

MANIFESTO OF RHINI DROS ADDYSG GYMRAEG
FOR THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF WALES ELECTIONS 2016



A language for our country,
a language for our schools.

Contact:
Ceri Owen,
RhAG Director of Development,
Tŷ Cymru, Greenwood Close,
Cardiff Gate Business Park,
Cardiff CF23 8RD
02920 739 207 / 07912175403
ceri@rhag.net


rhieni dros
addysg gymraeg
parents for Welsh
medium education

INCREASING THE MOMENTUM AND STIMULATING GROWTH

Introduction

RhAG is an organisation that represents the parents of pupils in Welsh-medium schools and those who want to see the growth of Welsh-medium schools and Welsh-medium education. RhAG is partly funded by the Welsh Government. RhAG believes, as does the Welsh Government, that Welsh-medium schools is the best school model in giving full skills in two languages for all pupils.

The Welsh Government's publication, a new Strategy for Welsh-medium Education, is a document of importance. For the first time, the Welsh Government has taken the lead in the planning of the growth of Welsh-medium Education.

A system needs to be in place which not only meets demand but stimulates further growth, clear guidance should be provided to local authorities on how to achieve this.

The development of Welsh-medium Education

Over the past 60 years, Welsh-medium education has increased in all parts of Wales, and RhAG's activity has contributed significantly to this. Now around 22% of primary school children in Wales receive Welsh-medium education. Some 17% of secondary pupils receive their education through the medium of Welsh. But in the further education sector, the percentage is under 5%, and this is similar in higher education.

While the Welsh Government has set targets for 2015 and 2020, with 30% of 7 year old pupils attending Welsh-medium schools by 2020, it is unlikely that these targets will be reached.

We offer a realistic target of 50% of pupils aged 7 in Welsh-medium education by 2030.

Welsh language education bill

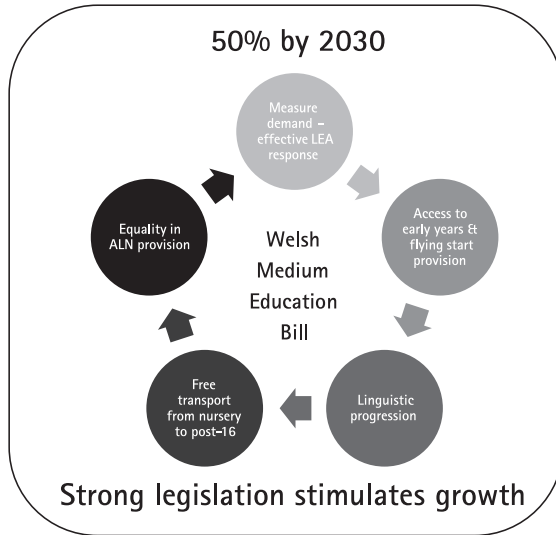
RhAG believes that the current arrangements for promoting and supporting Welsh-medium education is not sufficient. Local authorities are avoiding their responsibility, and many schools also avoid responsibility. Although local authorities have to introduce Welsh in Education Strategic Plans, these plans have no real teeth. Many Local Authorities are undermining the aims and objectives of the Government's Welsh-medium Education Strategy

So that we ensure quick and decisive progress, RhAG calls for formulating a Welsh Medium Education Bill during the next Assembly term to strengthen the existing legislative infrastructure.

At present all relevant legislation is fragmented, inadequate or incorporated into other laws. In many respects no legislation exists at all. RhAG recommends drawing up a Welsh Medium Education Bill which would cover a range of needs in the field by drawing together all current legislative threads and offer unambiguous legal clarity in the future.

Welsh in Education Strategic Plans

The Welsh in Education Strategic Plans (WESPs) should ensure a mechanism for robust and proactive planning on a statutory basis. The Plans that have been submitted by the LAs and then that have been approved by the Government, were inadequate and without ambition. Overall they lacked concrete and



measurable targets.

RhAG has projected the need for between 80 and 100 additional streams (30 children each) in order to reach the goal. Currently the Plans fall well short of that target, and therefore the target of the Welsh Government.

The demand for Welsh-medium Education

The measuring of demand for Welsh-medium education in counties with Welsh-speaking populations of lower density is now statutory. Not all counties have measured the demand. Results have shown that parental demand is between 25% and about 45% in each county where the demand for Welsh-medium education has been measured. This is two to three times higher than the Welsh-medium provision in these counties.

It must be required that every county with Welsh-speaking populations of lower density to measure the demand for Welsh-medium education and act in accordance with the results.

Flying Start

Research¹ carried out by RhAG has shown that the provision does not come close to the current percentages receiving Welsh-medium education. This militates against the expansion of Welsh-medium Education in half the counties of Wales.

An expansion of the Flying Start program is planned in the coming years through a substantial financial investment by the Welsh Government. This is a key area that overlaps with the remit of several Ministers, which includes Tackling Poverty, Child Care and Education. Consequently we need national policy guidance and direction from the center in relation to the status of the Welsh language within the program and a commitment by the Government to ensure that the relevant Ministers act accordingly.

Nursery and pre-school provision

One major weakness at the moment is the provision in the nursery sector and the progression between the nursery and primary sector. When a school admission number is less than the size of the nursery the school will immediately lose a number of those children.

A significant difficulty faced by children in Welsh-medium nursery classes is that statutory transport is not available, as there is for primary schools. On average, pupils attending Welsh-medium provision live further away than pupils in English provision, but no support is offered for nursery age children to travel to their classes. Transport on a statutory basis should be offered to nursery age children.

With an increasing emphasis on education for 3 year olds through the Foundation Phase, this sector should now be given statutory-voluntary status and attributed the properties of the statutory sector.

Growth in the primary sector

RhAG recommends two accelerated ways of establishing Welsh-medium schools:

Establish starter classes that will eventually become independent schools. This rules out the need to identify new buildings immediately, which would be empty for the first few years. Cardiff has successfully implemented this method.

In urban areas, the LEA should act according to the percentage of demand for Welsh-medium education by creating plans to convert English schools into Welsh-medium schools. This could happen over time, or by relocation.

Secondary schools

There are about 25 designated Welsh-medium high schools in less densely Welsh-speaking areas, and some 35 others which act as Welsh-medium or bilingual schools.

While close to 22% of primary pupils are learning Welsh as a first language, only 17% do so in the secondary sector. It is necessary to stop the pattern of 'linguistic slippage' occurring primarily among school pupils in traditionally Welsh speaking areas.

It should be necessary for Welsh Government and other examination bodies to ensure that schools adhere to a robust code of practice to ensure an effective linguistic progression between the primary and secondary sectors.

There is also a need to ensure continuity in terms of subject teaching medium, since studying through the medium of Welsh strengthens linguistic skills.

16+ Education

Post 16 classes in Welsh-medium schools have been accepted as the only educational institutions that can offer an effective 16+ Welsh-medium education. To ensure the success of 16+ classes in Welsh-medium schools, convenient transport should be offered on the same terms as transport offered to the -16 sector.

Where LAs are addressing the Transformation Agenda, it is vital that 16+ classes in Welsh-medium schools are not weakened.

Linguistic progression

The LAs Welsh in Education Strategic Plans do not adequately address the linguistic progression between different sectors of education.

Up to one-third and more pupils in some areas have been turned from studying Welsh as a first language to a second language. Although the Government has set targets in 2010, the targets have not been reached. The percentage increased from 16% to 17% over four years. The target is 23% by 2020.

The weakest areas in Wales in terms of progression are Neath Port Talbot, Carmarthenshire and Conwy, with losses also evident in Gwynedd, Anglesey and some other counties.

English medium schools

A report by Professor Sioned Davies (2012) has highlighted that English-medium schools are generally ineffective in the teaching of Welsh. Learning the Welsh language on one continuum, developing from primary to secondary and using Welsh for activities, would be a way of introducing Welsh effectively as a living language in these schools.

Additional Learning Needs

The provision of ALN is lacking in many parts of Wales, and in some areas more than others. A general audit of the provision is needed looking at each LA individually and to ensure that cross-county collaboration is facilitated to provide fairness for pupils who are already suffering from disabilities or learning difficulties.

Centers of excellence should be established in each county to consolidate expertise and share good practice.

The provision of specialist supplementary services through the medium of Welsh, eg. speech and language, psychiatry, dyslexia support, etc., should be made statutory.

There are still examples of 'experts' advising parents to remove their children from the Welsh-medium sector to the English medium sector, stating that the child 'would benefit' from doing so. This method of not providing a Welsh language service, and rejects the right of pupils to be educated in their language of choice.

Education and Urban development

When education is considered in the context of planning new housing estates, local authorities need to place linguistic considerations as central to such developments by ensuring that Welsh-medium schools are part of these plans. When the private sector is financing such developments, we need to capitalize on this in terms of Welsh language education. We need clear and unambiguous national policy guidance on this.

Increasing access points to Welsh-medium education

RhAG wishes to ensure that Welsh-medium education is available to all who desire it, and thus wants to see a specific provision for latecomers in each county. Delivery may be held in conjunction with the provision of learning Welsh for parents.

Each county needs to offer a center for latecomers, either as an independent center, or connected with a local Welsh-medium school.

Cross-county collaboration and catchments

Welsh Government needs to formulate guidelines that ensure proactive collaboration occurs between LEAs as they offer Welsh-medium education provision.

Clearer guidelines are needed with regard to 16+ education, to ensure that provision is available as Welsh-medium comprehensive schools cooperate in their own counties or cross-county.

Transport

Local authorities need to implement the Learner Travel (Wales) Measure 2008 to ensure that transport promotes Welsh-medium education.

Distances between households and Welsh-medium schools are more than the distances from English-medium schools on average. There should be a duty on LEAs to provide transport to compensate for this difference.

RhAG research shows that certainty of transport is as important if not more important than obtaining free transport. Our research suggests that the Welsh-medium 16+ sector could be decimated unless transport is available under the terms of the -16 sector.

Some LAs are charging hundreds of pounds on pupils travelling for 16+ Welsh-medium Education.

The Learner Travel Measure (2008) states that there is a duty on local authorities to provide transport in a manner which promotes Welsh language education. Clarity is needed on this and the steps that the Welsh Government can take unless LAs acts accordingly.

We call on the Welsh Government to ensure that free transport for post 16 Welsh-medium education is available to pupils across Wales.

Marketing Welsh-medium Education

Overall, the marketing and promotion of Welsh-medium education is very limited. Parents often lack information about pre-school provision and Welsh-medium schools in their area. This is often true even when a new school is established or when classes are opened.

Having an extensive promotional program is an integral part of preparation for the growth of Welsh-medium education.

Future developments should include: creating and delivering a new information pack for families who move to Wales; a nationwide expansion of the Gwynedd School Language Charter system; devising a special program to promote the benefits of Welsh-medium education among ethnic minority communities in Wales.

Linguistic definitions of schools

Although linguistic definitions have been proposed nationally for various educational institutions, local education authorities do not often give clear information to parents about the schools in their charge.

We encourage the ratification of the recommendation in the Welsh-medium Education Strategy, which sets out that Welsh-medium education should be provided within establishments with a Welsh language ethos and environment, rather than in bilingual schools where a lot of interaction between staff and pupils is in English.

There should be an urgent review of the policy document: 'Defining schools according to Welsh medium provision' [Information document No: 023/2007, October 2007].

In terms of the secondary sector, categories 1 and 2A should be combined and a new category created for 2B, 2C and 2D schools; establish a more transparent system to monitor the number of pupils in each class examined in Welsh in all subjects and the associated funding arrangements; establish a system that would prevent dilution of Welsh language provision e.g. downgrading Welsh medium provision as part of school reorganisation proposals.

Supporting parents

Parents need to be fully supported when they send their children to Welsh-medium schools. An intensive program for the learning and improving of Welsh should be offered to parents and prospective parents, and prioritising those parents who want to turn the language of their home into Welsh. An obvious place for effective collaboration is between Welsh for Adults and schools.

A network of dedicated field officers should be employed who can talk face to face with parents and act as an important link between the home, Cylchoedd Meithrin and schools

While parents receive TWF packs, follow-up work is needed to convey messages about Welsh life and culture. Support should include information on Welsh sports, songs, and how to speak Welsh with their children. An equivalent to the TWF program should be established in the more Anglicized areas of Wales.

Staffing and planning the workforce

We need to develop Welsh-medium training courses for teachers, and offer intensive refresher courses for teachers who are willing to convert to the Welsh-medium education sector, again through planned release of the work by developing the Sabbatical Scheme.

Mudiad Meithrin continue to face staffing problems, particularly in more Anglicised areas. To overcome this it is necessary to offer sufficient language training as well as offering better pay and conditions.

The National Welsh for Adults Entity should play a role in offering language training for teachers, including learning the language and development of language skills.

Staff expertise within government departments

There is a need to mainstream the Welsh language across all Government departments, and increase awareness and staff expertise in the field of Welsh-medium education to ensure coherent collaboration.

Too many government policies have appeared in the field of education without reference to Welsh-medium education, or where Welsh-medium education is given marginal consideration. It is clear that there is a lack of capacity in the Welsh in Education Unit.

There must be clear guidance from the Education Minister regarding Welsh-medium education and that LAs are clear about their own responsibilities in this area.

Further & Higher Education and Training

We welcome the development of the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol, and the growth in the number of those who follow a substantial part of their studies through the medium of Welsh, yet we need to recognise that linguistic progression continues to be disastrous between the secondary education sector and further and higher education.

The Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol's funding should be increased, to further improve linguistic continuity between the secondary sector and further and higher education sectors.

The role of the Education Minister

The Minister of Education currently has to make decisions on school closures or sanctioning the opening of new schools. The Minister of Education also leads in the field of education in Wales. There are times when the Education Minister withdraws discussion on the development of Welsh-medium schools, due to this dual role, rather than providing sound guidance to local authorities.

We recommend that a Committee of Experts with a background in language planning, bilingual and multilingual research, both in Wales and internationally, be established to advise the Minister.