

Meilyr Rowlands

Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales

Estyn

21 March 2019

Dear Meilyr,

### **Teaching of Welsh history and culture in schools**

The Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee is scrutinising the teaching of Welsh history, culture and heritage in schools.

During the summer of 2018 we ran a public poll inviting members of the public to select from a list of potential inquiry topics. Nearly 2,500 people participated in the poll and 44% of them voted for this topic.

We are looking into how the Welsh Government's draft curriculum will allow for the children of Wales to gain a sense of identity from learning about their history, language and customs.

In February we held an event to hear from practitioners and others interested in this issue. A number of those at the event said that there was limited evidence on the amount of Welsh history that is taught in the classroom. Whilst we are clear that there are requirements to teach aspects of Welsh history in the curriculum and within exam syllabuses, there is a perception from professionals that the reality on the ground is quite different. This is obviously of great concern and an issue that we feel must be resolved at a time when the new curriculum is being developed and implemented.

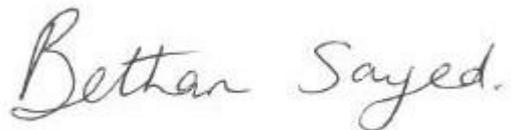
One of the comments which received a great deal of support was a suggestion that Estyn carry out a thematic review of the teaching of Welsh history. While the Committee is in the early stages of its inquiry, should the Committee be so minded to recommend that the Minister for Education consider remitting Estyn to undertake a thematic review of the teaching of Welsh history, I would welcome your views on the feasibility of carrying out such a review.

I would also be grateful to learn whether you hold any information on the content and teaching of Welsh history and culture in schools which we can draw on to inform our inquiry. We are interested in hearing from Estyn on

ways to improve the teaching of this subject, can you let me know of the best person to speak to in Estyn to discuss this further?

I would be grateful for your response to these questions by 24 April in order to inform our work.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Bethan Sayed." The signature is written in a dark ink and is positioned centrally below the text "Yours sincerely,".

Bethan Sayed

**Chair of the Committee**

Bethan Sayed AM  
Committee Chair  
Culture, Welsh Language and Communications  
Committee

17 April 2019

Dear Bethan

### Teaching of Welsh history and culture in schools

Thank you for your letter outlining the work of the Culture, Communications and Welsh Language Committee in scrutinising the teaching of Welsh history and culture in schools. I am pleased that the Committee has been looking at this important area. It is an area that Estyn considered recently in our thematic report on '[Good practice in the humanities](#)'. I have attached a summary of our evidence base from the thematic report and from other recent inspection work as an annex. I hope this will be useful to the Committee.

Inspectors give broad consideration to this aspect in core inspections of schools, and report on it by exception. Under Inspection Area 3, teaching and learning experiences, we consider: *'the ways in which the school develops a curriculum that fully reflects the nature of the school's context, including designing learning activities that reflect the cultural, linguistic and ethnic diversity of Wales and the school's local area'*.

I would welcome the opportunity to undertake a more comprehensive thematic review of the teaching of Welsh history and culture through our annual remit. You will be aware that the Minister for Education recently wrote to me outlining her priorities for thematic reviews within our annual remit for 2019-2020. There is capacity for one additional review each year. You may wish to discuss with the Minister whether this work could be agreed as an additional item this year. Alternatively, it could be considered as part of next year's annual remit to Estyn.

If you would like to discuss this aspect further, or if there is any other evidence I can provide to the Committee, please do not hesitate to contact me. If you wish to discuss our work in this specific area further our lead inspector to the humanities is Michelle Gosney and she can be reached through [Enquiries@estyn.gov.uk](mailto:Enquiries@estyn.gov.uk).

Yours sincerely



**Meilyr Rowlands**  
Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of  
Education and Training in Wales

## **Annex: Evidence for the Culture, Communications and Welsh Language Committee's inquiry into the teaching of Welsh history and culture in schools**

We have presented below a range of evidence from our core inspection and thematic work about the teaching of Welsh history and culture.

### **Summary**

- Many teachers draw effectively on their local context and Welsh historical events and people as part of their humanities lessons and to provide a rich context for learning in other curriculum areas. These opportunities support pupils to enhance their understanding of Welsh history and culture.
- In a few schools, teachers do not provide sufficient opportunities to develop pupils' understanding of their local area. This is either due to a lack of awareness or use of less relevant examples from textbooks.
- At key stage 4, the development the Welsh dimension is not exploited fully. Teachers focus solely on the specific requirements of the examinations. As a result, teachers do not always relate pupils' learning to a local context where possible.

### **Secondary school inspection reports**

#### **Inspection area 1: Standards**

- Reports include a range of examples where pupils discuss, read and write about Welsh history and culture, especially in key stage 3.

For example:

#### Speaking and listening

- Developing their oracy skills through discussing the drowning of Capel Celyn and Tryweryn to create dams

#### Reading

- Opportunities to use a range of written sources to extract and organise relevant information, for example about the character of Llewellyn the Last
- Pupils retrieve information about Patagonia after watching a video clip and transfer their information into simple closed passages
- In geography lessons, pupils read a variety of texts about different landforms to develop ideas about how the 'Green Bridge of Wales' in Pembrokeshire was formed.
- Pupils respond skilfully to the content and style of literary texts, for example when comparing poems that celebrate the success of the Wales football team in the Euro 2016 championships.

#### Writing

- In history lessons, pupils write a purposeful diary about the life and work of a miner at the beginning of the twentieth century.
- Older pupils discuss the impact of literary devices such as when annotating Owen Sheers' poetry to identify words evoking imagery.

## Provision

### **Summary of extracts from inspection reports**

Many schools offer opportunities for pupils to develop their appreciation of Welsh heritage and culture, such as the annual Eisteddfod and residential courses in Glanllyn, Llangrannog or Cardiff.

Pupils benefit from suitable opportunities to enhance their understanding of Welsh heritage and culture, for example through participation in competitions with the Urdd, the Menter Iaith initiatives and visits to local places of interest such as the Big Pit national coal museum.

Pupils also have appropriate opportunities to study local themes and cultural heritage in their academic studies. For example, they learn about Welsh heroes and the Rebecca riots and the effect of the Second World War on areas of Wales.

In a few schools, this aspect of the school's work is underdeveloped.

### **Primary school inspection reports**

#### **Inspection area 1: Standards**

Reports include a range of examples where pupils develop their key skills as they learn about Welsh history and culture, especially in key stage 2.

For example:

#### Speaking and listening

- Pupils develop their oracy skills and explore different situations through role play when creating a drama script to portray the life of an evacuee during the Second World War
- Pupils listen carefully to presentations using techniques to remember the main points making notes and summarising, such as when listening to visitors retelling their experiences of life in the coalmines.

#### Reading

- When researching a particular theme, such as the story of Betsi Cadwaladr, pupils use a range of reading strategies, such as skimming the text to find key words, phrases, the gist, and the main ideas or themes.
- In their work about the Second World War, pupils identify features of texts, such as the introduction to the topic, the sequence, illustrations, and the degree of formality, for example from newspaper reports of the time.
- When researching about the Romans in Wales, pupils use information from trusted sources, on-screen and on paper, selecting and downloading as necessary. More able pupils often compare the viewpoint of different writers on the same topic, collate and make connections between information and ideas from different sources and distinguish between facts, theories and opinions.

#### Writing

- In their thematic work across the curriculum, pupils write about the history of Wales and its culture through various genres. For example, through re-telling the story of St David in their own words or through creating detailed descriptions and portrayals of a Celtic warrior. Many present their work in different forms, such as a newspaper report on the bombing of Swansea during the Second World War or a pamphlet about the benefits of visiting a local Castle and other tourist amenities.
- In their lessons, pupils write a fictional diary about the life and work of a child during the Victoria era in Wales. The use subject-specific vocabulary independently and relate key facts from their previous learning.

- Many create presentations using ICT to consolidate their learning about historical events, for example creating a factual presentation of the life of Henry VIII or a fact sheet about characters from history and icons from their local area, such as O.M. Edwards.

## Provision

### Summary of extracts from inspection reports

Many schools plan interesting and engaging themes where Welsh history and culture often feature as an element of the learning. For example, when studying the Second World War, teachers plan to teach pupils about how the war affected Wales. They focus on developing pupils' knowledge of the war, including evacuation, daily life and the effects of bombing in areas of Wales.

Many schools offer opportunities for pupils to develop their appreciation of Welsh heritage and culture, such as the through the theme about the Tudors in Wales. Teachers develop pupils' knowledge of how the Tudor dynasty began, the chronology of significant monarchs and how Wales and England changed during Tudor rule.

Most schools create learning themes or topics that explore the local history and culture well. These experiences are often associated with the historical industries that were prominent in the area, such as the slate industry in North Wales and the coal and steel industry in the south. In these examples, teachers plan to develop pupils' knowledge of how and why the mining started, the impact of the industry on daily life and the legacy and future of those industries in Wales.

Many schools also develop their curriculum themes to incorporate the key features of the local area, such as its iconic buildings such as castles or buildings from certain historical eras. Nearly all of these schools encourage pupils' appreciation by conducting visits to these monuments to deepen pupils' understanding.

Many schools also develop pupils' understanding and knowledge of inspirational people and how they influence modern culture.

Pupils benefit from suitable opportunities to enhance their understanding of Welsh heritage and culture, for example through participation in competitions with the Urdd, the Menter Iaith initiatives and visits to local places of interest such as the Big Pit national coal museum. Further experiences include the participation in the annual Eisteddfod and residential courses at Glanllyn, Llangrannog or Cardiff.

### Extract of findings from [‘Good practice in the humanities’](#)

The development of pupils' appreciation and understanding of the Welsh dimension and the place of Wales in the world is a strong feature in most schools visited.

In the primary schools visited, teachers ensure that, where appropriate within humanities topics, direct links are made for pupils with their local area, for example producing a performance about

the history of the local slate industry, assuming the roles of residents of Llandaff in 1605 or visiting local historical sites.

In most secondary schools where good practice is seen, the humanities subjects make appropriate links with Welsh history or geography. In history, this may include a study of the local area, learning about significant national events such as the Aberfan disaster or local issues such as the World War 1 soldiers of Buckley. In geography, pupils are encouraged to explore local issues, for example flooding in Tywyn and Rhyl.

In a few schools, teachers do not provide sufficient opportunities to develop pupils' understanding of their local area. This is either due to a lack of awareness of the opportunities that the local area can offer, or because teachers use examples found in textbooks that are often not relevant to pupils, rather than developing their own examples using the local context.

At key stage 4, the development the Welsh dimension is not exploited fully. Teachers focus solely on the specific requirements of the examinations. As a result, teachers do not always relate pupils' learning to a local context where possible.