Welsh speakers who are able to access the curriculum through the medium of Welsh.

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/carers 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

Atodiad 1: Niferoedd – symiau a chyfrannau

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 (www.estyn.gov.wales)

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