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Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales

An evaluation of the GCSE Welsh second language short course

October 2007

BUDDSODDWR MEWN POBL
INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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Introduction

1 The purpose of this report is to respond to a request by the Welsh Assembly Government for advice on the GCSE Welsh second language short course. In particular, the Welsh Assembly Government asked Estyn to provide advice on the implications of the significant increase over the last few years in the proportion of pupils being entered for the short GCSE course in key stage 4 rather than the full GCSE course.

2 As part of this survey, inspectors visited 17 secondary schools in different areas of Wales during the 2006 autumn term. The schools we visited are listed in the appendix. During the visits, we:

- observed Welsh second language short course lessons in key stage 4;
- examined samples of pupils' written work; and
- interviewed pupils, heads of Welsh departments and members of senior management teams.

Background

3 Iaith Pawb (A National Action Plan for a Bilingual Wales) sets the following target:

'by 2011, the percentage of people in Wales able to speak Welsh will have increased by five percentage points from the figure which emerges from the census of 2001'

(Iaith Pawb, page 15)

4 Iaith Pawb also notes the following in relation to the above target:

'that local education authorities and schools should consider ways of improving standards in Welsh second language, with clear guidance from the Welsh Assembly Government'

(Iaith Pawb, page 85)

5 It is a statutory requirement that all pupils are taught Welsh to the end of key stage 4, either as a first or second language[1]. There is a choice of two GCSE Welsh second language courses in key stage 4, namely the short and the full GCSE course. The short course is equivalent to half a full GCSE qualification. Both courses are assessed on two tiers, the 'higher' and 'lower' tiers. On the higher tier, pupils can gain grades A* to D and on the lower tier pupils can gain grades C to G only. Pupils who follow either course can be entered for either tier. GCSE certificates do not specify whether the grade awarded was as a result of following the short or the full GCSE course.

6 The Welsh Assembly Government is supporting WJEC to pilot new GCSE specifications for the short and full Welsh second language courses in key stage 4 between September 2006 and August 2009.

[1] except for pupils with statements of SEN that disapply the requirement to study Welsh

Main findings

7 Only a very few pupils who follow the GCSE Welsh second language short course make good progress towards becoming fluent Welsh speakers. The percentage of pupils who achieve grades A* - C on the short course has increased to 47% in 2006. However, these results compare poorly with the full course, where 69% of pupils achieved grades A* - C in 2006. Few pupils who follow the short course choose to study Welsh post-16.

8 The main reasons for the underachievement of pupils who follow the short course are as follows:

- too many pupils who follow the short course are entered for the lower tier examination though they are capable of gaining high grades. Only one in five pupils who follow the short course sit a higher tier examination, compared with about half those who follow the full course;
- the time allocated to teaching the short course is often less than that recommended by the examination board. Only 15% of the schools visited as part of this survey allocated time in line with the examination specification, namely two and a half hours a fortnight. In some schools, the allocation is as little as one hour a fortnight;
- in most schools, there are not enough opportunities for pupils following the short course to hear and practise using the language beyond formal Welsh lessons; and
- in too many schools, the short course is taught by non-specialist teachers who lack a thorough understanding of second language teaching methodology.

9 In the predominantly Welsh-speaking authorities of Carmarthenshire, Ceredigion, Gwynedd, Ynys Môn and Conwy, the great majority of pupils who study Welsh second language follow the full course. Elsewhere, a small number of schools serving mainly English-speaking communities also deliver the full course to all pupils. In these schools, pupils generally achieve well in Welsh second language.

10 However, between 2004 and 2006 in most of the rest of Wales, there has been a significant reduction in the proportion of pupils entered for the full course and a corresponding increase in those entered for the short course. In 2006, for the first time, the proportion of candidates for the short course in Wales was higher than for the full course.

11 In many schools, especially in south east Wales, the decrease in the proportion of pupils following the full course between 2004 and 2006 has been very marked. The main reasons for this trend in these schools are as follows:

- pupils are not guided to take the course (short or full) that will help them achieve their potential. In particular, there is not enough support for pupils to choose the full course;

- although most of the pupils interviewed have positive attitudes towards learning Welsh and recognise the value of continuing to do so in key stage 4, the subjects options in key stage 4 are organised in such a way that the Welsh second language full GCSE course competes with other popular subject choices; and

- in some of the schools, the full course is not available for pupils to study, often because the school does not have enough specialist Welsh second language teachers.

12 The proposed new GCSE Welsh second language syllabuses have the potential to make learning Welsh at key stage 4 more attractive to pupils.

Recommendations

13 In order to improve standards in Welsh second language, the Welsh Assembly Government should:

R1 consider phasing out the short GCSE course when the staffing capacity and quality of teaching are good enough to sustain delivery of the full GCSE course to increased numbers of pupils; and

R2 increase the number of specialist Welsh second language teachers to meet demand.

Local education authorities should:

R3 identify and support the schools that allocate too little time to Welsh second language in key stage 4; and

R4 include targets in their Welsh Education Schemes to increase the proportion of Welsh second language pupils entered for a GCSE examination and for the higher tier examinations.

Schools should:

R5 review their policy for entering pupils for higher tier examinations in Welsh second language;

R6 ensure that enough time is allocated to all their Welsh second language courses in key stage 4; and

R7 offer pupils a range of opportunities to hear and practise using Welsh beyond formal Welsh lessons.

How well are pupils achieving in the Welsh second language short course?

14 The following charts show the national results for the short course and the Welsh second language full course between 2004 and 2006:

Chart 1: Percentages of pupils gaining grades A* - C in the Welsh second language GCSE short course examination between 2004 and 2006

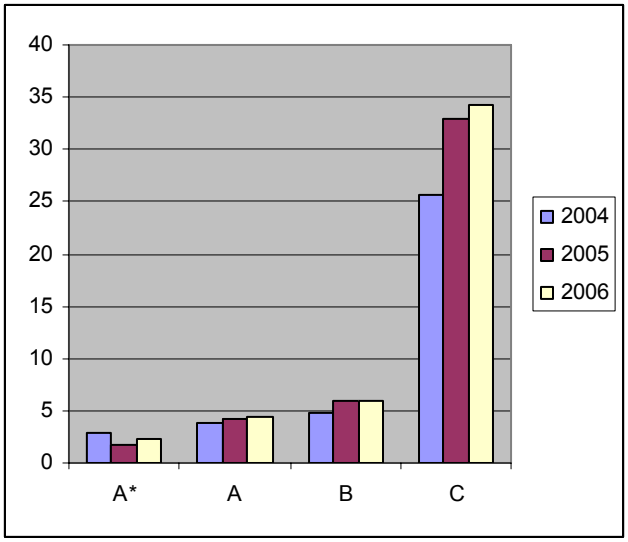
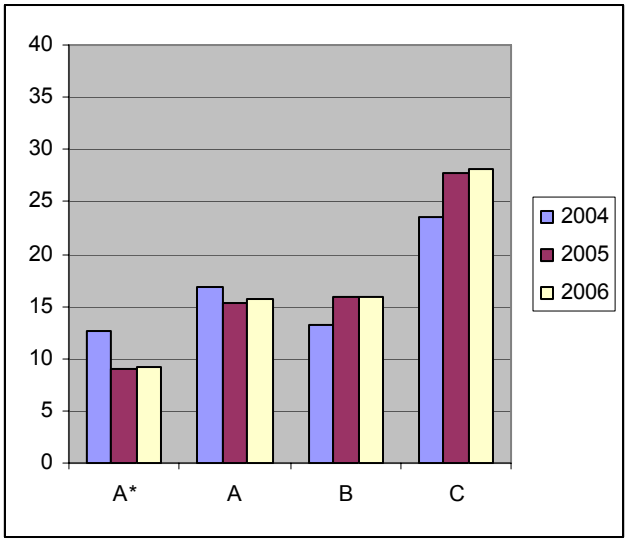


Chart 2: Percentages of pupils gaining grades A* - C in the Welsh second language GCSE full course examination between 2004 and 2006



15 The percentage of pupils gaining the higher grades A* and A in the short course (about 7%) is much lower than the corresponding figure for the full course (about 25%).

16 The percentage of pupils on the short course who gained grades A* to C over these three years increased from 37% in 2004 to almost 47% in 2006. This increase is

likely to be due to pupils who are capable of gaining a high grade in the full course being entered for the short course and hence boosting the short course results. Even so, the result for the short course continues to be far lower than for the full course, which was 69% gaining grades A* to C in 2006.

17 During the visits made to schools as part of this survey, we observed a small number of short course lessons. In general, pupils work conscientiously and apply themselves well to learning activities. They learn and practise using new vocabulary and sentence patterns and make progress during the lessons. A few pupils make good progress but most do not make enough progress over time towards becoming fluent in Welsh. Only a few pupils can hold a conversation and present personal information articulately. Many pupils do not remember or build on what they have learnt in previous lessons. Sometimes this is because they do not have sufficient opportunities in lessons to practise using the language in less formal situations. At other times, new language patterns are not reinforced enough by constant revision when they are introduced. This affects pupils' ability to use Welsh in pairs or in small groups. In both cases, limited time allocation for Welsh second language contributes significantly to pupils' underachievement.

18 These observations are supported by school inspection findings. Standards in Welsh second language are good or better in just over 40% of lessons observed during secondary school inspections in 2005-2006[2]. This leaves nearly 60% of lessons where there are shortcomings in pupils' achievements. Overall, standards in Welsh second language in key stage 4 are lower than in any other subject. The pattern has been similar over several years.

19 Few pupils who follow the short course choose to continue to study Welsh as a second language in the sixth form. The main reason for this is because the step from the GCSE short course to the advanced supplementary or advanced level is too great for many pupils. This is of concern as continuing to study Welsh at this level helps towards becoming fully fluent. In 2006, only about 450 candidates were entered for the Welsh second language advanced level examination, which is similar to the number for German and about half the number for French.

[2] See the Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector for Education and Training in Wales for 2005-2006.

How many pupils are following the Welsh second language short course?

20 The table below shows the proportion of pupils entered for the different types of examinations in Welsh between 2004 and 2006:

Year	Size of cohort	Percentage of pupils entered for:					
		Welsh 1st language	Welsh 2nd language: full course	Welsh 2nd language: short course	Entry level certificate: Welsh 1st language	Entry level certificate: Welsh 2nd language	% of whole cohort entered for an examination in Welsh
2004	39187	12.8	30.1	20.2[3]	0.7	1.6	65.8
2005	38482	13.2	25.4	22.8	0.7	1.3	63.3
2006	38744	13.4	24.5	25.3	0.8	1.2	65.2

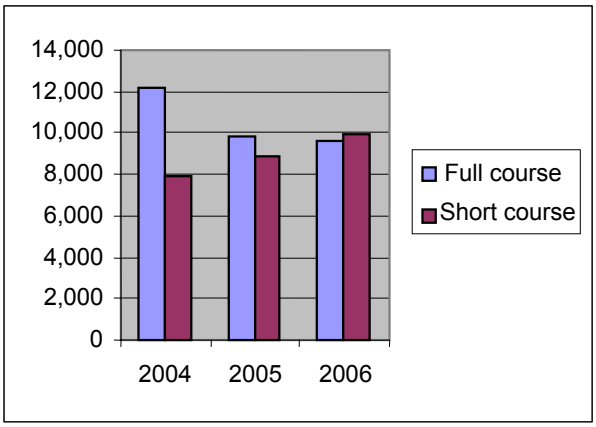
Source: WJEC Welsh Examinations Database

21 The table shows that only about two-thirds of pupils aged 15 are entered for an examination in Welsh. This compares with over 90% in English, mathematics and science.

22 There has also been a decrease in the proportion of pupils entered for the full GCSE course examination in Welsh second language and a corresponding increase in those entered for the short course over the three year period between 2004 and 2006.

23 The following chart shows the numbers of pupils who were entered for the full course and short course examinations in GCSE Welsh second language over the same period:

Chart 3: Numbers of Welsh second language GCSE full course and short course candidates between 2004 and 2006



24 The chart shows a decrease over the period 2004-2006 of over 2,500 in the number of pupils who were entered for the full course, from around 12,000 in 2004 to just over 9,500 in 2006. In 2006, for the first time, the number of pupils who were entered for the short course was higher than the number on the full course.

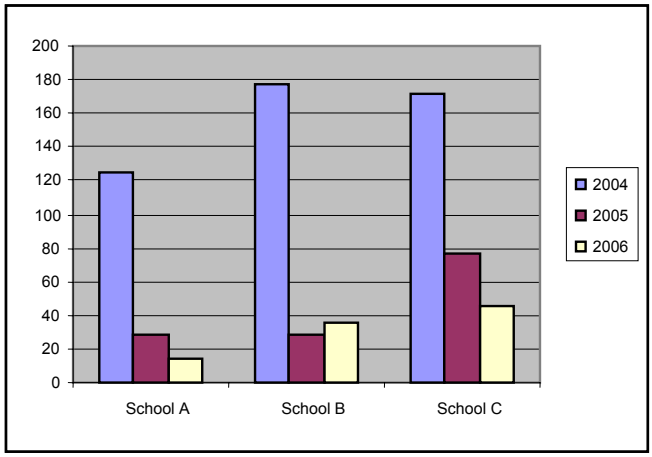
[3] When this data was originally published, this figure was quoted incorrectly as 9.8%.

25 In Carmarthenshire, Ceredigion, Gwynedd, Ynys Môn and Conwy, pupils who study Welsh as a second language follow the full course, with only a few exceptions. This reflects the language policies of these local authorities and schools. Across the rest of Wales, the numbers who follow the full course vary greatly. This variation does not reflect the linguistic nature of the schools or the areas they serve. There are a few English-medium secondary schools serving areas where there are no Welsh-speaking communities, where every pupil in key stage 4 follows the full GCSE course, for example Croesyceiliog Comprehensive School, Cwmbran. In such schools, the short course is not offered to pupils in key stage 4. Pupils and parents do not seem to object to these policies.

26 Between 2004 and 2005, there was a significant increase overall in the proportion of pupils who follow the short course. This tendency was most evident in authorities such as Cardiff and Newport, and to a lesser extent in other authorities in south east Wales and other parts of Wales.

27 The following chart illustrates the scale of the decrease in the numbers of pupils following the full GCSE course in three secondary schools which are typical of those in urban areas in south east Wales.

Chart 4: Numbers of pupils following the full course between 2004 and 2006 in three secondary schools in one of the authorities of south east Wales



28 The chart shows that between these schools, almost 400 fewer pupils followed the full course in 2006 than in 2004, which is a decrease of some 80% over the three years. This pattern is repeated in a number of other similar schools.

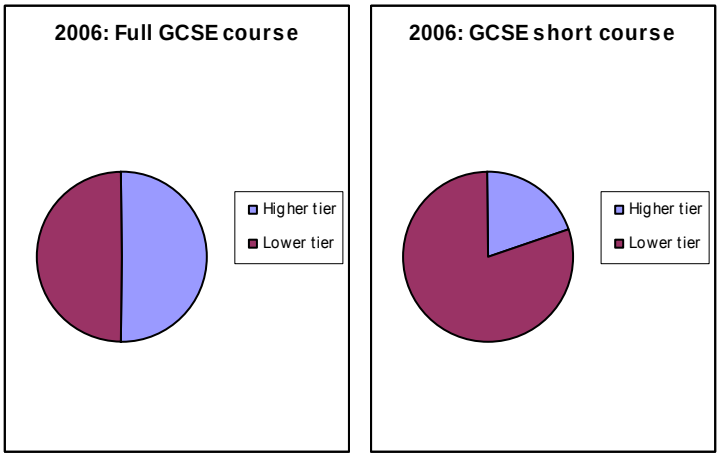
29 There is a lack of specialist teachers to teach Welsh in schools in certain parts of Wales. This limits the ability of these schools to offer the full course because of the greater time allocation necessary to teach the full course. In too many schools, the short course is taught by non-specialist teachers who lack a thorough understanding of the methodology of teaching a second language.

30 In some schools, this decrease in the number of pupils following the full course is because the school now only offers the full course to a small proportion of pupils. Where this happens, the school is not providing all pupils with equal opportunities. Often where the option is open to all pupils, there is not enough guidance from the school for pupils to understand or consider the advantages of following the full course.

31 Some schools, in which both the full and the short course are options, have succeeded in increasing the numbers who follow the full course. This is as a result of having a clear strategy to raise pupils' and parents' awareness of the advantages of increasing their contact hours with Welsh. In these schools, providing appropriate advice to pupils and their parents when they choose subject options at the end of Year 9 has had a positive effect on the numbers of pupils who choose to study the full GCSE course in key stage 4.

32 The following charts show the difference between the full course and the short course in terms of the number of GCSE Welsh second language candidates who sat higher tier examinations in 2006.

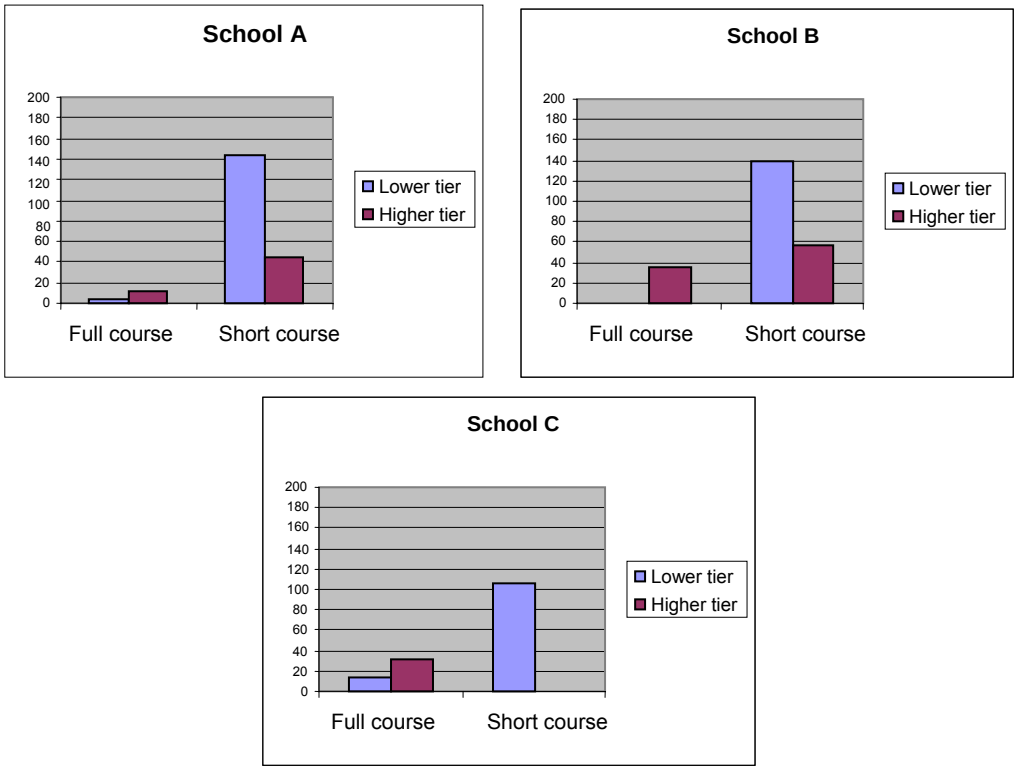
Charts 5 and 6: Numbers of pupils who were entered for the higher and lower tier in Welsh second language GCSE examinations in 2006



33 In 2006, 4,733 pupils following the full course and 1,788 pupils following the short course were entered for the higher tier. The charts show that about half the pupils who followed the full course were entered for the higher tier. However, on the short course, only about one in five pupils did so, though many able pupils are now following the short course. Therefore, four out of five pupils on the short course could not gain a grade higher than grade C. The situation was similar in 2005.

34 The following charts show entries for the higher and lower tiers in the same three schools referred to above.

Charts 7, 8 and 9: Numbers of pupils entered for the higher and lower tier Welsh second language GCSE examinations in three secondary schools in one of the authorities of south east Wales in 2006



35 In 2006, in these three schools, the vast majority of pupils were entered for the lower tier. Less than a third of all pupils are entered for the higher tier either in the short course or the full course. The figure is as low as one pupil in five in School C. In this school, no pupils who followed the short course were entered for the higher tier. In schools such as these, a high proportion of pupils are underachieving in Welsh second language compared with other subjects they study. In one of the three schools, almost 40% of the pupils who followed the short course were not entered for the examination and so do not have any GCSE qualification in Welsh.

How much time is there for teaching the Welsh second language short course?

36 The examination board's specifications recommend that the time allocation for delivering the short course should be two and a half hours a fortnight. Only a small number of schools which were visited as a part of the survey (about 15%) provide this allocation. In some schools, the allocated time is less than an hour a fortnight.

37 Such limited time allocations make it difficult for most pupils to make good progress in learning Welsh. There is not enough time to cover all the language skills. Often, the time to develop reading and writing skills is limited and this has an adverse effect on the development of the pupils' oral skills, because oral skills are reinforced by the development of reading and writing skills. In schools where pupils have no experience of Welsh other than in their Welsh lessons, it is difficult for them to remember what they have learnt in previous lessons. Pupils often become frustrated because their progress is limited due to insufficient time. This can adversely affect pupils' motivation.

38 Often the time allocation for the course is an hour a week (two hours a fortnight). Although an hour a week is only fifteen minutes short of the recommended time allocation, this still represents a 20% reduction in the total time allocated and amounts to a reduction of nearly 10 hours of study over the whole year.

39 Some schools are trialling different models of providing the short course. Rather than providing the same weekly time allocation throughout the year, these schools deliver Welsh second language through intensive modules at the beginning and end of the school year, with the total number of teaching hours over the course of the year being the same. Intensive provision can help pupils make quick progress. However, learning a language successfully depends on consistent and continuous contact with the target language. In general, the schools have not given enough consideration to ensuring that pupils receive opportunities to use Welsh during the time between modules. As a result, pupils do not make enough progress and, in some instances, are not entered for the GCSE examination.

40 In response to the decrease in the number of pupils choosing the full course, a few schools provide pupils in Year 9 with an accelerated course, with the aim of entering them for the full course at the end of Year 10. The advantages to this model are:

- greater flexibility in the Year 9 timetable that permits extra time to be allocated for Welsh second language courses;
- rapid progress in pupils' achievement boosts their motivation; and
- the opportunity for pupils to progress to the advanced subsidiary (AS) course in Year 11.

41 Beginning the advanced subsidiary course in key stage 4 ensures progression and continuity in pupils' learning. It can also lead to a higher proportion of pupils following the advanced subsidiary course and improving their ability to use Welsh. Where there is no advanced subsidiary available in Year 11, some of the advantages of the accelerated course are lost. One school has piloted an accelerated course where pupils sit the short course at the end of Year 9, with the intention of attracting more pupils to follow the full course in Year 10. This pilot was unsuccessful largely because the pupils were satisfied with gaining a grade C in GCSE Welsh second language and did not wish to continue studying Welsh.

42 In many schools that teach Welsh primarily as a second language, pupils' contact with the Welsh language beyond their Welsh lessons is limited. In many English-medium secondary schools few if any staff are able to speak Welsh. A lack of wider contact with Welsh hinders pupils' progress and their confidence, especially where there is already limited time allocation for the short courses. Examples of regular contact with the language beyond Welsh lessons are scarce. A few schools arrange residential stays for pupils at the Urdd camps.

43 There are effective initiatives that bring adult Welsh learners into contact with Welsh speakers. An example of this is the Cynllun Pontio scheme in the Aberystwyth area, which involves Welsh speakers visiting classes on a regular basis to converse with learners. Emulating projects such as this, with the assistance of the Mentrau Iaith[4] would help to improve pupils' Welsh second language achievements in key stage 4.

[4] Mentrau Iaith are community based agencies, set up by the Welsh Language Board in each local authority. Their function is to extend and expand the use of Welsh as a medium of social, business and institutional interaction in the community.

What is the examination syllabus for the Welsh second language short course?

44 The proposed new GCSE specifications for Welsh second language in key stage 4 offer the two pathways of 'Living Welsh' and 'Practical Welsh' for both the short and the full GCSE course. The new specifications make the GCSE Welsh second language courses more relevant to modern day contexts, relating Welsh to general day-to-day use and to vocational situations. The new specifications aspire to:

- develop pupils' interest in Welsh and their enthusiasm towards the language;
- enable pupils to communicate confidently and effectively in Welsh;
- develop pupils' skills so that they meet their own needs and those of employers and further education;
- enable pupils to acquire the skills and understanding they need to participate fully in a bilingual community; and
- enable pupils to acquire the knowledge, understanding and skills needed for further study.

45 The 'Living Welsh' path way focuses on contexts relating to the themes of 'Us' and 'Everyday language'. The learning experiences of pupils following the 'Practical Welsh' pathway are based on 'The world around us' and 'The world of work'. These themes provide pupils with appropriate opportunities to learn to use Welsh in a range of situations where they are likely to come into contact with Welsh.

46 The above aspects of the new syllabuses have the potential to make learning Welsh in key stage 4 more attractive to pupils. The examination board's progress report of February 2007 indicates that the new specifications have been well-received by the schools participating in the pilot. This was supported by the interviews we had with heads of Welsh departments.

47 Even so, the recommended time allocation of two and a half hours a fortnight for the short course still compares unfavourably with the weekly contact hours in intensive Welsh courses for adults. Learners need about four hours a week of contact time (including formal and informal contact) to become fluent in a language.

Conclusion

48 There are fundamental shortcomings in the delivery of Welsh as a second language in key stage 4 and in the delivery of the short course in particular. These shortcomings are an obstacle to meeting the target in Iaith Pawb of increasing by 2011 the proportion of Welsh speakers by five percentage points from the 2001 figure.

Appendix

A list of the schools we visited

1 Denbigh High School
2 Argoed Secondary School
3 Llanishen High School
4 Cyfarthfa High School
5 Brynteg Comprehensive School
6 Sir Thomas Picton School
7 St Julian's School, Newport
8 Cowbridge High School
9 Hartridge Comprehensive School
10 Dŵr y Felin Comprehensive School
11 Pencoed Secondary School
12 Treorchy Comprehensive School
13 Cwmcarn High School
14 Croesyceiliog Comprehensive School
15 Caerleon Comprehensive School
16 Caldicot Comprehensive School
17 Whitchurch High School