



**y ganolfan cynllunio iaith**  
welsh centre for language planning

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# **Research into Parents' Support Needs**

## **Executive Summary**

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## 1.0 Project Aims

1.1 Previous research (e.g. Jones and Morris 2005) shows that the education experiences of young children through the medium of Welsh benefit greatly from having a Welsh or bilingual home environment. Welsh Early Years Practitioners in Cardiff have recognised the possible need for greater and better support for parents who don't speak Welsh themselves in methods of supporting and embedding their children's Welsh medium Early Years experiences by providing them with family and social experiences through the medium of Welsh.

1.2 Therefore, the aim of the research was:

- to recognise the support needs of non-Welsh speaking parents with regards to ensuring a holistic Welsh language experience for their children during the Early Years, and
- to focus on the practical support that parents feel they need in order to bridge the linguistic contexts of the family, community and Welsh medium Early Years education in the Cardiff area.

1.3 Through this, the intention is to:

- Assist parents to enrich and meet their children's bilingual development needs;
- Lead to a better awareness and better access to sport, culture and leisure activities in Welsh for families with Early Years children; and
- Improve the information and advice available for parents who don't speak Welsh but who are eager for their children to receive a Welsh medium education.

## 2.0 Methodology

2.1 Evidence was gathered for the report by:

- (i) Conducting desk top research in the following areas:
  - A review of the priorities of Early Years and Welsh language policy documents;
  - Research into the factors that facilitate or prevent bilingual/multilingual language transfer and minority language socialisation in the Welsh and international contexts;
  - A review of the practical methods and advice given to parents of young children regarding language transfer and acquiring two or more languages;
  - Research into supporting families' needs regarding language transfer and acquiring language in the home;
  - Research into bilingualism / multilingualism, poverty and children's welfare.
- (ii) Interviewing a cross-section of parents in four focus groups at the following *cylchoedd meithrin*: Cylch Meithrin Pili Pala Llanelwyr; Cylch Meithrin Treganna; Cylch Meithrin Grangetown a'r Bae; Cylch Meithrin Trelái.
- (iii) Conducting interviews with the following Early Years providers: Health Visitor, Flying Start, Language and Play, Welsh Medium Primary School Head teacher, Menter Caerdydd - Welsh Language Initiative.

- 2.2 The views of 13 parents and 8 Early Years providers were gathered. It must be noted that the sample is very small and that it was not possible to make an entirely objective selection of research participants. However, every effort was made to include *cylchoedd meithrin* from various locations in Cardiff with a cross-section of parents from various socio-economic backgrounds, and we are extremely grateful to the staff of *Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin* for that support. We were also dependent on the support of *Cylchoedd Meithrin* staff to identify parents who met the requirements of the work and who would be prepared to take part. All parents were non-Welsh speakers according to the project requirements. Although the majority of parents had children under the age of 2, some had children who were older.
- 2.3 This study provides an insight into the situation of non-Welsh speaking parents in Cardiff and refers to the experience, perspective and views of a small number of parents and professional workers. Having said this, this work coincided with a similar piece of research for *Twf* in Carmarthen, Cross Hands, Ponterwyd, Aberdare and Bangor. A number of similar patterns and experiences were seen in that work also.

### 3.0 Context

- 3.1 In the full report, the policy and research context is reviewed under the following sub-headings:
- The increase in the number of Welsh speakers in Cardiff
  - The current Welsh Early Years education provision
  - Increasing the integration of Welsh into mainstream parenting and child care
  - Providing Early Years children with Welsh: Assembly Government policies
  - The Early Years, parenting and child care agenda
  - Language, poverty and child welfare
  - Arguments for the inclusion of Welsh in mainstream provision
  - Research into supporting family needs regarding language transfer and acquisition

### 4.0 Parents' Evidence

- 4.1 There was a constant focus to the discussions with parents. In the full report, attention is given to the following elements:
- Aspirations to provide their children with Welsh
    - Attitudes towards Welsh
    - Welsh gives the children better opportunities
  - Things that make it difficult to provide the children with Welsh
    - Unable to speak Welsh themselves
    - The opportunity to learn Welsh
  - Things that help non-Welsh speaking parents to provide their children with Welsh
    - Welsh speaking friends
    - The influence of an older child
    - Television and other media

- School support
- Things that worry parents
  - Lack of child care
  - Lack of nurseries and Welsh medium education provision
  - It is difficult to gain access to Welsh
  - Lack of welcome at Welsh medium schools
  - Lack of help and support from schools
  - Tension between language and religious values
- The type of extra support that would help non-Welsh speaking parents
  - Introducing Welsh in Ti a Fi groups
  - Accessing social and leisure activities through the medium of Welsh
  - Advice on Welsh medium education
  - Cooperation between parents, *Cylch Meithrin* and the school
  - Comprehensive source of information for parents
  - Early support for non-Welsh speakers

## 5.0 Evidence from Early Years providers

5.1 In the full report, the evidence gathered from Early Years providers is presented under the following headings:

- Parents' concerns
- The Welsh medium nursery education available to parents
- Play and socialising opportunities for the young children of non-Welsh speaking parents
- How schools should be supporting non-Welsh speaking parents
- How to reach parents
- Including Welsh in mainstream parenting and child care
- The role of the health visitor

## 6.0 Conclusions and recommendations

### 6.1 Conclusions

6.1.1 In this research, we saw a very strong desire among the non-Welsh speaking parents interviewed, to provide their young children with Welsh. The Welsh Language Act 1993 has been responsible for increasing the status of the language in the public sector in particular, and since establishing the Welsh Assembly Government, there has been a more coordinated approach towards the provision of bilingual education and social services. As a result, the Welsh language has gained a higher profile and has been increasingly used in Cardiff. The parents in this study were well aware of this and the social, economic and cognitive advantages Welsh brings their children.

6.1.2 It was apparent that Welsh is starting to become increasingly embedded in the Early Years, parenting and child care agenda, forming policy at both a national and county level in Cardiff. However, even though the policy and research documents acknowledge the need to provide provision in Welsh, it is apparent that there is still a long way to go to

ensure that the provision meets the needs of parents and children. In mainstream Early Years provision, there is a tendency to see Welsh as an additional option for those who chose to use it, and that the demand for Welsh must be measured and proven before any provision is made. The Welsh language is not considered as being of additional social / economic value and therefore a resource that everyone in Wales should be able to access. Contrary to this tendency, the parents in this research were fully aware of the additional value of Welsh and felt that access to Welsh medium education provision during the Early Years was a matter of justice.

6.1.3 Even though the parents were all united in favour of introducing and supporting their children's process of acquiring Welsh, they all faced a number of obstacles that deterred them from getting as close to Welsh as they would like. There was a clear demand among this small sample of parents for more support and for a more inclusive attitude towards non-Welsh speakers.

6.1.4 It became apparent that *Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin* has a central function to act as a catalyst in response to these needs by:

- strengthening the practical support for parents through the *Cylchoedd Ti a Fi* and *Meithrin*;
- jointly coordinating the effort with other agencies and providers in the Early Years field;
- harnessing the existing potential through mainstreaming, abolishing poverty, parenting, education and child care policies and so on;
- attempting to ensure close and careful cooperation between the agencies and Early Years providers and aiming to create a network of support that can be more extensive and stronger than any other partner could achieve individually.

6.1.5 The aim, therefore, would be to:

- i) strengthen the support for non-Welsh speaking parents in the Welsh medium sector through the *Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin*, Welsh medium schools, the local *Menter Iaith* (language initiative) and the *Urdd*; as well as
- ii) normalising the use of Welsh in the mainstream (with Flying Start, Language and Play, nurseries, schools, health visitors, the County Council, libraries, leisure centres etc)

so that Welsh is increasingly reaching places it has not previously reached and so that it offers opportunities to children from diverse backgrounds.

## 6.2 Recommendations

### Recommendations for *Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin*

6.2.1 Funding for a new post at *MYM* in Cardiff to support non-Welsh speaking parents through identifying their needs early, coordinating appropriate support and developing the skills foundation in *Cylchoedd Ti a Fi / Meithrin* in order for staff to work closely with those parents and create a supportive, welcoming ethos.

6.2.2 To create a training and development strategy to strengthen systems, partnerships and resources so that *Cylchoedd Ti a Fi* are able to increase their capacity to support non-Welsh speaking parents (by increasing the opportunities for them to hear and experiment

- with the use of Welsh in the *Cylch* and offer strategies that enable them to start embedding the use of Welsh outside the *Cylch*).
- 6.2.3 Continue the supportive contact with parents who use *Cylchoedd Meithrin* through pairing schemes, information bulletins on resources, Welsh learners' sessions, social opportunities, etc, (see examples 3.7.7 and 3.7.10)
  - 6.2.4 To hold induction events to offer information that is as comprehensive as possible and paths to further support for parents on the threshold of their first encounter with MYM.
  - 6.2.5 To promote and market what the *MYM* have on offer in an inclusive manner.
  - 6.2.6 Set up a coordinating and action group to link all providers in the Flying Start fields in order to create an operational plan over the next 2 -3 years that will increase the Welsh and bilingual experience for a parent and child who are part of the mainstream activities.
  - 6.2.7 To ensure equal access to the *Cylch Meithrin* for children in Flying Start areas across the city, (see 5.2.3).
  - 6.2.8 To ensure firm contact links and a constructive relationship between the *Cylch Meithrin* and the local Welsh school in each case.
  - 6.2.9 To cooperate with organisations / other associated schemes (*Twf*, for example) to develop a comprehensive source of information for parents as suggested in 4.5.4.1 above.

### **Recommendations for the Education Sector**

- 6.2.10 Continue to strengthen the Welsh language education system in the city together with increasing the Welsh language mainstream provision over the next period.
- 6.2.11 Broaden the good practice seen in the relationship between Welsh medium schools and their non-Welsh speaking parents by using the strategies stated in 5.4.3 and through In Service Training to equip staff with the appropriate strategies.

### **Recommendations for policy makers**

- 6.2.12 Place pressure on the city's Leisure Centres to create practical operational plans in order to broaden their Welsh medium provision, as part of the local authority's Welsh Language Scheme.
- 6.2.13 Hold discussions with the Welsh Language Board to consider expanding the *Twf* scheme to Cardiff city in order to ensure equal access to information and support.

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