



SCRUTINY COMMITTEE REPORT

Date Written	09/08/18
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Service Area	Education
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To: Chair, Ladies and Gentlemen

Update on Welsh Education Strategic Plan Diweddariad ar Gynllun Strategol Addysg Gymraeg

1.0 SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the status of the Welsh Education Strategic Plan (WESP) 2017-2020 for Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION

2.1 This report is discussed and noted.

3.0 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

3.1 Each local authority in Wales has a statutory duty to prepare, and submit, a WESP for Welsh Ministers' consideration. Plans must demonstrate clear actions and steps to maximise opportunities for Welsh-medium education. They must also set challenging targets for developing Welsh-medium education in their areas.

4.0 WHERE WE WERE

4.1 The Plan provides strategic direction for the planning and delivery of Welsh-medium and Welsh language education across the LA as well as a vision statement. The Plan is underpinned and informed by Welsh Government's current Welsh-medium Education Strategy and policy. The Plan has been written in line with Welsh Government priorities as set out in the following documents:

- Rewriting the Future - <http://gov.wales/topics/educationandskills/schoolshome/deprivation/rewriting-the-future-schools/?lang=en>;
- Successful Futures - <http://gov.wales/topics/educationandskills/schoolshome/curriculum-for-wales-curriculum-for-life/why-we-are-changing/successful-futures/?lang=en>;
- Future Generations – <http://gov.wales/topics/people-and-communities/people/future-generations-act/?lang=en>;

4.2 The WESP was produced in line, and launched for consultation, within Welsh Government timescales. It is aligned with the corporate strategy. It was submitted for approval on 20th December 2016. WG was to notify LAs of the Minister's decision by 31st January 2017. Instead, on 14th March 2017, the Minister for the Welsh Language, Alun Davies, announced the appointment of Aled Roberts to carry out a rapid review of Local Authorities' Welsh in Education Strategic Plans (WESPs). <http://gov.wales/about/cabinet/cabinetstatements/2017/welshineducation/?lang=en>

4.3 Aled Roberts' report was published at the end of April, following on from which there was close communication between him, the Inclusion Manager and other WG colleagues to address comments made with regards to the Plan. These were around the following areas:

- Setting more ambitious targets in order to increase the numbers in Welsh-medium education and to improve pre-school provision.
- The lack of plans to expand the provision under Band B of the 21st Century Schools and Education Programme.
- Reasons for varied transfer rates from playgroups to Welsh-medium education.
- Information needed regarding how provision for latecomers will be offered.
- Clarity in terms of data on the numbers of young people following Welsh medium courses.
- Targets to be set for Welsh First Language and Second Language.
- Objectives to be set for conducting a Welsh medium Additional Learning Needs audit.

4.4 An interim response was sent to WG in May 2017, followed by meetings with colleagues from WG, with a final response being sent on 28th September 2017. All of the above areas were addressed. However, WG requested more information with regards to the inclusion of Welsh-medium projects in Band B 21st Century Schools projects as well as the detail around the possibility of establishing a Welsh-medium nursery on an English-medium site. A further response was then sent.

4.5 A decision was meant to be forthcoming by December 2017, but instead in November 2017 the Cabinet Secretary for Education made an announcement on the funding of the 21st Century Schools and Education Programme Band B, stating that no decision would be made regarding the approval of the WESPs before this announcement as WG is keen to ensure that the capital element is key to the development of the Welsh-medium provision. There is an expectation that all WESPs state their intention in detail in increasing Welsh-medium provision through the 21st Century Schools and Education Programme.

5.0 WHERE WE ARE NOW

5.1 Since May 2017 close correspondence has been in place with WG in respect of the WESP to ensure that targets are more ambitious, while also being realistic and pertinent to the area, along with providing detail on the plans for increasing Welsh-medium provision and promoting growth. These are as follows;

- Having re-calculated capacity across all schools, the LA has identified additional classroom space within the two Welsh Medium Primary schools. This has resulted in an increased capacity in Ysgol Santes Tudful from 390 to 420 and in Ysgol Rhyd y Grug from 210 to 260. This equates to 4.9% (20 pupils) of surplus spaces in Ysgol Santes Tudful and 15% (33 pupils) in Ysgol Rhyd y Grug. This is more in line with the LA's revised target of an increase of 55 pupils by 2021;
- submit a proposal to use the grant for Reducing Class Sizes to build a classroom on the site of a Welsh Medium Primary school; this will increase capacity by 30 in Ysgol Santes Tydfil;
- review school capacity in order to plan for increased demand within schools eg. use of porta cabins, Band C proposals, conversion of current English Medium provision to Welsh Medium. In addition the LA is planning for modifications within schools eg. one room was previously being used for Music has now been turned into a classroom at Ysgol Santes Tudful as of the start of the academic year 2017/18;
- apply for a 3 class extension at Ysgol Rhyd Y Grug (from the £30 million Welsh Government Grant), with plans for this to include a Welsh Medium LRB. This will increase capacity in the school for nursery and pre-nursery. The WM LRB will provide flexible specialist support to primary aged pupils across the Foundation Phase and Key Stage 2;
- as part of our Band B proposal the site of an English Medium school will become available and this will be used in our submission proposals for the development of a new Welsh Medium Primary school in the northern part of the county (to be applied for from the £30million Welsh Government Grant) with Early Years provision (applied for out of the £60million Welsh Government Grant). This will provide a third WM Primary school with a capacity of 210 pupils and will include sufficient places for WM maintained nursery and pre-nursery provision. It will also provide space/facilities to co-locate after school and holiday childcare provision on the same site;

- bid for additional monies from the Capital Funding for Early Years Provision grant but the details of this have not yet been completed – the grant claim pro-forma and Terms and Conditions etc. have not yet been circulated. However, opportunities will be sought using this funding stream to increase the capacity of existing pre-nursery and nursery classes within schools if possible, as well as co-locating non-maintained REPs and/or Early Years Childcare providers within schools; and
- continue to identify how to stimulate growth.

5.2 This will provide capacity for increased demand in Welsh Medium education in support of the Welsh Government's aims of securing one million Welsh speakers by 2050. This will also take account the LDP which is currently out to consultation.

In addition the LA will:

- promote the benefits of bilingualism when sharing information with all parents about applying for a place in Nursery and in Reception;
- hold workshops for parents about the benefits of bilingualism;
- set up focus groups with parents – including those who move from Welsh pre-school to English Medium to identify barriers to going into Welsh Medium Primary;
- set up focus groups with Welsh Medium support groups to identify barriers and co-construct an action plan to stimulate demand and increase progression from pre-school through the Primary education; and
- promote early years Welsh Medium provision within English Medium schools that have been ear marked for Band B projects.

5.3 A final version was sent to WG on 4th June 2018 to which we are waiting a response.

6.0 WHERE WE WANT TO BE

6.1 We want to break the cycle of inter-generational poverty in our local authority area, raise aspirations and improve outcomes for children and young people and improve their life chances. We want to increase the opportunities for the use of the Welsh language and support the Welsh Government's target of having a million Welsh speakers by 2050, as such we need:

- to enable the people of Merthyr Tydfil to be able to live their lives through the medium of Welsh if they so wish;
- to encourage and support the use of the Welsh language within families;
- to promote the benefits of bilingualism;
- to increase the provision of welsh-medium activities for children and young people;
- to increase the awareness of the value of the Welsh language; and
- to strengthen the position of the Welsh language in the community.

7.0 WHAT WE NEED TO DO NEXT

7.1 The WESP needs to be approved so that it can be shared more widely and posted on the MTCBC website, in order for all parties involved to work together to maximise the opportunities for Welsh Medium education.

8.0 CONTRIBUTION TO WELLBEING OBJECTIVES

8.1 The WESP relates to the following Wellbeing Objective:

- Best Start to Life:
 - Children and young people get the best start to life and are equipped with the skills they need to be successful learners and confident individuals
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BACKGROUND PAPERS		
Title of Document(s)	Document(s) Date	Document Location
Rewriting the Future		Education
Successful Futures		Education
Future Generations		Education
WESP		Education
Does the report contain any issue that may impact the Council's Constitution?		No