

# P-06-1329: Set an ambition and a clear timetable to give every child in the country Welsh-medium education

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 15 Mai 2023  
Petitions Committee | 15 May 2023

Reference: SR23/5702-3

Petition Number: [P-06-1329](#)

Petition title: Set an ambition and a clear timetable to give every child in the country Welsh-medium education

## Petition text

We believe the Welsh Government should include in upcoming legislation a statutory aim that every young person in Wales will be educated through the medium of Welsh, building up to this over time, to ensure more and more young people in the future become fluent and confident in the language.

## More details

We believe that Welsh belongs to all the people of Wales, and that everyone, whatever their background, has the right to the language.

The evidence shows that the way to ensure young people become fluent in the language is Welsh-medium education, but only around 20% of young people are given this opportunity at present.

We believe there should be significant and sustained growth in Welsh-medium education, building up to universal Welsh-medium provision to ensure access to the language for all young people.



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## 1. Summary

- Currently, around 23% of school pupils receive their education through the medium of Welsh.
- Education has a **pivotal role** to play in the Welsh Government's aim of reaching its target of a million Welsh speakers by 2050. It has incremental targets aimed at leading to a position whereby 40% of pupils are educated through Welsh by 2050 and 70% can speak Welsh by the time they leave school.
- The Welsh Government is **proposing new legislation** in this Senedd term to replace the current system of Welsh in Education Strategic Plans (WESPs). A consultation on a White Paper is currently open until 16 June 2023.
- A **Senedd Committee inquiry** has recently been undertaken into WESPs and is to report soon.

## 2. The current position regarding Welsh-medium education

At the time of the [2021/22 school census](#) (taken in February 2022), 109,331 of 471,131 pupils were taught in a Welsh-medium school, equating to 23%. Of the 1,470 schools, 439 were Welsh-medium, bilingual or dual-stream schools, equating to 30% ([StatsWales](#)). [2022/23 school census data](#) is due to be published on 25 May 2023.

People's development and acquisition of Welsh language skills through the education system is **expected to have a pivotal role** in working towards the Welsh Government's Cymraeg 2050 target of one million Welsh speakers by 2050.

### 2.1. The Welsh Government's targets

The [Cymraeg 2050 strategy](#), published in 2017, sets **targets** that the proportion of each school year group receiving Welsh-medium education **increases from 22% in 2017, to 30% in 2031, and to 40% in 2050**. It also seeks to transform how Welsh is taught to all learners, including those in English-medium schools, with a **target of 70% of school leavers by 2050** reporting that they can speak Welsh.

Increasing the number of young people acquiring the language through education on this scale requires a considerable increase in the Welsh in Education workforce capacity. The Welsh Government has a 10-year plan to do this.

## 2.2. Legislative position

The School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013 requires local authorities to have a Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP) setting out how they will improve and develop Welsh-medium education provision in their area.

Originally, WESPs were set for three years and reviewed annually. However, they are now on a ten-year cycle. In 2017, the Welsh Government commissioned a 'rapid review' of the current system for Welsh language education planning, with the aim of recommending how to improve the WESPs system.

The Welsh Government committed in its Programme for Government (2021-26) and Co-operation Agreement with Plaid Cymru (December 2021) to introduce a Welsh Language Education Bill to the Senedd.

## 3. Recent Welsh Government action: the White Paper

The Welsh Government published a White Paper for a Welsh Language Education Bill on 27 March 2023, alongside a Ministerial statement. It is consulting on the White Paper until 16 June 2023. The proposals include:

- Placing the Cymraeg 2050 target of one million Welsh speakers by 2050 in law – on the face of the Bill.
- Considering increasing the target of 40% of all learners receiving their education through Welsh by 2050 to 50%.
- A statutory target of all pupils leaving compulsory education to be at a level equivalent to level B2 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.
- Statutory language categories for schools (currently, these are non-statutory).
- Increasing, over time, requirements for how much of each school week is devoted to Welsh language provision, by the language category of the school.

- A statutory Welsh Language Skills continuum, describing different levels of proficiency, which would be used as the basis for designing and improving the provision of lifelong Welsh language learning.
- A Statutory National Plan for the acquisition and learning of Welsh, which will provide direction for local authorities' local plans (the current WESPs). The National Plan will include national targets for teacher numbers.
- Renaming WESPs as Welsh Education Implementation Plans (WEIPs) to reflect a shift whereby the Welsh Government will set local authorities' strategic aims for planning Welsh-medium education and will set local authorities' targets.
- The Welsh Ministers will have greater powers to direct local authorities in how they should plan Welsh-medium education – they will be able to commission an external independent review of a local authority's draft proposed WEIP and be able to require the local authority to submit a new WEIP for approval. Estyn will be involved in carrying out rapid reviews of WESPs.
- Local authorities will be under duties to promote Welsh-medium education and to plan their workforce on the basis of their WEIP.
- Specialist support for life-long Welsh learning, including schools, will be centralised and the role given to the National Centre for Learning Welsh, which was established in 2015 to strategically lead the Welsh for Adults sector (as it was then known) at a national level.

## 4. Senedd action

The Senedd's Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport and International Relations (CCWLSIR) Committee has recently undertaken an [inquiry into the legislative framework that supports Welsh-Medium Education Provision](#), i.e. the Welsh in Education Strategic Plans (WESPs), which local authorities are required to have in place.

The CCWLSIR Committee's report is due to be published soon. This will feed into the broader Welsh Government consultation on its White Paper (discussed above).

## 5. Political debate in the Senedd

An exchange in [Plenary on 6 December 2022](#) between the First Minister and the Leader of Plaid Cymru demonstrated a difference in their parties' positions:

Adam Price MS: "Don't we now need to recognise that the actions are not sufficient to reach the target by 2050? As with climate change, goodwill is not the same as delivering against targets. So, wouldn't the most positive response to today's news be to ensure that the proposed Welsh language education Bill would provide Welsh-medium education for all children in Wales within a clear and adequate timetable?"

First Minister, Mark Drakeford MS: "Well, I don't agree with the final point that the leader of Plaid Cymru raised. I don't think that people in Wales will be willing to support the point that he made, and I think that the most important thing about the Welsh language is to maintain the support of people in Wales for everything that we're trying to do. We've succeeded in doing that. There is a strong feeling for the Welsh language in every part of Wales, and we want to use that goodwill that exists to continue to have more people learning Welsh and using Welsh, and so forth."

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in this briefing is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.