

The top five recommendations from school inspections

Teaching



The quality of teaching in a school has a direct impact on the standards that pupils achieve. It is the single most important factor in helping pupils to achieve their potential.

The quality of teaching is an aspect of provision that often requires a recommendation in school inspections. Very often, the recommendation is about the need to improve the consistency of teaching in schools where, although there may be some good and sometimes even excellent teaching, there are also serious weaknesses that limit pupils' progress in some subjects or classes.

Literacy & numeracy



Recommendations about literacy and numeracy are also frequent. Even some schools that have mainly good performance need to do more to improve the way they teach and assess literacy and numeracy. Of the three core subjects, pupils' performance is weakest in mathematics, and it is unlikely that pupils will be able to apply sound numeracy skills across the curriculum if there are weaknesses in their learning in mathematics. And if pupils cannot read with understanding at an age-appropriate level, the content of many lessons will be difficult to understand because comprehension is a fundamental pre-requisite of learning.

Pupils' Welsh second language skills



Inspectors make recommendations to develop pupils' Welsh second language skills in over a quarter of English-medium schools. Pupils' progress in learning Welsh decreases as they get older, so that, although a majority of pupils make good progress in Welsh language development in the Foundation Phase, their progress slows down in subsequent key stages.

Self-evaluation & planning for improvement



In just over a quarter of schools there is a recommendation to improve self-evaluation and planning for improvement. This recommendation is closely linked to improving teaching and standards, because leaders who do not gather enough first-hand evidence about teaching and learning cannot identify the best teaching or to give support to those who need it. Teaching and assessment are not likely to improve where managers do not take full responsibility for the quality of the core business of the school.

Assessment



The most common recommendation in inspection reports is about the need to improve assessment, with nearly 40% of schools inspected having this as a significant area for improvement. Even in schools with good inspection outcomes overall, assessment is frequently identified as a shortcoming. This is often to do with the quality of teachers'

marking and the degree to which pupils understand and respond to it. Without feedback that they can understand, pupils do not know what it is they need to do to improve. And if teachers do not know how well pupils are doing, neither can they plan lessons to remedy gaps in learning.

Learning Welsh as a second language

All pupils in maintained schools study Welsh up to the age of 16. As around three-quarters of schools are English-medium, more pupils take a GCSE in Welsh as a second language than in Welsh as a first language. Only 15% sit Welsh first language at 16, whereas 62% sit GCSE Welsh second language. Nearly a quarter of the Year 11 cohort do not sit any GCSE examinations in Welsh.

In post-16, six 'Welsh for adults' centres provide opportunities nationally for adults to learn Welsh in their communities or workplaces. These centres offer a wide range of courses from entry level courses for non-Welsh speakers to proficiency level for advanced Welsh learners. Learners can attend courses of varying intensity and duration, from short taster and residential courses to intensive courses of more than three hours a week over a longer period. In addition the centres offer customised courses for specific workplaces and have also developed a good range of distance and e-learning courses.

During the past five years the number of adult Welsh learners has remained at a fairly constant level, with around 18,000 learners enrolled. There has been a downward trend in enrolments at entry and foundation levels but the number of learners attending proficiency courses has increased. The numbers of learners attending specialist courses, such as Welsh in the workplace, revision courses and short courses have also increased.

Figure 1.9: 2013
Full Welsh second language GCSE course

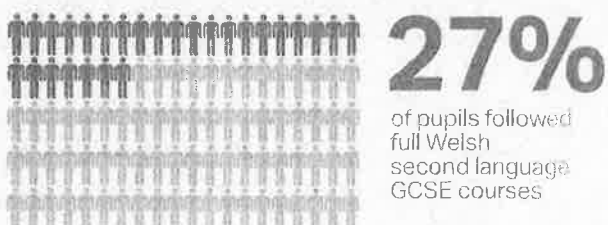
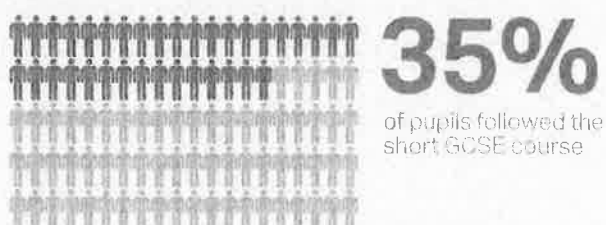


Figure 1.10: 2013
Short Welsh second language GCSE course



How good are outcomes in Welsh as a second language?

There are no published assessment results for Welsh language development in English-medium settings and schools up to the age of seven.

At key stage 2, it is optional for schools to provide details of teacher assessments in Welsh second language to the Welsh Government. In 2013, 95% of pupils from the eligible cohort were assessed in Welsh second language. The percentage of pupils achieving the expected level (level 4 or above) in Welsh second language was 68%.

In 2013, approximately 83% of pupils at the end of key stage 3 completed Welsh second language assessments, and 73% of them reached or exceeded the expected level. The other 17% of pupils completed Welsh first language assessments.

GCSE Welsh second-language courses do not produce bilingual pupils or young people who are sufficiently confident to use the language in their everyday lives. Welsh is a statutory subject for every pupil until the end of key stage 4. GCSE second language qualifications are, for many pupils, the culmination of 11 years of learning Welsh as a second language. This is a considerable investment by the Welsh Government.

In 2013, 27% of pupils followed full Welsh second-language GCSE courses (slightly higher than in 2012). Of these, 76% achieved A*-C grades. Results from the short course are weaker than those for the full course. Thirty-five per cent followed the short GCSE course and 48% achieved A*-C grades.

Therefore, in general, a fairly low number of pupils follow the Welsh second-language full GCSE courses in key stage 4. In a few English-medium schools like Bryngwyn School, many pupils sit and pass the full GCSE course. In Bryngwyn School, 93% follow the full GCSE course with 82% of them achieving A* to C grades. It is no surprise that, in those schools where teaching is good or excellent, pupils reach high standards in Welsh second language.

In 2007, Estyn published a remit report entitled 'An evaluation of the GCSE Welsh second language short course'. The report identifies several challenges associated with the GCSE short course and these shortcomings are still relevant. They mainly reflect the lack of time allocated to teaching GCSE courses in Welsh second language and the poor quality of much of that teaching, both of which affect the motivation of pupils. The dearth of well-qualified teachers of Welsh as a second language still limits pupils' progress across key stages.

Findings from school Inspections in the current inspection cycle

In Welsh second language, in the majority of schools, pupils make a relatively good start in terms of learning to speak Welsh and listening to Welsh. In the Foundation Phase, the majority of pupils make good progress during whole-group sessions, and they have a positive attitude towards speaking Welsh.

Standards in key stage 2 are improving slowly but, in a significant minority of schools, pupils do not develop their Welsh language skills well enough. Frequently in these schools, teachers do not allocate enough time to improving pupils' Welsh second language skills and many teachers are not confident when using the Welsh language themselves, especially with older pupils in key stage 2. Too often, teachers do not plan jointly to ensure language progression from year to year but often repeat sentence patterns and vocabulary from scratch. Too much use is made of writing frames that require pupils to fill the gaps rather than offering opportunities to structure simple sentences independently. Examples of pupils making good use of the Welsh language across the curriculum are scarce.

Standards in Welsh second language in secondary schools are good in only a few schools. Standards are particularly good in those schools in which standards are excellent in general. However, Welsh second language is an important area that needs to be improved in approximately one in every five schools, where standards are so low that we make a recommendation that improvements need to be made. Even in schools where standards are good, it is rare to find pupils who are confident enough to use the language on a day-to-day basis.

There are not enough opportunities for pupils to improve their ability to use the Welsh language outside Welsh lessons. Very few English-medium secondary schools include actions in their school-improvement plans to increase fluency in Welsh. Very few work with organisations such as the *Urdd* or *Mentrau Iaith* to offer more opportunities for pupils to practise speaking Welsh informally after school hours. However, some individual schools do succeed well where they have teachers who are better qualified and who find imaginative ways to improve pupils' skills in and beyond their timetabled lessons.

What can be done to improve the situation?

Too often, what we see in many Welsh second language lessons reflects traditional and unexciting teaching techniques.

The most successful schools place an emphasis on fostering confidence in speaking (and writing) the language, as opposed to the more passive skills of listening and reading. They do this by linking class work with enjoyable extra-curricular activities and by emphasising the *Cwricwlwm Cymreig* across the whole school, so that pupils appreciate and understand the history, geography and culture of Wales. These activities include outdoor activities, or residential periods away from school, for example at *Urdd* camps.

The best schools create links with peers in Welsh-medium schools, both locally and further afield, and they use modern technology, such as e-mail and Twitter. A great deal can be learned from the methodology demonstrated by some Welsh for adults providers, for example by inviting Welsh speakers from the local community to school to speak to the learners.

A few schools raise awareness amongst pupils and parents of the advantages of bilingualism in the job market. The careers service has an important role to play by using labour-market information about the jobs available to Welsh speakers.

Staffing

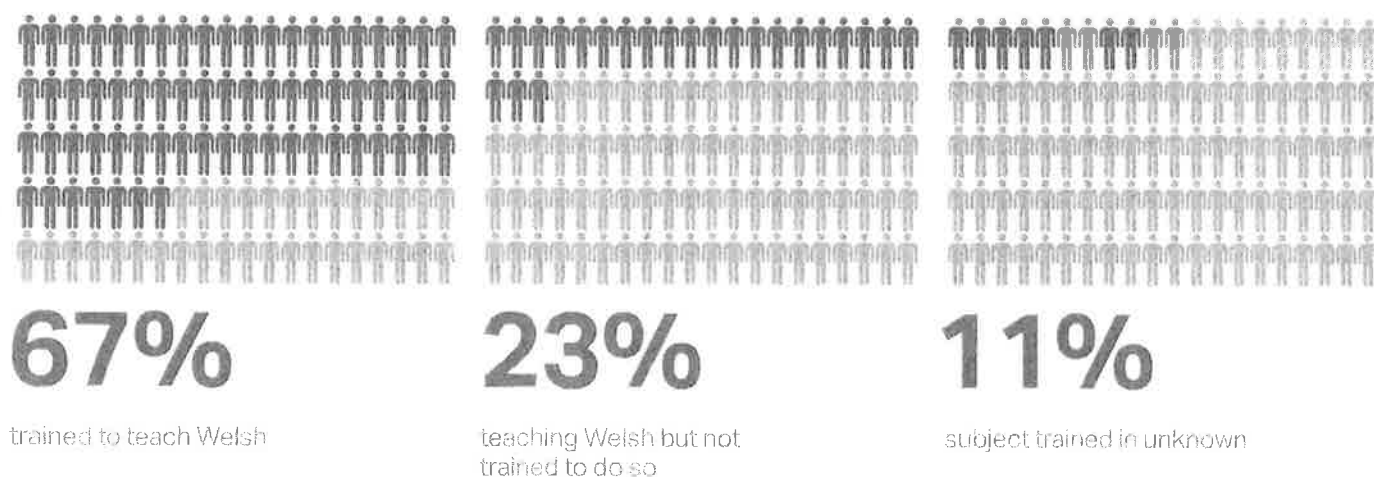
Attracting well-qualified Welsh specialists to teach Welsh second language is a challenge for many English-medium secondary schools. Overall there is limited staffing and leadership capacity. In some schools, teachers who are not subject-specialists are expected to teach Welsh extensively. Too many of these teachers lack competence and confidence.

There are 1,003 teachers registered to teach Welsh as a first or second language working in secondary schools in Wales¹. Of these teachers, only 67% have been trained to teach Welsh and 23% have not been trained to teach the subject. This means that there are at least 226 teachers teaching Welsh in secondary schools who have not been trained to teach the subject, while there is no information on the relevant qualifications of the rest.

A minority of schools organise a programme to help staff to learn Welsh. This helps staff to use the Welsh language with pupils in informal situations around the school but fails to address the need for fluent teachers.

It is clear from the way that immersion teaching methods work with young children from non-Welsh speaking homes when they join Welsh-medium schools at the age of three or four that early immersion is the most effective way of teaching not only a second language but also a third and fourth language. Young children are highly receptive to language learning. It becomes more difficult later on, although immersion is used at all levels, including for adults. Recent research suggests that there are general cognitive benefits associated with fluency in more than one language and that they go beyond simple language proficiency. However, we do not currently have the capacity in the teaching and learning-support workforce in Wales to enable schools and settings to offer immersion teaching to all children for whom Welsh is a second or third language. Neither do we have a curriculum for Welsh as a second language that requires teachers to use immersion methods.

Figure 1.11: Percentages of registered secondary school teachers of Welsh by initial training



¹ General Teaching Council for Wales Annual Statistics Digest, March 2013

Outcomes: primary schools

Standards are good or better in just over 70% of primary schools. This is similar to last year.

Excellent standards

A very few schools have excellent standards. In these schools, pupils are confident and expect to achieve highly. They learn well from their mistakes and are involved in setting their own learning targets. Nearly all of these pupils have good problem-solving skills and apply these well to new learning situations. In these schools, most pupils apply their literacy skills exceptionally well across the curriculum. They use a wide and varied vocabulary, and enjoy experimenting with language.

This year, half of the schools judged as having excellent standards have over a quarter of their pupils entitled to free school meals and a significant proportion of pupils that speak English as an additional language. In these schools, the systematic approach to teaching literacy, targeted additional support, and the expectation that all pupils will achieve at least the expected level, contribute to excellent standards overall.

Good standards

A majority of schools have good standards. Pupils make appropriate progress and achieve well. They speak confidently and listen well to others. In the Foundation Phase, most pupils read with understanding and enjoyment using a range of strategies to work out the meaning of unfamiliar words. By the end of key stage 2, many pupils read enthusiastically and express and justify their opinions about books. Many skim texts

quickly to get an overview of the content and extract relevant information. Many pupils in the Foundation Phase write short texts independently of the teacher in a variety of genres with accurate spelling, punctuation and grammar. In key stage 2, many write well at length and develop their writing skills across all subjects. A majority structure their writing well and use imaginative vocabulary.

Many pupils develop their numeracy skills appropriately in mathematics lessons. However, a significant minority do not apply their numeracy skills, particularly their number skills and numerical reasoning, at an appropriate level across subjects. For example, pupils often do not know which operation to use when attempting to solve problems expressed in words, or their slow recall of key number facts restricts their ability to work out answers. In a majority of schools, pupils have good information and communication technology (ICT) skills. Even so, a significant minority of pupils do not use data handling or modelling well enough in ICT lessons or in context within other subjects.

In the Foundation Phase, most pupils have a positive attitude towards learning Welsh second language. In key stage 2, a majority of pupils use a suitable range of simple sentence patterns in their oral and written work, and read Welsh texts at an appropriate level. A few pupils speak confidently in Welsh lessons, though many do not use the language outside of structured lessons.

Figure 2.2: Percentages of judgements awarded for Key Question 1: How good are outcomes?

