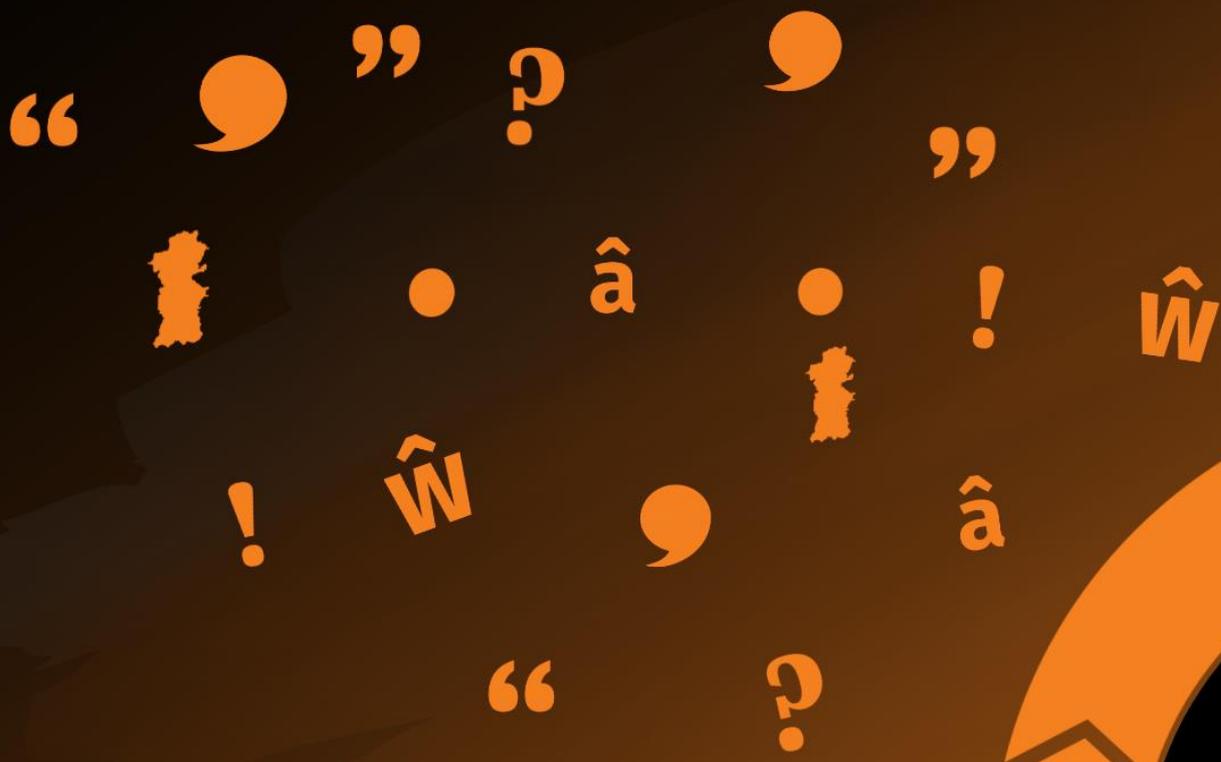


A vision for increasing the number of fully
bilingual learners in Powys

December 2020



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About

In March 2020, the local authority set out a clear ambition for its schools, that:

“All children and young people in Powys will experience a high quality, inspiring education to help develop the knowledge, skills and attributes that will enable them to become healthy, personally fulfilled, economically productive, socially responsible and globally engaged citizens of 21st century Wales.”

The extensive engagement held with a wide range of stakeholders over the preceding months had underlined, with great clarity, that change is necessary at some pace for the Powys schools' system. Underpinning the need for change is the widespread feeling that the schools' system is no longer suited for the delivery of an inclusive, modern arrangement to meet the needs of all learners. It was also clear that stakeholders are insistent that it is the Council's responsibility to frame and set a strategic direction as a matter of urgency, to tackle the acknowledged shortcomings. There is a strong consensus, expressed frequently during the engagement that changes are needed to have more accessible schools that can support learners who learn in Welsh – offering the full curriculum from the age of 4 to 18.

The evidence from the rest of Wales is that Welsh-medium/bilingual provision offers the best opportunity for learners to become fully bilingual,

whilst also creating a dynamic outward looking cultural environment. These are schools that operate in Welsh, and which meet the needs of learners from diverse backgrounds across Wales, including learners who arrive in Wales after they have started their education. Provision in these schools, like similar schools around the world, enable all learners to become fully bilingual young people.

In April 2020, the Transforming Education Strategy was adopted on behalf of the Cabinet, which included the following commitment to the future of education in Welsh for learners in Powys.

“Strategic Aim 3: We will improve access to Welsh-medium provision across all key stages”

The purpose of this aim is to ensure that, in future, a growing number of children can access Welsh-medium education from early years to their school leaving age.

From the evidence gathered during the engagement exercise, it is apparent that there is no equality of provision for Welsh-medium learners across the county, and the level of Welsh-medium provision available is a postcode lottery. In addition, learners in Powys do not have access to a Welsh-medium secondary school.

The Council's new **Welsh in Education Strategic Plan 2021-2031** will be fully aligned with this Strategy and will include additional actions to support this Strategic Aim.

Terminology

There has been lack of clarity regarding the meaning of terminology relating to the language status of schools.

Across Wales, a **Welsh-medium school** is understood to be a school where every learner in the school is taught and supported to be entirely bilingual in Welsh and English (whilst they also study modern foreign languages). As they work to provide a curriculum to support bilingualism for all learners, it is not uncommon for them to be called **bilingual schools**.

In Powys, there are no Welsh-medium/bilingual secondary schools in the sense noted above i.e. there are no secondary schools which work to ensure the bilingualism of all learners. There are **dual-stream secondary schools** across the county. These are schools where only some of their learners are educated in a way that will enable them to become fully bilingual by the time they leave school. In these schools, some learners have their curriculum in English, and others have their curriculum in a mix of English and Welsh. In essence, in the same school, there are learners who are having a bilingual education and others who are having an English language education. The proportions in our dual stream schools across Powys are:

School	No. of Pupils in Welsh/Bilingual Stream	No. of Pupils in English Stream
Builth C.P. School	108	93
Rhayader C. in W. School	65	136
Sennybridge C.P. School	54	82
Ysgol Bro Hyddgen (Primary)	112	54
Ysgol Dyffryn Trannon	96	14
Ysgol GG Llanfair Caereinion	86	75
Ysgol Llanfyllin (Primary)	67	63
Ysgol Llanrhaeadr ym Mochnant	38	36
Ysgol Rhiw Bechan	61	94
Ysgol Trefonnen	88	120
Brecon High School	30	549
Caereinion High School	253	211
Llanidloes High School	106	544
Ysgol Bro Hyddgen (Secondary)	186	110
Ysgol Calon Cymru	142	854
Ysgol Llanfyllin (Secondary)	158	525

Pupil numbers as of 13th October 2020

This contrasts with much of Wales where there are designated schools that set out to ensure the bilingualism of every learner, and others which operate in English only. In Wales, there are 3 authorities without designated Welsh-medium/bilingual schools – Powys, Monmouthshire, and Blaenau Gwent. However, Monmouthshire and Blaenau Gwent have had firm arrangements for 30 years with Newport and Torfaen to offer a full Welsh-medium/bilingual provision in their secondary schools.

The assumption by some that a dual-stream school is the same as a bilingual school has often hampered discussions with stakeholders about the future planning of education.

What is the difference?

Welsh-medium or bilingual school

These are schools where:



Learners

- Every learner in the school is expected to become fully bilingual in Welsh and English.
- All pupils study both English and Welsh to first language standard, including for external examinations and also study a modern foreign language.



Curriculum

- The curriculum is delivered mainly through the medium of Welsh.



Language of the school

- The administrative and social life of the school for pupils and staff is conducted in Welsh.



Extra-curricular

- Extra-curricular activities are usually conducted in Welsh, but students access national activities in both languages



Engagement with parents

- Engagement with parents happens entirely bilingually or according to parental choice. Whilst the learners are fully bilingual, most parents might not be.

Dual-stream school

These are schools where:



Learners

- Some learners are enabled to become fully bilingual while other learners in the school study in English only.
- The learners in the Welsh/bilingual stream study Welsh and English as first languages and are expected to be fully bilingual, Learners in the English stream study English to first language standard and Welsh as a second language, and it is not designed for them to become fully bilingual by the end of their time at school.



Curriculum

- In the main, the entire curriculum is available in English for all learners. A part of the curriculum is available in Welsh for those who are in the Welsh/bilingual stream (which varies greatly from school to school).



Language of the school

- Usually, the social language of the school is determined by its leadership and staffing, and by the proportion of learners who study in either language.



Extra-curricular

- Extra-curricular activities are usually conducted in both English and Welsh.



Engagement with parents

- Engagement with parents happens entirely in Welsh and/or English depending on the ability of staff to communicate through the medium of Welsh or according to parental choice.

Recent public engagement

During our public engagement exercises conducted last year, concerns were expressed around the current provision of education in Welsh in Powys. Some of these included:

- Not all parts of Powys have easily accessible primary or secondary education through the medium of Welsh – currently there is no provision in the Presteigne, Crickhowell or Gwernyfed areas.
- Many schools that do provide a dual-stream approach do not deliver enough of their curriculum in Welsh to satisfy their learners. Provision is patchy, and unequal in too many of the secondary schools. It is common for under half of the curriculum to be available in their language of choice for learners in the Welsh stream of secondary education from year 7.
- The choice of subjects taught through the medium of Welsh becomes smaller as the learner gets older, and at post-14 the provision is very poor or non-existent. This includes deficiencies in the provision by the Further Education provider. In some secondary Welsh streams, fewer than 5 GCSE subjects are delivered through the medium of Welsh, and in one case only one non-language course is taught in Welsh. Some respondents queried how we could refer to schools as 'dual stream' if for some learners they can only choose from one or two subjects in Welsh.
- There is evidence that some parents in Powys avoid choosing an education through the medium of Welsh because they are concerned that the progression available for their child within the authority will be limited. This has been reported by headteachers at primary level who are frustrated by the lack of provision after their learners transition to secondary education.
- At a time when bilingual/Welsh education has grown across Wales and is often a showcase sector for other counties, Powys has been stagnant, and in some key indicators the local authority has been going backwards. This has happened despite commitments made in the Powys Welsh in Education Strategic Plans over recent years.
- Powys has a smaller percentage of its children learning through the medium of Welsh than the percentage of Welsh speakers in the wider population. It is believed to be the only authority in Wales where this is the case.

The views expressed in the engagement process are particularly disappointing given that in 2017 Powys Council published clear objectives for its Welsh in Education Strategic Plan¹.

Powys Welsh in Education Strategic Plan 2017-2020

In the 2017 Plan, the Council acknowledged the deficiencies in its historic planning for Welsh-medium education and expressed the need to move towards designated Welsh-medium schools in both primary and secondary phases and **included the following priorities:**

Objective 1 - To increase the opportunities for pupils to access Welsh-medium early years provision

Objective 2 - To establish, and identify opportunities to establish, new designated Welsh-medium provision in the primary sector

¹ https://en.powys.gov.uk/media/3436/Welsh-in-Education-Strategic-Plan-2017-20/pdf/WESP_2017-20_-_Final_English.pdf

Objective 3 - To provide equitable and sustainable linguistic progression for Welsh-medium pupils from Key Stage 2 into Key Stages 3, 4 and 5

Objective 4 - To provide improved opportunities for latecomers to transfer to the Welsh-medium sector in all stages of education.

In 2020, it is clear that these objectives continue to be a priority for the local authority because of a general failure to achieve these goals over the last decade. It must now make progress in each of these areas. There was clear support for the direction of travel in the engagement exercise with the public in the first months of 2020, but there is a risk of a loss of faith in the Council unless it now acts to bring forward effective proposals to deliver these objectives.

Strategy for Transforming Education in Powys 2020-2030

In April 2020, the Leader of the Council exercised her delegated powers to urge officers to make progress with bringing forward a wide raft of proposals. Those proposals should reflect an agreed set of guiding principles for transforming the Powys schools' system.

- ✓ A world class rural education system that has learner entitlement at its core
- ✓ Schools that are fully inclusive, with a culture of deep collaboration in order to improve learner outcomes and experience
- ✓ A broad choice and high quality of provision for 14 – 19 year old learners, that includes both academic and vocational provision, meeting the needs of all learners, communities and the Powys economy
- ✓ Welsh-medium provision that is accessible and provides a full curriculum in Welsh from Meithrin to age 19 and beyond
- ✓ Provision for learners with Special Educational Needs (SEN)/Additional Learning Needs (ALN) that is accessible as near to home as is practicably possible, with the appropriate specialist teaching, support and facilities that enables every learner to meet their potential
- ✓ A digitally-rich schools sector that enables all learners and staff to enhance their teaching and learning experience
- ✓ Community-focused schools that are the central point for multi-agency services to support children, young people, families and the community
- ✓ Early years provision that is designed to meet the needs of all children, mindful of their particular circumstances, language requirements or any special or additional learning needs
- ✓ Financially and environmentally sustainable schools
- ✓ The highest priority is given to staff wellbeing and professional development

Building a bilingual future for Powys and its young people

In addition to developing the workforce, the local authority needs to focus on growing the opportunities for children to learn in Welsh in Welsh-medium or bilingual settings. This must include ensuring that there are specialist staff who are able to support learners with additional learning needs or special educational needs and ensuring that the schools are able to support all learners.

1. Powys needs to normalise Welsh-medium/bilingual education.

Children in Welsh-medium/bilingual education study both Welsh and English as first languages, and it is the surest way to become bilingual in Wales. Outcomes in English language and literature GCSE and A levels are comparable across Welsh-medium and English medium schools. In other words, students do not have poorer outcomes in English simply because they've been educated in Welsh. Similarly, students do not have poorer outcomes in mathematics and science because they've been educated in Welsh-medium schools, including schools where the vast majority of the children come from non-Welsh speaking homes.

Approximately 70% of the world's population is bilingual – it's not unusual, and it's not unusual in Wales, especially for younger people.

Being bilingual should be a realistic aim for most learners in Wales, because of the benefits of being a confident user of more than one language. Some of these benefits have been widely published and can be summarized as follows:

- Learners who understand more than one language think more creatively and with more flexibility and tend to do better in IQ tests
- Being bilingual has a positive effect on the brain by keeping it active later in life
- Being bilingual can reduce the risk of dementia
- In Wales, being able to speak Welsh fluently is a valuable extra skill, with benefits for businesses and the individual
- Being bilingual gives access to two different cultures and two worlds of experience
- Bilingual people find it easier to learn a third language and often show more tolerance towards other cultures.
- Across Wales, bilingual children tend to achieve better results – including in English.
- Research shows that being bilingual doesn't hold you back – in fact the opposite is true. Bilingual children do better in Science and Mathematics reasoning tests (Prof Colin Baker, International Expert in Bilingual Education).

Making bilingual education a normalised provision and a natural entitlement are essential if we are to make progress in this domain. To support the normalisation of bilingualism, authorities across Wales have also identified ways in which other services, such as youth services and services for learners with ALN/SEN can be developed.

2. Powys County Council and its partner in Mudiad Meithrin need to work together to ensure that Welsh nursery and early years provision is available to every child.

Mudiad Meithrin, the Welsh Nursery School Movement, established in 1971 operates across Wales (and Patagonia) to help families give their children the best opportunity to become naturally bilingual.

The Cylch Ti a Fi gives parents/carers of babies/young children the opportunity to meet once a week to socialise, share experiences about parenting skills, and to play together in an informal Welsh atmosphere. In the Cylch Ti a Fi you can enjoy making new friends, playing with toys, learn to sing simple Welsh songs and listen to Welsh stories with your child. Children can be taken to a Cylch Ti a Fi from about 6 months old.

The Cylch Meithrin is a Welsh-medium playgroup which offers your child an opportunity to socialise with other children and learn through play under the guidance of professional and qualified staff. By attending the Cylch Meithrin your child will begin his/her journey to Welsh-medium education and will develop into a confident individual ready to take the next natural step into Welsh-medium education at your local school. Children start in a Cylch Meithrin (Welsh Nursery School) from 2 ½ years old.

The local authority, as it rolls out its transformation programme will need to consider opportunities for facilities to be developed for use by Mudiad Meithrin and other partners who can enhance the offer for the parents of young children. This should include careful analysis of the wrap-around care available for families, so that provision in Welsh can align with the provision by the Cylch Meithrin and the primary school.

3. Powys needs to welcome newcomers to their locality, many of whom are new to Wales. We should also welcome those who wish to choose a Welsh-medium education after initially choosing English medium provision for their child, by offering opportunities for immersion (rapid language learning) and an opportunity to join and be fully integrated into a Welsh-medium/bilingual classroom.

No children should be excluded from the opportunities to have an education through the medium of Welsh – even if they arrive in Wales part way through their education. Powys County Council is in the process of establishing Welsh Language Centres, which will offer intensive Welsh courses for pupils moving to the area or pupils currently attending English-medium education who would like to transfer to Welsh-medium education. Welsh language centres are established across Wales as an effective and successful way of immersing children in the Welsh language and enabling them to transfer effectively to Welsh-medium education. Children acquire languages very easily with a positive mindset and effective teaching. This works across the world and in other parts of Wales and will be rolled out in different parts of Powys in the near future.

4. Powys needs to have a network of Welsh-medium/bilingual primary providers in every locality across the county.

Across Wales, Welsh-medium/bilingual education is for all – not for the children of families that currently speak Welsh or for any social or ethnic group. The recent global feel to the online COVID National Eisteddfod was enormously enhanced by young people from Afro-Caribbean, Asian and Arabic ethnic backgrounds who had been educated in Welsh and who are contributing significantly to the present and future of Wales. This does require a change in mindset in Powys, so that the Welsh language can in future be owned by all of our young people, through a vibrant education system that aspires to create fluent speakers across the authority. Some areas currently have no provision for Welsh/bilingual primary education e.g. the Crickhowell, Hay/Talgarth, and Presteigne areas.

Some schools are already keen to move along the language continuum. This means that while they currently have only a certain percentage of their learners using Welsh fluently every day, they want to work to a point where more, or all of their learners can leave school as full bilinguals or multi-linguals. Schools need to be given the time and the support to make this possible, while at the same time the local authority should seek to ensure that a full provision in Welsh is available within reasonable travelling distance for every child and young person in Powys.

This could be tackled in the short to medium term by a range of options e.g. developing dual stream facilities where none exist at the moment, and in other cases by supporting schools to move from being dual stream to being ones that aspire to full bilingualism for all their learners, thus becoming Welsh-medium or bilingual schools. Other options could include moving foundation phase to an offer in Welsh, and then allowing all learners to grow through the school with the expectation of full bilingualism for all.

5. Powys needs to develop a mutually supportive network of secondary providers that is able to offer a full curriculum across Powys in Welsh at all key stages

Quite simply, the current model of 6 dual stream schools at secondary level is not working well enough to offer the full educational provision in Welsh for our young people. It is simply not generating the numbers of bilingual learners that Powys should be contributing to the future of our society and economy, with the opportunities that can present our young people. In the main, small numbers of pupils are learning in Welsh in those schools, and the curriculum provision for them is incomplete. Levels of participation by Powys secondary pupils in Welsh language national events designed for schools is poor, and the opportunities for effective participation in both the formal and informal curriculum must be tackled. The opportunities to celebrate Welsh art, music, drama and much else are usually lost and schools rarely feature nationally amongst the range of Welsh-medium/bilingual schools that exist across Wales.

Across Wales, Welsh-medium/bilingual secondary provision is normal. In areas that had become largely English speaking during the 20th century there are vibrant and large Welsh-medium secondary schools – in Torfaen, Newport, South Pembrokeshire, Wrexham, and Flintshire. Powys does not currently have a designated Welsh-medium secondary school, and the feedback in our winter 2019/20 engagement suggested clearly that this is an inhibitor to the growth of the primary sector in Powys.

A clear plan should be put in place to ensure that our young people have the same opportunities as young people in the rest of Wales to pursue their education in Welsh through to the end of secondary school, ensuring that they are fully bilingual and able to play their full part in the whole of the life of Wales, and beyond.

The transformation programme should seek to ensure that both primary and secondary Welsh-medium/bilingual provision is made available in all corners of Powys.

The future of provision in Powys

The evidence from the rest of Wales is that bilingual/Welsh-medium provision offers the best opportunity for learners to become fully bilingual, whilst also creating a dynamic outward looking cultural environment

Following the decision taken to ensure that Powys is committed to developing all-age schools in key localities across the county, it is essential that we explore how bilingual/Welsh-medium provision can be available for pre-school and primary aged pupils across each locality, with an assured progression within reasonable distance through the full range of secondary education and beyond.

Towards 2030: What needs to be done to increase the opportunities for more young people in Powys to be fully bilingual by 2030.

1. Every family will be clear about the opportunities for bilingual and Welsh language learning that will be available for their young infant well before the time when they make choices about schools. The local authority and its partners will ensure co-ordinated sign-posting of provision for the parents of young children across Powys, and ensure that the option of Welsh-medium provision is known to all and provision from early years will be available in each part of Powys. This should include the notion of an "active offer" i.e. when queries are made about admissions to schools or childcare (no matter the background or location of the families), an effort is made by all officials to explain the benefits and availability of WM education.
2. There will be early years and primary provision in each of our 13 secondary localities to enable parents to make a realistic choice of a bilingual/Welsh-medium provision for their child. Increasingly, there will be more than one provider available in each of the 13 localities. These providers should all seek to align with the work of Mudiad Meithrin and provide wrap around care support.
3. There will be a planned programme of immersion available to support families who are new to the area to help their child settle into a bilingual/Welsh-medium provision, and a means to support parents and learners already in a Powys school who would like to switch to a bilingual/Welsh-medium provision during the child's primary education or at transition to secondary school.
4. Dual stream schools will be available where there is no practicable option to have a single-stream school, but in the main the local authority will have developed schools as clearly defined single-stream providers. New bilingual/Welsh-medium provision might be developed through opening a new bilingual/Welsh-medium school, facilitating a time-limited dual stream or a seedling class² to support their establishment.

² These have been used successfully in other parts of Wales. These exist when an English medium school with surplus capacity offers some of its rooms for the opening of a new Welsh-medium provision that starts with pupils from the youngest age up. That WM provision will usually have a teacher-in-charge on the site, and be supported by a neighbouring WM school, including its headteacher. When the seedling class is established, it either becomes a school, in its own right on its current site, or it moves to a purposely designated site.

5. Every primary year 5/6 class learning in Welsh will be part of a cohesive transition arrangement to a specified bilingual/Welsh-medium secondary school, with significant collaboration between the secondary and its primary partners to secure effective transition for all learners.
6. Children with special educational needs will be well supported in Welsh, either in their local bilingual/Welsh-medium school or through effective collaboration with a more specialist setting in Powys.
7. At secondary school, every learner who is studying in Welsh will be able to access the entire Curriculum for Wales through the medium of Welsh, supported by effective collaboration across the sector to ensure that no bilingual/Welsh-medium setting is too small to offer the whole range of the curriculum in Welsh. In addition to accessing the curriculum in Welsh, the learners should also be able to benefit from a school environment that immerses them in Welsh culture, art, drama, music and where the daily life and business of the school is conducted in Welsh.
8. At Post-16, through collaboration across schools and with other providers, there will be an extensive offer of subjects available in Welsh, in line with other parts of Wales.
9. The bilingual/Welsh-medium sector across Powys will work as an extended collaboration with the local authority (and with others across Wales) to develop the curriculum offer and entitlement, the support for learners with additional needs, the development and learning of the workforce and the leadership of both schools and the local authority.
10. The local authority will ensure that centrally managed services offer a more equitable service in both languages to support learners (and staff) in our schools in areas such as youth services, ALN support, leadership development and professional learning.

Conclusion

In 2021, Powys County Council will produce a detailed Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP) for the next decade.

This vision document, approved by Cabinet, will form the basis of the contents of that WESP, which will then become the binding document to ensure well planned provision for increasing the opportunities for a growing number of children and young people in Powys to become fully bilingual.

