Estyn

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Arolygiaeth Ei Mawrhydi dros Addysg a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru

Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales

Welsh in the Foundation Phase
Developing Welsh as a first language in primary schools and the non-maintained sector

December 2013

The purpose of Estyn is to inspect quality and standards in education and training in Wales. Estyn is responsible for inspecting:

⌃ nursery schools and settings that are maintained by, or receive funding from, local authorities (LAs);
⌃ primary schools;
⌃ secondary schools;
⌃ special schools;
⌃ pupil referral units;
⌃ independent schools;
⌃ further education;
⌃ independent specialist colleges;
⌃ adult community learning;
⌃ local authority education services for children and young people;
⌃ teacher education and training;
⌃ Welsh for adults;
⌃ work-based learning; and
⌃ learning in the justice sector.

Estyn also:

⌃ provides advice on quality and standards in education and training in Wales to the National Assembly for Wales and others; and
⌃ makes public good practice based on inspection evidence.

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Introduction

This report is published in response to a request for advice in the Minister for Education and Skills' annual remit letter to Estyn for 2012-2013. The purpose of the report is to:

- report on the standards of speaking, reading and writing in Welsh in the Foundation Phase in Welsh-medium schools and non-maintained settings;
- consider the differences between schools which have a high percentage of pupils from Welsh-speaking homes, schools with a high percentage of pupils who do not come from Welsh-speaking homes, and schools where there is a mixed population in terms of the language of the home; and
- consider the balance between the need for formal education to develop language, and providing the opportunities for play and informal activities which are part of the philosophy and operation of the Foundation Phase.

The report is intended for the Welsh Government, headteachers of Welsh-medium or bilingual nursery and primary schools, leaders and managers of Welsh-medium non-maintained settings, practitioners (teachers, learning assistants and other support staff) in Welsh-medium schools and non-maintained settings, local authority and regional consortia officers and advisors, and church diocesan authorities. The report will also be of interest to institutions that train practitioners.

The contents and findings of this report are based on the range of evidence which is identified in Appendix 1.

Background

In September 2008, the Foundation Phase was introduced for all children aged three and four years old in schools and non-maintained settings in Wales. Since the beginning of the 2011-2012 school year, the Foundation Phase has been fully operational for pupils up to seven years old.

The Foundation Phase Framework for Children's Learning explains the philosophy and operation of the Foundation Phase as follows:

> 'The Foundation Phase encompasses children's developmental needs. At the centre of the statutory curriculum framework lies the holistic development of children and their skills across the curriculum, building on their previous learning experiences, knowledge and skills.'

and again:

> 'Children learn through first-hand experiential activities with the serious business of 'play' providing the vehicle. Through their play, children practise and consolidate their learning, play with ideas, experiment, take risks, solve

problems, and make decisions individually, in small and in large groups. First-hand experiences allow children to develop an understanding of themselves and the world in which they live. The development of children's self-image and feelings of self-worth and self-esteem are at the core of this phase.'

In general, across Wales, pupils start school soon after their fourth birthday. However, some local authorities admit pupils to their schools during the year in which the children reach four years old. This means that education for three and four-year-olds is provided in schools maintained by local authorities, and also in non-maintained settings. These non-maintained settings are provided and supported by voluntary and charitable organisations, such as Mudiad Meithrin and the Wales Pre-school Providers Association, or by private providers. Mudiad Meithrin is the main Welsh-medium provider, with more than 500 settings across Wales which are attended by approximately 13,000 children up to four years old.

In Welsh-medium schools and settings, there is a specific emphasis on developing Welsh through immersion methods across all areas of learning of the Foundation Phase, whatever language the child speaks at home. There is no requirement for these settings to deliver the Welsh Language Development learning area, which is only operational in settings which deliver Welsh as a second language. The immersion method focuses on using Welsh as the only medium of teaching and learning, using practical and visual techniques to help children and pupils to develop vocabulary and syntax. The essence of this method is introducing and modelling good language.

In Welsh-medium schools, when pupils reach seven years old at the end of the Foundation Phase, they are assessed against three areas of learning–language, literacy and communication skills (Welsh), mathematical development and personal and social development, wellbeing and cultural diversity. All assessments are conducted in Welsh, regardless of the pupil's first language. Few of the cohort in Welsh-medium schools across Wales come from Welsh-speaking homes. For example, of the pupils assessed through the medium of Welsh in 2012, fewer than 8% spoke Welsh at home.

The report places a specific emphasis on the Language, Literacy and Communication Skills learning area, but the study will also examine which strategies are used to encourage pupils to acquire and use Welsh across the five other areas of learning in the Foundation Phase. Particular attention will be given to:

- pupils' standards and progress in Welsh;
- the quality of teaching and educational provision, including the learning environment; and
- leadership and planning for improvement, including training and support for practitioners.

The purpose of this remit work is to evaluate how effectively children acquire Welsh language skills in Welsh-medium schools and non-maintained settings across Wales. The report examines how planning principles and Foundation Phase provision in

schools and settings facilitate Welsh language development among pupils from Welsh-speaking and non-Welsh speaking backgrounds.

The report also considers the 'Welsh-medium Education Strategy 2010'. This strategy shows the Welsh Government's intention to develop Welsh-medium education and training as an integral part of the education system. The Welsh Government wants to 'ensure that all learners develop their Welsh-language skills to their full potential and encourage sound linguistic progression from one phase of education and training to the next.' It states further:

> 'Welsh-medium education from the early years, with robust linguistic
> progression through every phase of education, offers the best
> conditions for developing young people who are truly bilingual.'

Outcome 1 of the Strategy sets specific aims in relation to the percentages of pupils to be assessed in the language, literacy and communication skills learning area through the medium of Welsh at the end of the Foundation Phase. The aim is to increase the percentage who are assessed through the medium of Welsh from 21% of pupils in Wales in 2009 (end of key stage 1 assessments), to 25% by 2015 and 30% by 2020.

These aims give local authorities a clear responsibility to plan clearly how they intend to increase opportunities to provide Welsh-medium education.

Main findings

Standards and progress in Welsh across the Foundation Phase

1   According to assessments at the end of the Foundation Phase in 2011-2012, approximately 86% of pupils in Welsh-medium schools across Wales achieve in line with expectations (outcome 5 or above) in the language, literacy and communication skills (Welsh) learning area. This compares well with results in language, literacy and communication skills (English) in English-medium schools (84.3%). Although results at the higher than expected levels (outcome 6) are similar for language, literacy and communication skills (Welsh), language, literacy and communication skills (English) and mathematical development, they are significantly higher in the personal and social development and wellbeing learning area.

2   In the majority of Welsh-medium schools and settings that were inspected, the standards of speaking and listening among three to four-year-old pupils are developing well. They can converse increasingly effectively with each other and with their teachers when taking part in activities. Many children enjoy reading and take pleasure in listening to stories. They like handling books and talking about what they are reading or what is being read to them. A few children can read familiar words successfully, such as their names or labels on equipment and furniture. Many of these children apply themselves successfully to initial mark making and creating patterns as a basis for developing their writing skills.

3   The overall standards of four to seven-year-old pupils in Welsh are good. Most pupils develop an effective spoken vocabulary in a wide range of contexts in the areas of learning, and develop an increasing ability to converse and discuss confidently with their teachers and with each other. Most pupils can select and use various reading sources and they develop their reading skills in a good variety of contexts. However, pupils' writing skills are not developing as well. In a minority of schools, pupils at the end of the Foundation Phase are over-reliant on support and guidance from teachers. Their written work across the areas of learning is not correct or neat enough.

4   Children's linguistic backgrounds and skills in Welsh vary on entry to schools and non-maintained settings. In those schools and settings which cater for pupils from similar linguistic backgrounds, pupils' linguistic skills develop consistently. However, in a few schools and settings where the children come from mixed backgrounds in terms of their home language, the progress of too many children from non-Welsh speaking homes is too slow, and the progress of some children from Welsh-speaking homes is hindered.

5   In a few schools, children do not make the expected progress in their speaking, reading, listening and writing skills. In these schools, although focus sessions concentrate firmly on developing language skills, pupils are not given enough opportunities to apply these successfully across a range of learning activities and in different activity areas.

Educational provision and the learning environment

6   Most settings and many schools succeed in creating a good balance between first-hand experience, of an informal nature, and focused activities which concentrate specifically on developing language, literacy and communication skills.

7   In many schools and settings, the learning environment is attractive and varied. These settings and schools provide activity areas to immerse children in language experiences and activities, both indoors and outdoors. As a result, pupils succeed in acquiring language to a standard which is appropriate to their age and ability while undertaking activities in a number of areas of learning. This also promotes their reading and writing skills.

8   In a few schools, there is not an effective balance between focused activities and more informal activities, particularly in Years 1 and 2. There is a great emphasis on developing language skills in formal sessions, but in general activity areas do not provide enough opportunities for pupils to practise their language skills in various contexts. Teachers focus on developing pupils' literacy skills without giving enough consideration to the central philosophy of the Foundation Phase.

9   In many settings, practitioners plan carefully and ensure that the experiences and resources that are available to pupils set firm foundations on which children can develop their language skills. This is also the case in the majority of schools.

10   In these schools and settings, activity areas provide specific opportunities for pupils to undertake tasks which develop their language skills specifically. Continuous provision challenges children to build effectively on their previous learning. The majority of teachers and assistants support pupils' learning through skilful intervention to introduce rich vocabulary and language syntax and provide excellent language models to pupils. In a minority of these schools and settings where this support is not available, pupils' language skills are not developing appropriately.

11   In most schools and settings alike, teachers provide children with specific language tasks and challenges. They give a strong priority to developing children's Welsh language skills, and do so in activities across the areas of learning. Only a few schools set specific language challenges for pupils aged four to seven across the activity areas. Where this is the case, many pupils respond positively to them and practise and develop their speaking, reading and writing skills in a very effective manner.

12   In most schools and settings, focused activities for developing the language skills of groups of pupils are targeted appropriately so that children get the most benefit from them. The majority of teachers, practitioners and assistants provide good language models that motivate children to acquire sophisticated and correct language. However, in a minority of non-maintained settings, most particularly in areas where not many people speak Welsh, the standard and accuracy of practitioners' language is not good enough to provide children with a correct model.

13   Where there are children from Welsh-speaking and non-Welsh speaking homes in the same setting, in the best practice, teachers plan to offer effective motivation and

support to develop all pupils' language. They provide challenges and activities that are well targeted to respond to pupils' linguistic needs. However, in too many of these schools, teachers do not plan effectively enough to ensure that pupils from different linguistic backgrounds make appropriate progress from their starting point.

14   In a few schools and settings, teachers and practitioners do not have a sound understanding of the principles of the immersion method of teaching. As a result, they do not introduce and model the Welsh language robustly enough for pupils, and their expectations are not high enough. In a very few cases, learning assistants do not stick to using Welsh with pupils from non-Welsh speaking homes and this hinders their progress.

15   In smaller schools, there are pupils of a wide age range in the teacher's care. Due to the differences in the pupil to adult ratio as pupils get older, there are a limited number of assistants available. In this situation, too often, activities are not targeted well enough to meet the needs of all pupils, and pupils' language skills do not develop appropriately.

16   Settings with purpose-built buildings that are allocated for early education have developed good outdoor areas to promote children's progress. However, where settings meet in temporary rooms or buildings, such as village halls, the majority have not succeeded in developing effective areas. However, a few make good arrangements to work with schools to promote this aspect.

Leadership and planning for improvement

17   In a few schools, leaders and teachers do not show enough understanding of the central philosophy of the Foundation Phase. Because of the current national priority to develop literacy, they see tension between the philosophy of the Foundation Phase and the need to plan purposefully to develop language and literacy skills. As a result, pupils are unable to apply their language skills successfully across a range of contexts. This is more apparent in Years 1 and 2.

18   Most schools and settings succeed in ensuring that they have suitably trained staff to operate according to the philosophy and methodology of the Foundation Phase. On the whole, practitioners in settings and also with children aged three to four in schools, give a high priority to developing children's language, communication and literacy. Only a minority of schools, and a very few settings, track pupils' linguistic progress and monitor provision continuously in order to evaluate whether it leads to progress in learning.

19   The majority of schools have succeeded in adapting the outdoor learning environment to ensure a variety of contexts and learning experiences which promote pupils' language and communication skills. In a minority of schools, the outdoor area has not been planned carefully enough to provide activities which motivate children to develop their language and literacy skills. In these schools, there is a tendency not to give older children in the Foundation Phase enough opportunities to take advantage of development opportunities in the outdoor area.

20   Voluntary organisations which manage settings, such as Mudiad Meithrin, ensure

that leaders and management committees of most non-maintained settings understand and implement the Foundation Phase requirements well, and they plan effectively to improve provision.

21   In schools, leaders' commitment and understanding are more varied. In the best practice, self-evaluation and improvement plans give clear attention to developing the Welsh language within the philosophy of the Foundation Phase. In the few settings and schools where leadership is not as good, leaders do not give enough attention to ensuring an effective relationship between developing the Welsh language and the philosophy of the Foundation Phase.

22   Local authorities and organisations that manage non-maintained settings provide effective support to schools and settings in most cases. However, a minority of local authorities do not provide that support through the medium of Welsh.

Recommendations

Schools and settings should:

R1   ensure specific opportunities for pupils to develop and use their speaking, reading and writing skills across areas of learning and in different activity areas;

R2   ensure an effective balance between formal sessions to teach and reinforce language skills and informal opportunities to use them;

R3   develop learning activities and experiences which ensure that pupils from different linguistic backgrounds make appropriate progress from their starting point;

R4   set clear expectations which will ensure that pupils from all backgrounds use the Welsh language as they pursue informal activities, particularly at the beginning of the Foundation Phase;

R5   set clear expectations for practitioners with regards to using the Welsh language in the Foundation Phase so as they introduce and model a good standard of Welsh to their pupils across areas of learning;

R6   track progress in pupils' speaking, reading and writing skills consistently throughout the Foundation Phase; and

R7   give appropriate attention to quality of provision and standards in the Foundation Phase as part of self-evaluation processes and improvement planning in schools and settings.

Local authorities and organisations which manage non-maintained settings should:

R8   provide support and training for practitioners on immersion methods of language learning and provide guidance on how language, literacy and communication skills (Welsh) can be developed in a way which is compatible with the philosophy and methodology of the Foundation Phase;

R9   provide training and support for practitioners, including assistants, to improve their Welsh, where necessary;

R10 share good practice in terms of developing language, literacy and communication skills (Welsh) across areas of learning and activity areas in the Foundation Phase; and

R11 ensure that local authority support provision for Welsh-medium non-maintained settings is available in Welsh.

The Welsh Government should:

R12 ensure that authorities and schools understand the relationship between the methodology and philosophy of the Foundation Phase and the Literacy and Numeracy Framework.

Standards and progress in Welsh across the Foundation Phase

23 In 2012, statutory teacher assessments were conducted at the end of the Foundation Phase for the first time. As a result, it is not possible to draw a meaningful comparison with standards in key stage 1 in previous years. Twenty-two point nine per cent (22.9%) of pupils in Wales were assessed in language, literacy and communication skills (Welsh).

24 As can be seen in this table, according to the Foundation Phase assessments in 2011-2012, 86% of pupils in Welsh-medium schools across Wales achieve in line with expectations (outcome 5 or above) in the language, literacy and communication skills (Welsh) learning area.

Table 1: Foundation Phase outcomes, all pupils, by outcome, 2012 (outcome 5+)

	English medium %	Welsh medium %	All schools %
Personal and social development, wellbeing and cultural diversity (PSD)	91.1	92.6	91.4
Language, literacy and communication skills (English) (LLCE)	84.3	82.2	84.3
Language, literacy and communication skills (Welsh) (LLCW)	-	86	86
Mathematical development (MathDev)	86.9	88.3	87.3
Foundation Phase Indicator (FPI)	80.8	81.9	81.1
Number of primary schools	890	446	1336

The Foundation Phase indicator represents the percentage of pupils who have achieved outcome 5 or above in PSD, LLCE/LLCW and MathDev combined.

25 Table 2 below shows that there is no clear pattern between outcomes in the language, literacy and communication skills (Welsh) area of learning and authorities' traditional linguistic nature. In general, local authorities which include traditionally Welsh-speaking areas perform between 82% and 87%. The local authorities with the highest and lowest performance percentages in the language, literacy and communication skills (Welsh) area of learning are outside traditionally Welsh-speaking areas.

Table 2: Foundation Phase outcomes, language, literacy and communication skills (Welsh), all pupils, by local authority, 2012 (outcome 5+)

Local authority	%
Anglesey	86.5
Gwynedd	87.6
Conwy	80.1
Denbighshire	88.4
Flintshire	84.1
Wrexham	88.0
Powys	80.8
Ceredigion	86.1
Pembrokeshire	82.7
Carmarthenshire	85.4
Swansea	85.8
Neath Port Talbot	85.2
Bridgend	87.3
Vale of Glamorgan	91.2
Rhondda Cynon Taf	82.3
Merthyr Tydfil	87.9
Caerphilly	87.7
Blaenau Gwent	-
Torfaen	77.5
Monmouthshire	-
Newport	91
Cardiff	89.6
Wales	85.9

26   At the higher than expected levels (outcome 6), results for language, literacy and communication skills (Welsh) are very close to the results for language, literacy and communication skills (English) and mathematical development. Personal and social development and wellbeing are significantly higher.

Table 3: Foundation Phase Outcomes, all pupils, by outcome, 2012 (Outcome 6)

	English medium %	Welsh medium %	All schools %
Personal and social development, wellbeing and cultural diversity (PSD)	38.2	41	38.6
Language, literacy and communication skills (English) (LLCE)	26	20	25.6
Language, literacy and communication skills (Welsh) (LLCW)	41.2	24.8	24.8
Mathematical development (MathDev)	24.7	23.2	24.2

- The number of pupils in English-medium schools who follow LLCW is very low (fewer than 20); therefore, this figure cannot be analysed meaningfully.

27   According to Estyn's Annual Report for 2011-2012, in general, across the Welsh and English-medium sectors,

> 'In over four-fifths of schools, most pupils in the Foundation Phase listen carefully and speak confidently with a growing vocabulary. Many pupils read appropriate texts with a good degree of accuracy and understanding and use their knowledge of phonics to work out unfamiliar words.'

28   Again, in Estyn's Annual Report for 2011-2012, across the Welsh and English-medium sectors:

> 'In the settings inspected, most children achieve well and make good progress in their early literacy and numeracy skills… In most settings, children listen attentively, speak clearly and enjoy listening to stories and sharing books with adults. Older and more mature children are beginning to understand the importance of writing, such as writing a list to visit the shop or sending an invitation to a party. In a few settings, children recognise their names on their tablemats at snack time or on wall displays'

29   According to the Annual Report, pupils' writing skills are not developing as well. In a minority of schools, pupils at the end of the Foundation Phase are over-reliant on support and guidance from teachers. The presentation of their written work across the curriculum is not correct or tidy enough. The results of this survey reinforce this view.

Speaking and listening

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30   In general, children aged three to four and pupils aged four to seven in non-maintained settings and schools show good progress in their ability to speak Welsh with each other and with adults at school. They converse with increasing confidence as they move through the Foundation Phase and develop their general and specific vocabulary effectively. In nearly all cases, Welsh is the language of communication between pupils and adults at all times. Pupils respond positively to focus sessions and other structured activities which aim to develop their oral skills.

31   Children aged three to four in those settings and schools where many pupils speak Welsh at home converse naturally and often animatedly. Most children are able to hold extended conversations on various topics spontaneously, and many are able to communicate information, feelings, wishes and opinions clearly in correct language. Where they have the opportunity to move around the different activity areas, they stick to Welsh and use a vocabulary which is appropriate to the context. The minority of pupils who do not speak Welsh at home develop correct spoken language quickly, and participate fully in all the activities of the school or setting. They develop a rich vocabulary and apply their oral skills increasingly effectively across the areas of learning.

32   In most schools and settings in areas where few pupils come from Welsh-speaking homes, in general, the oral progress of three to four-year-old pupils shows good progress from their starting point. Many are able to converse with increasing ease about everyday things, and they develop a good vocabulary linked to the activity

areas in the school or setting. In formal situations, they use Welsh consistently effectively. In situations where they are not under direct adult supervision, pupils use little Welsh with each other in many of these schools and settings. Many pupils aged four to seven in these areas make consistent and good progress in their speaking and listening skills. They use the Welsh language with adults without exception and, usually, with each other in formal situations. However, only in a few schools do pupils stick to the Welsh language when conversing with each other informally.

33   In settings where children are from mixed linguistic backgrounds, the oral progress of children aged three to four from their starting point is not as good. The oral progress of a minority of children is sound, and they are able to converse with increasing confidence in a variety of situations, both formal and informal. However, in the majority of these schools, pupils, including those from Welsh-speaking homes, are not as willing to speak Welsh with each other, and they do not respond as willingly to adults who speak Welsh with them. The progress of too many pupils from non-Welsh speaking homes is too slow, and the progress of some children from Welsh-speaking homes is hindered. Although their positive response to instructions and questions from adults shows that they understand, some children do not apply themselves enough to using the Welsh language.

34   The oral standards of pupils aged four to seven in schools where pupils come from mixed linguistic backgrounds, varies. In the majority of schools, pupils develop good oral skills and are able to apply them to a wide range of activities across areas of learning. However, in some schools, pupils do not consider Welsh as the school's natural language, and they do not transfer their oral skills successfully to a variety of learning contexts.

Case study 1: Develop pupils' Welsh speaking skills in a role play area

Context:
Ysgol Feithrin Rhydaman is maintained by Carmarthenshire local authority. The majority of pupils come from non-Welsh speaking homes. Approximately 75 nursery and reception age children are educated through the medium of Welsh or English, according to their parents' wishes. The majority are taught in the Welsh-medium stream. The majority of children in the Welsh stream speak English at home.

Strategy:
A role play area, which changes according to the school's activity themes at the time, is a permanent part of provision. Teachers and assistants plan effectively to ensure that purposeful resources and equipment are placed in the area, including books, leaflets or other reading materials for pupils at all times. They also provide opportunities for pupils to write and make marks, whatever the theme in the role play area.

Action:
The role play area was set up as a hospital. There was a reception to welcome patients, including a telephone and a computer, clipboards for doctors and nurses, and notice boards on which to write patients' names. Suitable resources – clothes, medical equipment, a bed etc – were also available. Practitioners had been introducing and modelling suitable and challenging vocabulary for this area and a number of cards and labels were displayed. Accompanied by one of the assistants, pupils took different roles and conversed confidently with each other, using the vocabulary and patterns that were modelled for them. The assistant supported the activity by asking open and relevant questions which prompted pupils to answer at length.

Results:
All children played different roles, and they succeeded in using the vocabulary very effectively. They enjoyed playing and were able to recall and use words such as 'penglog' (skull), 'asgwrn' (bone), and 'archwilio' (examine) easily and accurately. They also recognised these words in a pack of vocabulary cards.

Pupils 'wrote' names and medical notes on pieces of paper and clipboards when following the process of admitting, examining and treating a patient.

Reading

35   In the majority of non-maintained settings, many children handle books and reading materials confidently when moving around the activity areas. They enjoy listening to stories and respond to them enthusiastically. They respond well to questions and discuss pictures in books. While playing, they are able to create, see and explain patterns with toys, shapes and beads and, in some settings, they recognise their own names very well.

36   Many children aged three to four in many schools also respond well to pre-reading materials and activities. They take good advantage of structured reading sessions

and become effective readers in line with their ability, by building well on early skills. In general, four to seven-year-old pupils make good progress in their learning as they move through the Foundation Phase. They are able to read materials which are appropriate in terms of attainment, and use a number of strategies to read unfamiliar words. They are able to transfer these skills successfully to reading various suitable texts which are not part of formal reading learning materials.

Case study 2: Planning to focus on developing language and literacy skills across the six areas of learning in the Foundation Phase

Context:
Ysgol Fabanod Morfa Nefyn is a school for three to eight-year-old pupils in Gwynedd local authority. There are approximately 50 pupils on roll, of which nearly all are from Welsh-speaking homes, and pupils' Welsh oral skills on entry are generally high.

Strategy:
The school places great emphasis on pupils' oral development as a basis for all of the school's activities. Reading skills are delivered during the morning sessions and are applied and developed very effectively during the day's activities. All activities in learning areas are an opportunity to develop children's literacy skills in speaking, reading and writing.

Action:
In addition to concentrating firmly on focus activities to develop pupils' reading skills, teachers provide a curriculum of a very practical nature for activities across the six areas of learning in the Foundation Phase. During these practical sessions, there is a clear focus on discussion between pupils and adults, and between pupils, as a starting point for all activities. Pupils are encouraged to explore and experiment individually and together, in order to answer questions, solve problems and complete challenges.

All activities lead to pupils recording their findings in some form.

In order to ensure that pupils make progress in their writing skills from one year to the next, teachers provide opportunities for them to experiment with their own written communication for their own purposes in the various areas. They also explore a range of writing materials such as pens, pencils, crayons, chalk and paint. This is planned carefully across all areas of learning and activity areas.

Results:
The standards of pupils' language while speaking, reading and writing are very high. They are able to converse fluently and enthusiastically about all of their activities, read a very wide range of different texts, and write correctly and at length across the areas of learning.

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37   In a minority of settings and schools, children or pupils are not given enough opportunities to read various materials within activity areas, except for the reading corner. In these settings and schools, pupils do not apply their reading skills well enough outside structured sessions. They do not use reading effectively enough to support them to develop skills and knowledge across the six areas of learning in the Foundation Phase.

Writing

38   In the majority of settings and schools, three to four-year-old children make appropriate progress in their writing skills. On the whole, in non-maintained settings, pupils apply themselves spontaneously to pre-writing activities to develop fine motor skills successfully. They use a variety of media to make marks and patterns, including work on paper, on white boards, and on a large scale in outdoor areas, for example with water or chalk. A minority also use information and communication technology equipment confidently to develop these skills. Children aged three to four in schools make similar progress.

39   In schools, many pupils aged four to seven respond positively to formal opportunities to develop their ability to write words and sentences. By the end of the Foundation Phase, they develop to write more extended pieces in different forms. On the whole, they make good progress in their ability to write correctly, and are able to use their skills effectively to enrich their experiences across the areas of learning in the Foundation Phase. However, a minority of older pupils in the Foundation Phase are over-reliant on guidance and support from teachers and assistants, and an over-use of worksheets limits their development as independent writers.

40   In a minority of schools, although pupils write on a range of subjects and in a range of forms, they do so only in the formal context of focus sessions. They do not apply their writing skills voluntarily in informal activity areas in order to reinforce their skills in a range of situations.

Case study 3: Using stories as a prompt for language works across areas of learning

Context:
Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Nantcaerau is a relatively new school in the west of Cardiff which has not yet reached its full capacity. Only pupils up to Year 5 were there at the time of the inspection. Although it is a Welsh-medium school, nearly all of the 120 pupils are from non-Welsh speaking homes.

Strategy:
The teacher and assistants in Year 2 use books and stories as a prompt for a variety of linguistic activities across the curriculum. They plan carefully to ensure that follow-up activities and challenges, including writing tasks, are available for pupils across activity areas in the classroom, including the outdoor area.

Action:
Following a focus session which introduced a story about a giant, the teacher arranged an activity for pupils to solve the mystery of the giant's disappearance. The teacher and assistants had ensured that there were a number of clues in many of the indoor and outdoor learning areas to prompt discussion among pupils, along with specific challenges for them to complete. The challenges led to activities such as reading in order to gather information, writing a diary, dialogue and letters. There was a clear emphasis on allowing pupils to choose which challenges to accept.

Results:
The activity ignited pupils' enthusiasm, and they were very keen to solve the mystery. They discussed skilfully with each other, and with the teacher and assistants, who steered discussions through skilful questioning. Pupils read a variety of texts – e.g. the giant's diary, instructions, maps – and wrote polished pieces of writing such as letters, recorded their tasks and described the giant's journey.

Educational provision and the learning environment

Planning and teaching

41   Most settings and schools plan appropriately for developing the language, literacy and communication skills of children aged three to four. Language development is a clear priority, and the majority of settings and schools place an emphasis on developing good oral schools at an early stage in order to set a firm foundation for developing reading and writing. In nearly all schools, these plans ensure continuity and progression within the area of learning. In non-maintained settings, a minority of practitioners do not give enough consideration to continuity and progression when planning activities for children. The schemes of work of most non-maintained settings allocate clear responsibilities to practitioners, including assistants, to be implemented in the activity areas.

42   In schools, there is a general tendency to focus on more formal activities to promote reading and writing during the morning for pupils aged four to seven. Sometimes, teachers see a tension between the formal structure of the language session and the requirements of the central philosophy of the Foundation Phase for children to be more independent in their learning by undertaking activities voluntarily. In these cases, there are not enough relevant language activities across the different learning areas.

43   In nearly all schools, teachers plan in detail for developing spoken language in children aged four to seven. In a few cases where there is good practice, this includes lists of words and phrases to be introduced in specific learning areas and areas of learning. As a result, there is sound linguistic progression from one year to the next so that there is continuity and clarity in provision. Teachers also plan in detail for reading while playing, ensuring that there are effective and purposeful resources in the activity corners, for example leaflets, displays, posters and scrapbooks. However, the same detail is not apparent in provision for developing writing across the areas of learning. As a result, children are not given enough opportunities to develop their writing skills in activities other than formal language activities.

44   In the small number of the most successful schools, a wide range of activities is planned across all teaching areas in the curriculum to build upon the language focus activities which take place in the morning. Language development is not considered an isolated activity and, as a result, it is given a central place in children's education. The linguistic overview is mapped across all curriculum areas, with a language plan for all areas of learning, and staff plan in accordance with these guidelines. Plans show clearly how adults can support pupils in their learning, and offer guidance on how to intervene and support. This is particularly successful when assistants take responsibility for a number of activity areas.

45   Where there are not enough assistants available to support all groups, usually in classes that include pupils from a wide age range, some schools ensure that assistants are more flexible and move around the classroom. Schools consider intervention by these adults to be important, as it enables staff to promote the use of Welsh and to model correct language. In a few schools, daily planning enables practitioners to respond quickly to pupils' interests. They do so by extending or changing activities in the areas continuously, but maintaining a focus on developing the same skills.

Case study 4: Planning specifically to ensure robust support for pupils within continuous provision

Context:
Ysgol Gymraeg Dafydd Llwyd is a Welsh-medium school in Newtown, Powys. Approximately 160 pupils attend the school, most of whom come from non-Welsh speaking homes.

Strategy:
The teacher who is responsible for leading learning in the reception year plans activities which enrich continuous provision weekly. These plans identify the activities that pupils will undertake in different areas and the skills that they will develop. These are detailed plans which build upon pupils' previous experiences and match the school's activity themes at the same time.

Action:
The responsible teacher identifies assistants' responsibilities clearly on the plans. As some assistants are less experienced, guidelines for them are very detailed and set a clear direction. Guidelines identify what kind of questions assistants should ask pupils, which specific vocabulary needs to be introduced and modelled, and suggest linguistic patterns to be followed.

Results:
As a result, assistants' responsibilities are clear, there is a consistent and effective model for developing language while completing activities, and there is a positive effect on pupils' Welsh language development. Plans build purposefully on pupils' learning and there is clear consistency in the support that pupils receive from adults in the classroom.

46   Approximately half of the schools visited plan work for groups of pupils according to their language ability. The best schools do so solely for focus activities, allowing pupils more independence in the rest of their activities. However, the rest keep pupils in the same groups throughout the day. Usually, this results in developing a cycle of specific activities for groups of pupils in turn, which does not give pupils enough opportunity to work independently and follow their own learning path. In addition, some schools do not plan their activity areas tightly enough and, as a result, pupils do not face specific enough challenges when they visit these areas.

47   Few schools succeed in meeting pupils' linguistic needs in addition to giving them good opportunities to develop independence in their learning. These schools provide clear focus activities for developing pupils' reading and writing skills and provide specific opportunities for developing those skills in the activity areas and across areas of learning. Usually, reading and writing challenges can be seen in the areas, and there is a clear expectation for pupils to volunteer to complete these challenges during a period of time. Often, these challenges are tasks which have been differentiated effectively so that they are suitable for the full range of pupils in the class.

48 In general, practitioners in settings and schools are aware of the key principles of learning a language. They take advantage of opportunities to receive training from education authorities and other organisations in order to improve their understanding of immersion methods. The best practitioners demonstrate and model correct language, including phrases, idioms and a rich vocabulary.

49 In a few non-maintained settings, particularly in areas where there are not many Welsh speakers, the standard of some practitioners' language is not robust enough and, as a result, they are unable to introduce and model language of the required standard for pupils. The majority of practitioners have a clear understanding of the philosophy and methodology of the Foundation Phase, but a minority do not apply these successfully to developing language across the areas of learning.

50 In the best practice, staff plan differentiated language activities within activity areas and consider which resources and activities to use in order to meet the needs of individual pupils. Regular planning meetings are held, which include contributions from all members of staff, including assistants. As a result, all pupils receive support which is suitable for the ability and attainment of the individual. Support includes additional assistance at group or individual level, adapting equipment to meet children's needs or setting specific differentiated learning objectives.

51 In smaller schools, a wide range of pupils are in the teacher's care. Due to the differences in the pupil to adult ratio as pupils get older, the number of assistants decreases. The most effective schools succeed in planning provision so that all pupils work to an appropriate standard, and demonstrate good progress as they get older. They ensure that suitable activities are provided in the activity areas for pupils of different abilities and attainment. However, too often, there is not enough support to give appropriate guidance and support to pupils of different ages and abilities in smaller schools. Activities are not targeted effectively enough to meet the needs of all pupils, and expectations are not high enough.

Learning environment

52 In general, settings and schools have arranged the learning environment well. Purposeful resources of good quality are available to pupils.

53 In the best schools and settings, the learning environment is planned and set up carefully to ensure that pupils develop specific skills. Teachers use the environment skilfully to enrich pupils' learning experiences. There are a variety of resources which are organised well in order to elicit the best response from the children. The learning environment includes indoor and outdoor activity areas and there is easy access from one to the other. As a result, the nature of activities and areas ensures that pupils have effective learning experiences consistently.

Case study 5: Ensure a purposeful learning environment for language development across the six areas of learning

Context:
Ysgol Saron is a large primary school near Ammanford in Carmarthenshire. Although the school is situated in a traditionally Welsh-speaking area, many of the 260 pupils come from non-Welsh speaking homes.

Strategy:
All of the Foundation Phase, from nursery age up to the end of Year 2, is organised into various activity areas, both indoors and outdoors, and pupils of different ages are able to move freely from one learning environment to the next. By following common themes, often based on recognising specific letters or reading skills, there is a series of clear challenges available in nearly all areas.

Action:
Pupils choose whether or not they wish to complete the challenges, but usually they undertake tasks enthusiastically. Due to the detailed organisation, assistants are available to support pupils in nearly all challenges. They know pupils well and are able to provide support and assistance according to their individual needs. Their responsibilities are allocated clearly, and they are robust language models for pupils. They are aware of the skills that are developed by each challenge and activity and, therefore, are able to record pupils' progress very effectively.

Results:
The challenges, without exception, lead to recording or writing work, and pupils usually have to read the challenge themselves (with support, if needed). The nature of the challenges means that pupils complete investigative work independently, and work together in pairs or small groups. As a result of these challenges, pupils' independent learning skills and linguistic skills are developing well alongside one another.

54   As they are situated in halls or rooms which are available temporarily, some non-maintained settings have to set up and clear the learning areas on a daily basis. The best settings manage this situation very effectively, and ensure through careful planning that good resources are arranged effectively to ensure a learning experience of consistent quality for pupils.

55   In a few settings and schools, the outdoor area has not been developed sufficiently to be an integral part of the school day, and it does not provide specific opportunities to develop pupils' language skills. Although most schools strive to ensure that pupils receive outdoor learning experiences, there is no outdoor area available which is a natural extension of the room in which pupils learn. In a small minority of schools, teachers do not make effective use of the outdoor area that is available to them. They use the outdoor area for free activities, such as using large toys or a sand pit, without enriching them with challenges. As a result, pupils are unable to use the outdoor area's resources effectively to improve their language skills, particularly reading and writing.

Case study 6: Ensure a stimulating learning environment

Context:
Cylch Meithrin Bro Elfed meets in the old village school building, which is now a community centre. Many of the 12 to 15 pupils come from Welsh-speaking homes.

Strategy:
By following the clear plan which has been set out on paper, a number of activity areas are arranged carefully and consistently and set out on a daily basis. All areas of learning in the Foundation Phase curriculum are met in the provision, which includes areas such as a reading corner, mathematical area, role-play corner (a play house at the time of the visit), area for large toys, mark making area including activities with paint, and a computer with suitable programmes according to the theme (colours).

Action:
Under the guidance of the leader, assistants are fully aware of their roles, and support children in specific activities, focussing on developing spoken vocabulary. Practitioners have a very good recognition of each child's needs. They adapt to the linguistic needs of children in their care, and give specific attention to developing the vocabulary of the activity area. They introduce correct language consistently and model natural and rich language. Books are a prominent part of provision, and not only in the reading corner. There are also various opportunities for children to make marks on paper of varied textures and sizes, using a variety of media – paint, pencils, crayons etc.

Results:
As a result of careful planning, children at the nursery group are independently active throughout the session, and they are given appropriate support from the leader and assistants. They are completely familiar with the organisation and contents of the areas and move from one to the other confidently. Their oral standards and generally good, and children from non-Welsh speaking homes make good progress quickly. Those from Welsh-speaking homes speak only Welsh and they are able to converse fluently about their various activities at the nursery group. Nearly all children recognise their names on the display and on the back of chairs. Many pupils choose to look at books independently, and they enjoy listening to stories being read. Many show considerable control of paint, crayons and pencils when making marks and 'writing'.

56   In terms of promoting the development of Language, Literacy and Communication Skills, the best settings and schools provide activity areas where children can be immersed in language experiences and activities, such as role play, problem-solving and taking an active part in painting, marking, singing and reciting nursery rhymes, with the support of practitioners. As a result, children aged 3-4 succeed in acquiring language to a good standard while undertaking activities which promote early reading and writing skills, in addition to oral skills. In these settings and schools, language development is a strong feature across learning areas, and there are purposeful resources available.

57   Very few schools follow the excellent practice of setting success criteria for oral work,

reading and writing in all areas. These are targeted appropriately and progressively for the age groups that use them and are shared clearly with pupils, and support them to know what they need to achieve.

58   In a few schools, activity areas do not generally provide enough opportunities for pupils to practice their linguistic skills in various contexts. Increasingly, as pupils develop through the Foundation Phase, there are not enough resources or opportunities available for them to practice reading and writing in various contexts outside of the mark-making area or reading corner, although their oral skills are promoted effectively in nearly all schools for all ages.

Leadership and planning for improvement

Leadership

59   Implementing the philosophy and requirements of the Foundation Phase has been a challenge for settings and schools. This was a challenge in terms of developing staff's ability to relate to the new curriculum, but there was also the challenge of adapting the learning environment to be flexible and varied enough to provide hands-on activities and experiences which stimulate children to learn. In terms of developing language, literacy and communication skills, the challenge was to ensure that activity areas provide learning opportunities that would stimulate pupils' language skills. The schools and settings that succeeded best are the ones where the school management team were committed to the process.

60   Leaders and management committees in most non-maintained settings understand the Foundation Phase requirements well, and they plan effectively to improve provision. Leaders of the majority of these settings have effective self-evaluation methods which help them to identify improvement needs, and practical improvement plans stem from these. However, in the remaining settings, self-evaluation and improvement plans are often too superficial and do not have an effect on pupils' progress. Nearly all settings consider pupils' language development as a clear priority.

61   In schools, the commitment and understanding of leaders, who do not necessarily work directly with Foundation Phase pupils, is more varied. In the minority of schools where best practice can be seen, self-evaluation and improvement plans give clear attention to the development needs of the Foundation Phase, and the Foundation Phase leader is a part of the school management team. When considering whole-school issues, there is an appropriate emphasis on the needs of the Foundation Phase provision and on pupils' progress from an early age. As a result, the continuous development of pupils' language, literacy and communication skills is a whole-school priority.

62   Where leadership is not as good, developing the philosophy and methodology of the Foundation Phase is not a priority for the school management team, and there is not good enough planning to provide enough resources, including human resources, to meet the requirements of the provision. As a result, pupils do not receive the necessary range of experiences to develop language skills across the six areas of learning and to make appropriate progress.

63 Most schools and settings succeed in ensuring that they have suitably trained staff to operate in line with the philosophy and methodology of the Foundation Phase. In a few settings and schools, not all assistants are able to model correct language, due to their linguistic background, nor do they adhere to the language immersion methodology.

64 Training has been provided to schools by the Welsh Government and local authorities, and by Mudiad Meithrin and others in the non-maintained sector. The level of Welsh-medium support that is available from local authorities varies considerably, with some cases of authorities who are unable to offer Welsh-medium support at all in the Foundation Phase. As a result, schools and settings are unable to receive guidance and support that focuses specifically on developing the Welsh language. Too often, they are unable to support Welsh-medium non-maintained settings through the medium of Welsh.

Planning for improvement

65 On the whole, leaders in settings and schools give a high priority to developing pupils' language, literacy and communication skills within the Foundation Phase. The best track pupils' linguistic progress and monitor provision continuously in order to evaluate its effect. In the best practice, this is done by recording informally while watching children undertaking learning activities to begin with, and transferring the relevant information to more formal records which are then transferred with the pupil to the next stage in their education. This is a common method in the majority of non-maintained settings, but sometimes comments are not specific or evaluative enough, nor do they offer a way forward for the child. As they do not monitor and record progress effectively enough, they are unable to evaluate in enough detail for self-evaluation and cannot plan effectively to develop children's speaking, reading and writing abilities.

66 The majority of schools monitor standards of language, and track pupils' progress effectively from an early age throughout their school career, and set improvement targets for them. However, a few schools do not track pupils' literacy skills in enough detail.

67 In a very few schools, although there is a firm focus and a high priority on developing pupils' language and literacy skills, leaders and teachers do not show enough commitment and understanding of the central philosophy of the Foundation Phase. Formal language lessons take priority over implementing the methodology which focuses on the child's whole development. Leaders see a tension between the philosophy of the Foundation Phase and the need to plan purposefully for developing language, literacy and communication skills. As a result, learning activities and experiences are not planned well enough to ensure adequate standards and progress in language and literacy skills. In these schools, pupils are not given enough opportunities to undertake reading and writing activities spontaneously outside of the reading corner and mark-making area. There is a tendency for activities across areas of learning to be over-reliant on the guidance of practitioners, and on completing worksheets. As a result, the Foundation Phase requirements are not met in full, and pupils are unable to apply their language skills successfully across a range of contexts.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Evidence base

The findings and recommendations in this report draw on:

- visits by inspectors to five non-maintained settings and 18 primary schools across Wales, which were selected on the basis of their geographical location, linguistic nature and the size of the school:

  Cylch Meithrin Llanrug, Gwynedd
  Cylch Meithrin y Bala, Gwynedd
  Cylch Meithrin Bro Elfed, Carmarthenshire
  Cylch Meithrin Coed Duon, Caerphilly
  Ysgol Feithrin Pontypwl, Torfaen
  Ysgol Gymraeg Nant Caerau, Cardiff
  Ysgol Tyle'r Ynn, Neath Port Talbot
  Ysgol Bro Siôn Cwilt, Ceredigion
  Ysgol Llanilar, Ceredigion
  Ysgol Ciliau Parc, Ceredigion
  Ysgol Abersoch, Gwynedd
  Ysgol Fabanod Morfa Nefyn, Gwynedd
  Ysgol Llanllyfni, Gwynedd
  Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Santes Tudful, Merthyr Tydfil
  Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Cwm Garw, Bridgend
  Ysgol Dafydd Llwyd, Powys
  Ysgol Gwenffrwd, Flintshire
  Ysgol Gynradd Tremeirchion, Denbighshire
  Ysgol Gynradd Bro Brynach, Carmarthenshire
  Ysgol y Dderwen, Carmarthenshire
  Ysgol Gynradd Saron, Carmarthenshire
  Ysgol Gymraeg Cwmbrân, Torfaen
  Ysgol Bodhyfryd, Wrexham

- information drawn from inspections of approximately 80 Welsh-medium primary schools and approximately 70 non-maintained settings that were inspected during 2011-2012;
- discussions with national officers from Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin;
- a discussion with the Foundation Phase support teacher (non-maintained settings) from one local authority; and
- data analyses of the teachers' assessments at the end of the Foundation Phase 2012.

During the visits, inspectors:

- observed lessons;
- interviewed headteachers, setting leaders, Foundation Phase leaders and practitioners;
- scrutinised the documentation of schools and settings;
- talked to pupils; and
- scrutinised examples of pupils' work.

Appendix 2: Glossary/references

Documentation:

The Foundation Phase Framework for Children's Learning for 3 to 7-year olds in Wales, Welsh Government, January 2008

Welsh-medium Education Strategy, Welsh Government, March 2008

Annual Report 2011-2012, Estyn, January 2013

Glossary:

Areas of learning	There are seven areas of learning in the Foundation Phase curriculum for three to seven-year-olds in Wales. They complement each other in order to provide a cross-curricular philosophy for developing the whole child. The seven areas of learning: • creative development; • physical development; • knowledge and understanding of the world; • Welsh language development; (*in English-medium schools and settings only)* • mathematical development; • language, literacy and communication; (*Welsh in Welsh-medium schools, English in English-medium schools);* and • personal and social development, wellbeing and cultural diversity.
Learning areas	There is an emphasis on developing pupils' abilities as independent learners in the Foundation Phase, giving them opportunities to choose their own activities and learning paths. To facilitate this, a variety of learning areas are provided. For example, a mark-making and writing area, a reading area, a performing area, a role-play area. There is an emphasis on the outdoor area in the Foundation Phase, which should be a natural extension of the learning environment inside the school. Pupils should be able to move freely between the indoor and outdoor areas.
Practitioners	A generic term to describe adults who work in the Foundation Phase. This includes teachers, nursery group leaders and learning assistants.

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