

Cyflwynwyd yr ymateb hwn i'r [Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg ar Bil y Gymraeg ac Addysg \(Cymru\)](#)

This response was submitted to the [Children, Young People and Education Committee on the Welsh Language and Education \(Wales\) Bill](#)

WLE 22

Ymateb gan: Gwasanaeth Addysg yr Eglwys Gatholig
Response from: Catholic Education Service (CES)

The Catholic Education Service (CES) is the education agency of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales (Bishops' Conference). The Bishops' Conference is the permanent assembly of the Catholic Bishops in England and Wales and the CES is charged with promoting and securing education on behalf of the Catholic Bishops. There are two Welsh Catholic Dioceses - the diocese of Wrexham and the Archdiocese of Cardiff-Menevia with a Diocesan Director of Education for each area. There are 84 Catholic schools in Wales educating over 28,500 pupils. Catholic schools in Wales are more ethnically diverse than the national average and often serve a higher proportion of learners from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The Catholic Education Service has contacted diocesan officers and head teachers of Catholic Schools across Wales to gather their views on the provisions of the Bill. In addition to the terms of the inquiry the potential impact of the Bill in some of the following areas:

- Staffing
- Curriculum
- Budget
- Workload

Feedback from a range of Catholic primary and secondary schools in the 2 Welsh dioceses has informed our submission. Set out below are comments relating areas of specific relevance to Catholic schools in Wales.

PART 1 - PROMOTION AND FACILITATION OF USE OF THE WELSH LANGUAGE

We support *Cymraeg 2050* and efforts by the Welsh Government to proliferate the Welsh language. We believe the bill will widen access for those who would like to be educated through the medium of Welsh. Catholic schools are also committed to developing and strengthening Welsh language, ethos and culture. The Welsh Catholic community has been part of this rich heritage for hundreds of years and its place within the culture of Wales should be recognised.

In partnership with the state and other providers, the Catholic Church has played its part in establishing schools to enable parents to have a real choice of schools that can educate their children in accordance with their own religious and philosophical convictions. We look forward to working as partners to access the support and funding necessary to develop

further Welsh language provision in our schools whilst recognising and preserving their distinctive nature.

PART 2- DESCRIBING WELSH LANGUAGE ABILITY

We agree that the proposals will facilitate a shared understanding by learners, teachers, parents and employers of an individual's journey to learn the Welsh language and the expected linguistic outcomes at each stage of that journey.

The CES welcomes proposals to provide parents/carers with clear information. It is important to recognise the need for constructive dialogue and the level of support that may be required for parents/carers in areas where the Welsh language is not dominant. Providing opportunities for parents to learn the Welsh language will enable them to support their children as they progress along a language continuum. Head teachers echoed this point and gave the example that learners transferring into their schools from the Welsh medium sector have often experienced difficulties in a Welsh medium school because Welsh is not spoken at home.

The explanatory memorandum discusses expectations around qualifications provided for learners. It states that "the Code and common reference levels will be used to set expectations when providing qualifications for school pupils" a consistent clear set of reference points for setting expectations will, be advantageous to learners. However, this statement raises several points for clarification:

- Has consideration been given to developing a range of qualifications to address the needs and interests of all learners? Additional qualifications may need to be developed to address the use of the Welsh language in a vocational context. A more practical emphasis on spoken Welsh in real life settings may increase engagement and promote continued progression beyond compulsory school age.
- What are the expectations around addressing the drop off in Welsh language skills as learners progress to tertiary education?
- Is the focus of the Bill on developing Welsh speakers or obtaining qualifications in Welsh? Head teachers have expressed the view that developing the language outside formal settings which are not geared to an examination may be more successful in developing/maintaining interest in the day-to-day use of the Welsh language.

The explanatory memorandum also states that the code will also provide clarity on the Welsh language ability pupils should expect to reach. Clarity regarding baseline expectations will aid consistency. However, the CES and headteachers are concerned that a rigid set of expectations may fail to take account of the context of individual schools, such as their starting point, the composition of their school community and the catchment area which will affect rate of progress of language acquisition for their learners. Evaluating the context of the school when setting expectations may take account of some of the following factors:

- specific difficulties in recruiting Welsh speaking staff
- the number of EAL learners
- the % of learners entitled to free school meals.

The explanatory memorandum identified the risk that schools would find it more difficult to understand the Welsh language learning goal they should be working towards as they improve and/or increase their Welsh language provision over time. We agree that clarity surrounding the Welsh language learning goal, and the level/rate of progression expected may be an issue. In addition, there needs to be greater clarification regarding the starting point of the journey for schools to ensure that they have the necessary staffing and that learners have the language skills to access the enhanced provision. Headteachers of Catholic schools from across Wales stated that recruitment and retention of Welsh speaking teachers was a significant problem at the present time, and this would be exacerbated if provision through the medium of Welsh had to increase. The Welsh Government secondment scheme has been of benefit to individual staff but has not made the impact hoped for because improved skills are lost if there are insufficient Welsh speakers within the school to maintain and extend the use of spoken Welsh.

There should be consideration of the position of different schools within a cluster to ensure that the rollout of additional provision and progression has a logical read across from primary to secondary and onward to post-16. If there is not a clear and agreed timetable and progression across a cluster of schools, implementation will not be consistent and there may be a negative impact on learners' progression and their enthusiasm for using the Welsh language. Some headteachers of Catholic primary schools in predominantly Welsh speaking areas where there is no Catholic secondary school feel that their pupils will be disadvantaged. Learners travel out of their area to access secondary education and if these schools become Welsh medium schools, then learners from Catholic primaries may be disadvantaged academically. Additionally, Headteachers are concerned that if this is the case parents may feel they have no option but to withdraw their children from church schools to ensure a smooth transition to the secondary school.

PART 3 - WELSH LANGUAGE EDUCATION

Language categories

As a Church and as a major co-provider of education in Wales (alongside the State and the Church in Wales), we share the Welsh Government's core values of self-determination, subsidiarity and cultural nationalism. In turn, we support the autonomy, empowerment and intelligence of local communities and the cultivation of a Welsh language, ethos and culture (or *cynefin*) in and beyond schools.

The CES welcomes any improvement to the system which has a clear benefit to learners. However, there are areas in part 3 which require greater clarification and raise several questions regarding the practicalities of increasing Welsh language provision in a way that provides equality of opportunity for all learners:

- How will financial and other resources be allocated across the 3 categories of schools especially as there is a duty to promote Welsh medium education?
- What will be the nature of support available for clusters of schools to ensure continuity and progression of learning in Welsh as learners make the transition from primary to secondary school and to address the potential loss of language skills at the end of compulsory education?
- How will schools be able to meet the increased staffing demands required to deliver increased Welsh language provision and will an unintended consequence be enhanced pay for those able to teach through the medium of Welsh which will be out of reach of smaller schools and schools in financial difficulty.
- Will students have the necessary skill base to access the increased provision and to achieve the same academic outcomes?
- Anticipating increased demand from schools, what support will be given to mitigate the impact of staff release for the Welsh Government Sabbatical scheme?
- Has consideration been given that a possible unintended consequence of an increase in the amount of Welsh taught as a discrete subject may lead to a narrowing of the curriculum for Wales and the curriculum offer at GCSE?
- Will there be training and support available for Catholic secondary schools to participate fully in the Welsh Government's innovative E-sgol project which uses video technology to connect classrooms so learners from one school can join classes at other schools remotely, enabling students to access a greater range of subjects at GCSE and A level through the medium of Welsh?

The bill will make an impact on the workload of governors. The development of a school's Welsh language education delivery plan, the consultation process and the delivery will involve an increased workload and responsibility for governors which in turn may add to the difficulty of recruiting governors.

The Explanatory Memorandum states that the school's governing body must publish the approved delivery plan and take all reasonable steps to implement the proposals, for the purpose of meeting the school's Welsh language education. There may be an unintended consequence of the Bill that the requirements for all schools to increase and continuously improve Welsh language provision may become a new accountability which seems counter intuitive to the objective focussing on language ethos and culture and nurturing a desire to use the language in everyday life.

The timing and pace of change needs to be carefully considered and managed so that it does not impact negatively upon learners and the workforce. Schools have had to manage significant changes to implement the Curriculum for Wales and the ALN Bill and head teachers confirm that the implementation of these educational changes are their primary

focus. There is a danger therefore, that this latest policy objective may be undermined because of change/initiative fatigue. Schools will need to be reassured that they have the time and resources to do justice to the plans for developing the Welsh language.

PART 4 - PLANNING WELSH LANGUAGE EDUCATION AND LEARNING

National Framework

The National Framework provides a joined-up approach for setting targets for different bodies such as LAs and the National Institute for Learning Welsh.

The Explanatory memorandum states that one of the of the aims of the framework is to promote education in “Primarily Welsh Language” or “Dual Language” category schools and increasing the numbers of children attending those schools. This may impact negatively on Catholic schools which will for the most part fall into the category Primarily English Language, partly Welsh. There are low numbers of learners from Welsh speaking backgrounds. In addition, in some areas there are above average numbers of learners who have English as an additional language. Catholic schools support the Welsh government’s Welsh language policy but have concerns that there may not be equality of opportunity and availability of resources for those learners who choose to be educated in church schools.

The Explanatory Memorandum states that the National Framework must take steps ensuring that training, professional development and support is available for educational practitioners in Wales for the purpose of improving ability in Welsh. As stated previously, it is a concern that schools will not be able to meet the increased staffing demands required to deliver increased Welsh language provision. Also, there will there be sufficient resources to meet the training needs of those staff undertaking the secondment scheme to enhance their Welsh language skills. There may be unintended consequences in terms of financial burden and increased workload for staff. Headteachers are reporting that releasing staff for the secondment scheme already presents challenges as the level of financial support for the scheme does not cover the cost of providing supply cover. Information from headteachers has suggested that smaller schools may not be able to progress along the language continuum sufficiently quickly as they may be unable to release staff for training due to the impact on learners and the financial burden of supply cover.

PART 5 - NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR LEARNING WELSH

The CES welcomes the proposals for the National Institute for Learning Welsh and a clear strategic plan. We agree with the objective to take a view of language learning that is lifelong and cuts across different areas of society so that the emphasis is not entirely on schools as the only vehicle for reaching the 2050 goal. We look forward to the clarification given in its strategic plan as how it will ensure that the following objectives are achieved:

- development of the education workforce for the purpose of improving Welsh

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- language teaching (in all schools)
- promote equality of opportunity (in all schools)
- to promote collaboration including between Welsh language learning providers and schools in Wales.

As stated above. The CES represents the education policies of the Bishops of Wales on education to Government and assists the dioceses in supporting our schools. We look forward to ongoing engagement with Welsh Government officials about the proposals in the bill and the impact on Catholic education in Wales. In this way we can work in true partnership towards achieving the policy objectives of the Welsh Government whilst at the same time ensuring the appropriate protections for Catholic education which will enable Catholic education to flourish and add to the rich tapestry of Welsh culture.

Yours faithfully,

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