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REVIEW OF A PROJECT TO ENCOURAGE WELSH-MEDIUM TEACHING IN ENGLISH- MEDIUM PRIMARY SCHOOLS

1. Background

- 1.1 This paper presents the findings of a study of a Welsh Government-funded pilot project to encourage the use of Welsh in English-medium primary schools.
- 1.2 The project, delivered in two areas between 2013 and 2016, provides courses for Key Stage 2 (KS2) teachers and further support in order for them to adopt new teaching methodologies. This study was undertaken during the summer and autumn of 2014. This assessment is undertaken as part of the full evaluation of the Welsh-medium Education Strategy.
- 1.3 The aim of the project is to improve standards in Welsh as a second language by introducing methodologies that will enable teachers to increase Welsh-medium provision in Key Stage 2 (KS2) in terms of curricular elements delivered in Welsh. There are two pilot areas, Llanishen, Cardiff and Hawarden, Flintshire. The objectives are to increase the provision of Welsh as a second language for:
 - all year 3 learners (across the 11 schools in the project) during the 2012-13 academic year;
 - all year 3 and 4 learners during 2013-14;
 - all year 3, 4 and 5 learners during 2014-15; and
 - all learners in years 3, 4, 5 and 6, i.e. Key Stage 2 in its entirety, during the final year of the project (2015-2016).

- 1.4 Two three-day courses are offered to KS2 teachers in six primary schools in the Llanishen catchment area and five schools in Hawarden. The first three-day course concentrates on strengthening teachers' language patterns and the second course focuses on teaching methodology and resources. These courses are supported by 'Y Pod-antur Cymraeg' resource pack comprising of a DVD, books, worksheets, discussion cards and an interactive game (available to schools to purchase).
- 1.5 The process of coordinating the project is slightly different in both areas, with the Central South Consortium responsible in Cardiff and one of the project schools coordinating the process in Hawarden, with follow-up support from the North Wales Consortium.¹
- 1.6 The project was developed from the Welsh Government's Development Plan for Welsh as a second language, following discussions between Government officials, schools and consortium officers in two areas of Wales. Although the aim of the project is clear, there is some flexibility in the way in which it is delivered. The project does not have definite targets and a lack of data means that it is not possible to fully quantify progress.

2. Methodology

- 2.1 A teacher survey and visits to a sample of schools were undertaken during June – October 2014.² An electronic questionnaire was sent to the 51 teachers who had attended at least one of the courses up until the summer of 2014. 20 responses were received from seven schools.³ Five schools were visited, two in the north and three in the south, to interview teachers and managers. Between the visits and the questionnaires, evidence was collected from eight of the 11 schools. The evidence presented in this paper is therefore based on the opinions of, and information provided by, the teachers who have participated in this project to date and their managers. An attempt was made to collect data on learner attainment but there was no meaningful data, in the form of test results, available at the time for the relevant level and period. It should also be emphasised that this study does not include every school that participated in the project, and that it is possible

¹ There are four education consortia in Wales providing regional school improvement services commissioned by a joint group of local authorities.

² The questionnaire asked teachers about their Welsh-language skills, their opinion about the course, and their use of Welsh in school before and after the course. The visits were an opportunity to ask more in-depth questions about the role of Welsh as a second language at the school, the extent of support for the Project, and any changes that had been brought about following its implementation.

³ 24 responses were received, including one from an eighth school where only the opening questions had been answered. The questionnaires were distributed via email. In the north, the school responsible for coordinating the project distributed the questionnaire to the other schools, and in the south, the researchers sent a direct email to the teachers who attended the courses. The questionnaire was therefore sent to the 51 teachers who had attended courses up until that point, although it is impossible to know exactly how many teachers received the questionnaire.

that the teachers who responded to the questionnaire are not representative of the participating schools in their entirety. Another challenge relates to attributing the effects to the project, as the courses are in addition to the support available to all schools in both areas.⁴

3. Findings

- 3.1 **Variations were seen in the administration of the training courses.** The Cardiff schools received additional resources from the trainer to support their use of 'Y Pod-antur Cymraeg', whilst schools in the north collaborated to develop new resources, and continue to share the resources that they have produced since the course. In both areas, trainers are available after the course to give advice, and in the south, they work closely with the *athrawon bro* to continue the support. However, some teachers felt that there were insufficient efforts made to share support materials, and resources were not shared between the two pilot areas. In both areas, the teachers were unanimous in their praise for the courses and the 'Pod-antur Cymraeg' resources.
- 3.2 **The teachers reported a substantial effect on their linguistic confidence.** All respondents to the questionnaire and all individuals interviewed noted that participating in the initial language course had increased their confidence and improved their ability in Welsh. Some explained that the course had strengthened their existing Welsh-language skills ('the course was a good way of reminding me'), whilst for others it introduced new content ('we didn't have the vocabulary and the resources previously'). With the exception of one who did not have an opinion either way, all respondents to the questionnaire reported that they are now more confident in their use of Welsh in the classroom, and in one school, two of the teachers had switched to speaking Welsh with each other in front of the class.

⁴ This includes support from Welsh in Education Officers in the consortia; training opportunities available to any school, for example the Sabbatical Scheme for Welsh Language training and funding for training and resources for schools and consortia under the Welsh in Education Grant.

One school's experience in the Llanishen area was typical:

Teacher 1: "Before the lesson, I was reluctant to use Welsh and I tended to play it safe. I used to read out the PowerPoint, the lessons were tedious and I would use the same phrases every morning. By far, this was my weakest subject. If I'm honest, I was using Welsh KS1 level. Now the quality and the variety of phrases I use are much better. Already this year [a fortnight into the term], I've recorded discussions and I've done a written task."

Teacher 2: "We work more quickly now. Previously, I was presenting one topic every half term, for example 'clothes', and I would practise the same sentence patterns for the half term. We now learn 'clothes' in just one week with the Adventure Pod and by the second week, we've moved on to learn 'where are you?' telephone conversations."

- 3.3 **The teachers noted that there had been an increase in the number of subjects taught through the medium of Welsh, and an increase in the use of Welsh within those subjects** across the eight schools where information was collected. The survey showed that there had been a substantial increase in the use of Welsh in every subject.⁵ The greatest change was seen in the delivery of geography: two teachers reported that they used Welsh before the course, but there was a large increase after the course, with 15 out of 16 reporting that they used Welsh in geography lessons. The same pattern was evident in every other subject, albeit to a lesser extent. Before the course, nine (out of 13) reported that they did not use Welsh for literacy and eight (out of 11) reported that they did not use Welsh for numeracy. After the course, all teachers except one used Welsh during numeracy and literacy lessons.
- 3.4 Evidence gathered during the visits supports this account of progress, with teachers providing examples of the use made of Welsh, the 'Pod-antur Cymraeg' specifically, across the curriculum. Some schools structured lessons on the basis of subjects and others on themes, and the evidence shows that the project has extended the number of subjects and themes discussed in Welsh; for example, one teacher commented: 'we discussed 'gwersylla' this week'. I would never have considered using that vocabulary before!'
- 3.5 Four out of the five schools visited explained that Welsh had been restricted to specific short lessons before the project, but that by now, a part of every

⁵The question was asked whether Welsh was used to deliver the following subjects before and after the course: Science, Mathematics, Geography, Religious Studies, Physical Education, Art and Design, ICT, Design and Technology, Music, History, Literacy and Numeracy. After the course, every teacher offered more of the subjects in Welsh and every subject saw an increase in the numbers of teachers using Welsh in their delivery.

subject (or theme) was being delivered through the medium of Welsh. Examples of learners' subject books were shared with the researchers (work based on a different theme every half term) and up to half of the content was in Welsh for the very first time. 'I would never have dreamt of producing the charts and maps in Welsh last year', one teacher explained.

- 3.6 In every school visited, **the teachers explained that more use is made of incidental Welsh** since the introduction of the project. It was also explained that the learners spontaneously ask questions in Welsh and display curiosity towards the language when choosing a Welsh reading book or when looking for new vocabulary in the dictionary. One teacher suggested that this stemmed from the fact that learners sensed the confidence and enthusiasm of the teachers, and in fact, 'the Welsh language is neither here nor there any more, the pupils don't think about it, it's just a part of everything'.
- 3.7 **The 'Pod-antur Cymraeg' is used during Welsh lessons and across the curriculum** in the schools visited and teachers in every school reported that the learners 'love it'. However, a number of schools referred to the fact that there had been a shift towards more Welsh across the curriculum over the past few years and that participating in the project had facilitated changes that had already been planned, rather than establish entirely new practices.
- 3.8 **The teachers noted that there has been a substantial improvement in the written and oral work of the learners.** No quantitative data was provided to enable an analysis of the impact of the project on learners' Welsh language skills. However, teachers reported that they have observed a substantial increase in learners' Welsh language skills. Schools in both areas noted that the Welsh language skills of Year 5 learners who had just completed a year with a teacher who had attended the course, were better than the standards amongst Year 6 pupils. 'I've seen a great difference in the children', said one teacher before explaining that this could not be clearly measured until the group completed Year 6, although one noted that the predicted levels 'had shot up'.
- 3.9 Teachers noted that the enthusiasm and the attitude of the children had improved and that they could sense that they had made progress with their Welsh language skills, for example: 'my pupils would always note in their end of year evaluation that their weakest subject was Welsh. Nobody noted that last year'. Practical examples of the improvement were also given: 'The level is higher, I would never have used the past tense with Year 3 previously, but I now do this all the time'.
- 3.10 **Questions were raised by the teachers regarding the sustainability of improvements.** Although head teachers were supportive of the project in principle, the teachers explained that Welsh had been given less of a strategic emphasis during the project as the school had so many other

priorities. Two schools explained that Welsh had been taken off the list of priorities in their school development plan (the school's strategic improvement plan). The teachers were not confident either that the good work would be sustained after the learners had progressed to secondary school, and one asked, 'what will happen in the secondary school as there will be a variety of language levels? Will the [higher] level be maintained'?

4. Conclusions

- 4.1 In the schools that participated in this study, the pilot project has achieved the aim of increasing Welsh-medium provision in Key Stage 2. Specifically,
- There is evidence that the teachers offer more of the curriculum in Welsh and that they are confident in doing so.
 - Several examples were seen of a task or an activity previously undertaken in English now being undertaken through the medium of Welsh.
 - Teachers noted that learners' vocabulary had been extended and that their confidence and the standard of their Welsh skills had improved as a result of the project.
- 4.2 Amongst the teachers who contributed to this study, a very positive response was received to the courses and the resources provided through the project.
- 4.3 Looking to the future it seems that sustaining these improvements will be challenging as there is no evidence that the project has much influence on planning at school level. At present, the success of the project depends on the enthusiasm of individual teachers. Ensuring the input of managers could have provided a way of making the project a more integral part of planning at school level.
- 4.4 One of the next challenges, once the project has encompassed KS2 in its entirety, will be to work closely with the secondary sector to sustain the perceived improvements in learners' interest and Welsh language skills.

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The views expressed in this report are those of the researcher and not necessarily those of the Welsh Government.

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