

Briefing: Analysis of learner performance by learner-level and school-level characteristics, including Welsh language, 2011-2018

Background

The statistical article presents findings of an analysis with a main focus of attainment for pupils taught through the medium of Welsh. 'Taught through the medium of Welsh' is defined as:

- They are taught Welsh as a first language at a primary school age.
- They study any subject other than Welsh (first or second language) through the medium of Welsh at secondary school age.

The analysis is based on teacher assessments (Foundation Phase to Key Stage 3) and examination results (Key Stage 4), from 2011 to 2018. The outcome considered was whether or not learners met the 'expected level' at the end of each stage:

- The Foundation Phase Indicator (outcome 5 or above in personal and social development, well-being and cultural diversity, mathematical development and language, literacy and communication skills in English or Welsh).
- The Core Subject Indicator at Key Stage 2 (level 4 or above in science, mathematics and English or Welsh first language).
- The Core Subject Indicator at Key Stage 3 (level 5 or above in science, mathematics and English or Welsh first language).
- The Level 2 inclusive at Key Stage 4 (5 GCSEs at A* to C, including English or Welsh first language and mathematics).

Group model

For the purposes of the article and the regression models used, local authorities have been placed into three groups which take into account to extent of Welsh-medium provision in schools and sociolinguistic composition of the communities where schools are situated (Group 1 being the higher proportion of Welsh speakers and where the majority of learners are taught through the medium of Welsh; Group 3 being the lowest). The main regression models used (the Group model) considers educational attainment within the individual groups, to control for the large variation in the nature of provision and outcomes between groups.

National model

An alternative approach to the analysis, based on overall regression models for Wales, is considered in the article for completeness. The models for all Wales show different results; that learners taught through the medium of Welsh were less likely to achieve the expected level than learners not taught through the medium of Welsh at each key stage, other than at Key Stage 2. More research is required to understand the difference in outcomes between the two models, likely to be further complicated by the variation in the type of provision across Wales, for which there is no national approach. These models did not perform well when compared to the raw data.

Summary of key points from statistical article

Learners are, on average, more likely to achieve the expected level when taught through the medium of Welsh, than if not taught through the medium of Welsh. However, being taught through the medium of Welsh has a smaller effect than many other variables, including being eligible for Free School Meals and speaking Welsh at home.

When taught through the medium of Welsh:

- At Foundation Phase, learners are on average less likely to achieve the expected level.
- At Key Stage 2, learners are more likely to achieve the expected level.
- At Key Stage 3, learners are more likely to achieve the expected level in Groups 1 and 2. In Group 3, learners are less likely to achieve the expected level if taught through the medium of Welsh.
- At Key Stage 4, learners are more likely to achieve the expected level.
- Learners who speak Welsh at home are generally more likely to achieve the expected level.
- Learners who do not speak Welsh at home are generally less likely to achieve the expected level at the Foundation Phase. However, they are then more likely to achieve the expected level at all other Key Stages, when taught through the medium of Welsh. The exception to this is Group 3, at Key Stage 4.

Free School Meal eligibility

It remains the case that being eligible for free school meals or not eligible for free school meals has the largest impact on overall educational attainment.

- At Foundation Phase, being eligible for free school meals has the largest impact on attaining the expected level, with those eligible for free schools meals being much less likely to achieve the expected level than those not eligible.
- At Key Stage 2, with the exception of Group 1, the effects of being taught through the medium of Welsh were smaller than the effects of being eligible for free school meals.
- At Key Stage 3, with the exception of Group 3, the effects of being taught through the medium of Welsh were smaller than the effects of being eligible for free school meals.
- At Key Stage 4 for all Groups, those being taught through the medium of Welsh are more likely to achieve the expected level, but the marginal effect is still far lower than the effect of being eligible for free school meals.

Gender

- With the exception of Key Stage 2, where there was no notable effect, female learners are modestly, but consistently, more likely to achieve the expected level.