

**Report title:**

**Welsh in the Foundation Phase**

**Report Details**

This report was commissioned in response to a request for advice in the Minister for Education and Skills' annual remit letter to Estyn for 2012-2013. The purpose of the report is to evaluate how effectively children acquire Welsh language skills in Welsh-medium education settings across Wales.

**Summary of main findings.**

**Standards and progress in Welsh across the Foundation Phase**

Children's linguistic backgrounds and skills in Welsh vary on entry to schools and non-maintained settings. In those schools and settings which cater for pupils from similar linguistic backgrounds, pupils' linguistic skills develop consistently. However, in a few schools and settings where the children come from mixed backgrounds in terms of their home language, the progress of too many children from non-Welsh speaking homes is too slow, and the progress of some children from Welsh-speaking homes is hindered.

**Educational provision and the learning environment**

In a few schools and settings, teachers and practitioners do not have a sound understanding of the essentials of the immersion method of teaching. As a result, they do not feed and model the Welsh language strongly enough for pupils, and their expectations are not high enough. In a very few cases, learning assistants do not stick to using Welsh with pupils from non-Welsh speaking homes and this hinders their progress.

In smaller schools, there are pupils of a wide age range in the teacher's care. Due to the differences in the pupil to adult ratio as pupils get older, there are a limited number of assistants available. In this situation, too often, activities are not targeted well enough to meet the needs of all pupils, and pupils' language skills do not develop appropriately.

Settings with purpose-built buildings that are allocated for early education have developed good outdoor areas to promote children's progress. However, where settings meet in temporary rooms or buildings, such as village halls, the majority have not succeeded in developing effective areas. However, a few make good arrangements to work with schools to promote this aspect.

**Leadership and planning for improvement**

Voluntary organisations which manage settings, such as Mudiad Meithrin,

ensure that leaders and management committees of most non-maintained settings understand and implement the Foundation Phase requirements well, and they plan effectively to improve provision.

In schools, leaders' commitment and understanding are more varied. In the best practice, self-evaluation and improvement plans give clear attention to developing the Welsh language within the philosophy of the Foundation Phase. In the few settings and schools where leadership is not as good, leaders do not give enough attention to ensuring an effective relationship between developing the Welsh language and the philosophy of the Foundation Phase.

Local authorities and organisations that manage non-maintained settings provide effective support to schools and settings in most cases. However, a minority of local authorities do not provide that support through the medium of Welsh.

## **Recommendations**

### **Schools and settings should:**

R1 ensure specific opportunities for pupils to develop and use their speaking, reading and writing skills across areas of learning and in different activity areas;

R2 ensure an effective balance between formal sessions to teach and reinforce language skills and informal opportunities to use them;

R3 develop learning activities and experiences which ensure that pupils from different linguistic backgrounds make appropriate progress from their starting point;

R4 set clear expectations which will ensure that pupils from all backgrounds use the Welsh language as they pursue informal activities, particularly at the beginning of the Foundation Phase;

R5 set clear expectations for practitioners with regards to using the Welsh language in the Foundation Phase so as they feed and model a good standard of Welsh to their pupils across areas of learning;

R6 track progress in pupils' speaking, reading and writing skills consistently throughout the Foundation Phase; and

R7 give appropriate attention to quality of provision and standards in the Foundation Phase as part of self-evaluation processes and improvement planning in schools and settings.

**Local authorities and organisations which manage non-maintained settings should:**

R8 provide support and training for practitioners on immersion methods of language learning and provide guidance on how language, literacy and communication skills (Welsh) can be developed in a way which is compatible with the philosophy and methodology of the Foundation Phase;

R9 provide training and support for practitioners, including assistants, to improve their Welsh, where necessary;

R10 share good practice in terms of developing language, literacy and communication skills (Welsh) across areas of learning and activity areas in the Foundation Phase; and

R11 ensure that local authority support provision for Welsh-medium non-maintained settings is available in Welsh.

**Response to Recommendations 1-11**

Officials will write to Directors of Education to ask them to bring this report to the attention of Welsh medium primary schools and to consider with schools what action may be required to address the issues identified by Estyn.

Officials will require local authorities to document and explain how issues will be addressed in their Welsh in Education Strategic Plans. For example, information regarding support and training for practitioners on immersion methods of language learning and the need to provide support through the medium of Welsh in Welsh-medium settings may be required to address the issues raised by Estyn.

**The Welsh Government should:**

R12 ensure that authorities and schools understand the relationship between the methodology and philosophy of the Foundation Phase and the Literacy and Numeracy Framework.

**Response:**

1. The Department for Education and Skills through the Foundation Phase branch will be developing guidance to support our Foundation Phase practitioners on striking the right balance between child-initiated and adult-led learning in both Welsh-medium and English-medium settings and this will include the relationship between the Foundation Phase and the LNF.
2. The guidance is being written by a Foundation Phase subject expert and will be informed by the Foundation Phase stocktake. The supplementary guidance will also form part of any changes we make to the Foundation Phase National Training Pack.

3. The National Support Programme (NSP) is designed to support all schools in Wales to implement the National Literacy and Numeracy Framework, supporting school leaders to implement a whole-school approach to literacy and numeracy across the curriculum. All school will receive the necessary hands on support and training to effectively implement the requirements of the LNF in their schools, across the Foundation Phase Areas of Learning and all subjects from Reception through to year 9.

**Publication Details.**

The Estyn report is scheduled for publication on Estyn's website on 5 December 2013.