

A la maison je parle anglais, mais je vais à une école où nous avons des cours en gallois. Parce que je parle déjà deux langues, ça m'aide beaucoup à apprendre d'autres langues comme le français, parce qu'il y a beaucoup de choses qui se ressemblent.

Ich möchte dein Brieffreund werden. Ich wohne im Norden von Wales in einer kleinen Stadt, die nicht weit von der Küste liegt. Es gibt viele Berge. Ich spreche walisisch zu Hause und auch in der Schule, aber ich spreche auch manchmal englisch, und natürlich lerne ich deutsch in der Schule.

Mi pueblo es bastante pequeño. Hay unas tiendas, un polideportivo, un parque y un cine. Hablo galés en casa y en la escuela, y se habla galés alrededor, pero podemos todos hablar inglés. Me gusta mucho aprender español. Mi escuela cree que las lenguas son importantes, y aprendemos una lengua extranjera hasta los 6 años. Naturalmente estudiamos también galés e inglés.

## Standards and Quality in Secondary Schools

## Modern Foreign Languages in Welsh-Medium Schools

**Estyn Guidance for Schools and  
Local Education Authorities**



Arolygiath E! Mawrhyd. Dros Addysg  
A Hydrediant yng Nghymru  
Her Majesty's Inspectorate  
For Education and Training in Wales

... Rhagoriaeth i bawb ... Excellence for all ...



**BUDDSODDWR MEWN POBL**  
**INVESTOR IN PEOPLE**

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 The purpose of this report

According to information published by the National Assembly for Wales, (Statistical Bulletin 81/2003, 'Modern Foreign Languages in Wales, 2002') the proportion of 15-year-old pupils entering a modern foreign language GCSE is lower in Welsh medium schools than in English medium schools.<sup>1</sup>

This Estyn survey report investigates this issue to find possible reasons for the situation. It goes on to describe the measures which some Welsh medium schools have taken to improve the situation. Some of these measures are equally relevant to English medium schools.

The report refers to Estyn's previous guidance for schools and local education authorities, 'Aiming for Excellence in Modern Foreign Languages', when mentioning factors that affect both English and Welsh medium sectors.

### 1.2 The scope of the survey

Estyn sent a short statistical questionnaire to 44 Welsh medium schools, mainly those which entered some or all of their modern foreign language candidates for the GCSE examination through the medium of Welsh. These schools were generally either:

- designated Welsh medium schools in mainly English speaking areas; or
- schools in predominantly Welsh speaking areas and containing large numbers of Welsh speaking pupils.

There were replies from 35 of the schools. The returns were analysed, and visits were made to a representative sample. During the school visits, inspectors:

- discussed the issues with headteachers, other members of the school management team, heads of department and classroom teachers;
- interviewed year 10 pupils who had given up foreign languages;
- inspected a sample of lessons; and
- looked at school prospectuses, option schemes, guidance booklets and departmental documents.

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<sup>1</sup> The National Assembly classifies a Welsh medium school as one in which more than half the foundation subjects other than English, Welsh or religious education are taught wholly or partly in Welsh.

## 2. Main findings

- The proportion of pupils taking a modern foreign language in Welsh medium schools is lower than in other schools;
- In the Welsh medium sector, there are wide differences not only between schools but also between LEAs;
- The number of pupils studying a second foreign language in key stage 4 is very low in both English and Welsh medium schools;
- The proportion of boys studying foreign languages in key stage 4 in the Welsh medium schools in this survey is slightly lower than in English medium schools;
- Pupil numbers are highest where there is a school policy to promote the study of foreign languages;
- Many of the issues affecting pupils' attitudes to foreign languages are the same in both Welsh and English medium schools. The quality of pupils' experiences in key stage 3 is a very important factor;
- There are a few factors that appear to affect Welsh medium more than English medium schools. These factors include location, local attitudes and the school curriculum;
- Some pupils are confused when they have to deal with a mixture of three languages in lessons; and
- Several schools have had difficulties in recruiting well-qualified Welsh speaking foreign language teachers;

### 3. Main recommendations

Schools should:

- 1 prioritise, in their school development plan, the need to maintain or increase the number of pupils taking modern foreign languages in key stage 4;
- 2 develop strategies and set numerical targets to that end;
- 3 consider the position of modern foreign languages in the key stage 4 option system; and
- 4 provide time for the modern foreign languages, Welsh and English departments to work together to agree where they can provide mutual support.

Modern foreign language departments should:

- 1 include a strategy to increase pupil numbers in key stage 4 in their department development plan;
- 2 consider how they use both Welsh and English in their teaching;
- 3 in particular, examine whether some pupils are confused by the use of both English and Welsh as well as the foreign language;
- 4 identify, and consider how they teach, the aspects of language learning in key stage 3 which pupils dislike or find difficult (some of these are described in this report);
- 5 look again at the advice in Estyn's 'Aiming for Excellence in Modern Foreign Languages';
- 6 consider the guidance in ACCAC's 'Making the Link, Language learning 5-14', and discuss the issues raised with the English and Welsh departments; and
- 7 revise the contents of their schemes of work with a view to increasing the amount of activities and materials that interest boys.

The National Assembly for Wales should:

- 1 devise a strategy, with teacher training providers, for encouraging more Welsh speakers to train as foreign language teachers.

## 4. Background

### 4.1 The decline in numbers studying modern foreign languages

Since 1996 there has been a steady decline in the numbers of students studying modern foreign languages at key stage 4 and A Level. In response to this situation, the Welsh Assembly Government published its national modern foreign languages strategy, 'Languages Count', in April 2002. In support of the strategy, Estyn published 'Aiming for Excellence in Modern Foreign Languages', in the same year.

The National Assembly for Wales Statistical Bulletin 81/2003, 'Modern Foreign Languages in Wales, 2002' examines the data on examination and performance up to Summer 2002. It includes a comparison between Welsh medium and English medium schools. Figures provided in the bulletin, updated to include 2003 entries, are shown below.

Percentage of 15 year olds entered for GCSE in modern foreign languages (National Assembly figures):

Year	All schools	Welsh medium	English medium
1997	45	38	46
1998	43	36	44
1999	41	33	43
2000	39	33	41
2001	37	32	38
2002	35	30	36
2003	34	30	35

### 4.2 Interpreting the data – factors to bear in mind

Whilst the reduction in numbers in key stage 4 has been slower in Welsh medium schools, the percentage of pupils studying foreign languages still remains lower. However, it is not safe to make sweeping generalisations about this, and a number of factors need to be considered in interpreting the figures:

- There is considerable variety of Welsh medium provision in the schools officially designated by the National Assembly as Welsh medium schools. In some of these schools, for example Welsh medium schools in English speaking areas, all pupils study every subject through the medium of Welsh. In others, some or all of the subjects taught through the medium of Welsh may also be taught in English to some groups of pupils.

- There are also many schools in Wales, sometimes called bilingual schools, in which there is at least one Welsh medium group in each year for most subjects or, alternatively, some pupils study at least a few of their subjects in Welsh. Although the survey did not focus on these schools, some of them are included in the statistics given above, because they are covered by the National Assembly's definition of a Welsh medium school. Some of the issues addressed in this report apply to these schools also, at least in part.
- The situation is further complicated by the fact that some of the schools that teach all, or almost all, other subjects in Welsh cannot do so for modern foreign languages. This is usually because there are not enough Welsh speaking language teachers.

### 4.3 Differences between areas of Wales

There are wide variations in take-up at key stage 4 between different parts of Wales, irrespective of the medium of the schools. Statistical Bulletin 81/2003 shows that the percentage of 15-year-old pupils entering GCSE in at least one modern foreign language ranged, in 2002, from as low as 23% in two LEAs to 49% in two others. The two LEAs with the highest percentages (Monmouth and Newport) are in a part of the country with few Welsh speakers, and neither has a bilingual or Welsh medium school. This would seem to be consistent with the national trend for higher percentages in English medium schools. However, the LEA with the third highest percentage (Anglesey – 43%), represents a strongly Welsh speaking area, and contains mainly Welsh medium schools. One of the next four highest (Ceredigion) is a Welsh speaking rural area and has a large number of Welsh medium or bilingual schools. This shows that the pattern of take-up in relation to the language medium of the school is not a simple one.

This variation in the national pattern is also exemplified by the fact that, of the five LEAs with the lowest percentages of pupils studying foreign languages (English and Welsh medium schools combined), only two are in traditionally Welsh speaking areas. The two LEAs with the very lowest percentages (Rhondda Cynon Taff and Merthyr) are not in naturally Welsh speaking areas. One of them has no Welsh medium schools at all, whilst the other has four Welsh medium schools which, combined, have a higher percentage of pupils taking foreign languages than the LEA as a whole. In these LEAs, therefore, it is not the Welsh medium sector that is lowering the percentage of pupils taking languages.

These two LEAs are located in adjacent South Wales valley areas with high levels of economic deprivation. By contrast, one of the two LEAs with the highest numbers is relatively affluent compared with the rest of Wales. Although the picture is not entirely consistent across the country, there appears to be a correlation between high numbers and economic affluence.

In conclusion, therefore, whilst it is true to say that Welsh medium schools have a lower proportion of GCSE foreign language entries than English medium schools, it is very important to underline that other factors, including economic background, also appear to have an important influence.

#### 4.4 Variations between Welsh-medium schools

In the schools that returned the statistical questionnaire, 31% of pupils in year 10 (2003-2004) take at least one foreign language. This corresponds closely with the 2002 GCSE entry figure of 30% identified earlier.

The questionnaire revealed wide variations between schools. The highest percentage of pupils taking at least one foreign language in year 10 was 66%, compared with the lowest of 9%. In one-fifth of the schools, pupil take-up in year 10 was 20% or below. In a further fifth it was between 20% and 25%. In only one-fifth of the schools was it 40% or above.

Many of the schools with low numbers in key stage 4 still manage to produce very good GCSE results, measured as a percentage of entries, because the small key stage 4 groups often include a high proportion of able pupils. In these schools, many of the pupils studying languages in key stage 4 have often decided already that they want to continue with languages after GCSE. They therefore often generate good class sizes at AS and A Level, relative to the size of the year group. What these schools more often fail to do is to attract large numbers of those pupils at key stage 4 who are not potential A Level students. There are also some schools where very few or no students study foreign languages up to A Level.

Only about half of the schools provide a second foreign language. In most of these, the number of pupils studying a second foreign language in year 10 is small: in only four of them is the number higher than 15.

## 5. The findings of the survey: factors that influence pupil numbers in key stage 4

In investigating the reasons for these variations a number of factors are apparent. Some of these apply to all schools, whether English or Welsh medium. Others apply more specifically to Welsh medium schools<sup>2</sup>

### 5.1 School policy

The school's policy, and the support of the head and leadership team, are very important. In many of the schools with a relatively high take-up, headteachers express a very positive attitude to learning foreign languages. In these schools, it is often the school policy to encourage most pupils to study a foreign language up to the age of 16. In some of the schools, this policy is included in the school's aims and set out in the school handbook. Such a policy is usually reflected in curriculum and option arrangements.

In many of the schools with low take-up, there is a reluctance to promote any of the non-core foundation subjects at the expense of others, and no philosophy that pupils should have to study subjects from within specific areas of experience. In many of these schools, there is no particular attempt to advise pupils to continue with foreign language study.

### 5.2 The school curriculum

#### Key stage 4 options

The key stage 4 option system has a significant influence on pupil numbers in all optional subjects. It is particularly significant in Welsh medium schools, where there are four core subjects rather than the three in English medium schools, because all pupils take a full course in Welsh. This additional time for the core curriculum limits the number of available option blocks, compared with English medium schools. There are often as few as three blocks, especially where the small size of the school limits curriculum flexibility. This limits pupils' choices, as optional subjects are unlikely to appear in more than one block.

In some schools, even when there are more than three option blocks, foreign languages (in common with some other optional subjects) appear in only one of them. This reduces the likelihood that pupils will choose them, especially if the block also includes other very popular subjects.

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<sup>2</sup> In most cases these factors have been described in 'Aiming for Excellence in Modern Foreign Languages.'

Many schools no longer believe that pupils in key stage 4 should be obliged to study a range of subjects covering a wide number of areas of experience. In these schools, key stage 4 option blocks are usually constructed to allow as many pupils as possible to take the subjects that they most want to take. Foreign languages are in an open market and, as with other subjects, will attract high numbers only if pupils have a strong liking for them or a firm belief that they are valuable.

There are, however, also schools in which the option system provides pupils with every encouragement and opportunity to continue with foreign languages. Languages may appear in two or even three option blocks, and may sometimes be in competition with relatively unpopular subjects. In these circumstances, if pupils do not opt for them it is for reasons that govern any choice, such as the fact that they simply have not enjoyed languages enough in key stage 3, they do not see any value in learning them, or they have other priorities.

### **Pressure of work**

Many pupils make their option choices in the light of what they have to study in the compulsory core. For a majority of pupils in a Welsh medium school, the core amounts to at least seven subjects: Welsh language and literature, English language and literature, mathematics and double science. Some pupils may also study separate sciences, giving them eight subjects at GCSE, and in a few schools they do so in the time allocated to double science.

For many pupils this is already a heavy load. It is therefore not surprising that, in their option choices, many are looking for ways to reduce the examination burden. They therefore choose subjects which they perceive to be practical, not too heavily loaded with factual content, or simply easier to learn. This tends to militate against foreign languages. Many of the year 10 pupils interviewed stated that there is a lot of learning and memorising in languages, and they found them relatively difficult.

### **The key stage 3 curriculum**

The amount of time provided in the school curriculum in key stage 3 can also affect numbers in key stage 4 to some extent. One of the reasons pupils give for abandoning foreign languages is that they feel they have not made enough progress in key stage 3. This factor is equally relevant in both Welsh and English medium schools<sup>3</sup>.

The average time for foreign languages in key stage 3 in Welsh medium schools is close to the average for all schools in Wales of 120 minutes a week. However, some schools provide only two 50-minute lessons a week. This is generally not enough time for pupils to make good progress. Two lessons a week do not, on the whole, provide time for the regular repetition of words, phrases and concepts that pupils need in order to remember them well.

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<sup>3</sup> This is discussed in more detail in 'Aiming for Excellence in Modern Foreign Languages' (p.3).

Despite this, two of the schools with the highest percentage of pupils in key stage 4, provide only two 50-minute lessons a week in the first foreign language in key stage 3, although one of them also provides an additional lesson in year 9 to enable all pupils to begin a second foreign language. In these schools, it is essentially the key stage 4 option system which is the critical curriculum factor in ensuring that high numbers of pupils study foreign languages.

#### Curriculum factors which encourage high take-up

In many of the schools with high take-up, pupils are strongly encouraged to take foreign languages. Often there are few popular alternatives in the option block containing languages. Usually the options are constructed to support a school philosophy that pupils should study a wide range of specific curriculum experiences, including a foreign language.

Some of these schools also provide more option blocks than other schools (4 or even 5 rather than 3) to enable pupils to take other subjects of their choice. To find the time for this, they may slightly reduce the time allocated both to core and optional subjects. The disadvantage here is that pupils have to study more subjects in less time.

Other schools include languages in more than one option block, thus increasing the opportunity for pupils to choose them.

### 5.3 Attitudes towards modern foreign languages

Some of the schools state that their key stage 4 take-up is low because pupils' and parents' attitudes to foreign languages are negative. As mentioned earlier, there does appear to be some link, irrespective of the medium of instruction, between enthusiasm for foreign languages and geographical location or economic circumstances. Although the picture is not consistent across Wales, it is certainly true that several of the schools with high percentages have a relatively cosmopolitan or prosperous catchment area, where a high proportion of pupils have parents in professional employment. Discussion with headteachers and interviews with pupils reinforce the idea that a lack of interest in foreign languages is quite common in rural areas.

#### Attitudes in rural areas

Interviews also confirmed that many children in rural Wales have a strong sense of belonging to their area and community. They see their future in the area, often in farming or related industries, and may not be persuaded by the arguments that languages might help them to find a good job, or be useful generally in their lives.

Heads and language teachers in some rural schools also suggested that local families took holidays abroad less often than town-dwellers and, as a result, might be less well disposed towards foreign languages. Interviews with year 10 pupils who had given up languages tended to confirm this view. A high proportion of them rarely, if ever, went abroad; when they did it was more often to Spain than anywhere else, and few went to France. As a result, studying French did not appear to many of them to have much purpose, yet it was usually the main or only language on offer. Several stated they would have preferred to learn Spanish, but this is a language that few of them were able to study, even as a second foreign language. As a lot of Welsh medium schools are in rural areas, such attitudes may have a disproportionate effect in these schools.

There is some limited evidence to suggest that a reluctance to study foreign languages is stronger among those who speak Welsh as a first language, compared with those whose first language is English but who have also learnt to speak Welsh fluently. Some schools in the survey state that their English first language speakers are more likely to study foreign languages at A Level than their Welsh first language speakers.

Some of the pupils interviewed also expressed the view that they can speak two languages already and do not need to speak another.

### **Parental attitudes**

Parents who have a negative attitude to learning languages are quite likely to influence their children. Such attitudes can of course be found everywhere, and sometimes derive from parents' own unhappy experiences of learning languages when at school. However, a few headteachers in rural schools suggested that local families had more insular attitudes towards the rest of Europe than people in urban areas. They also suggested that farming communities harbour some resentment towards other European countries, particularly France, because they believe that they benefit unfairly from European Economic Area agricultural policies.

The interviews and discussion held during school visits certainly suggest the strong possibility that local and parental attitudes have an influence on pupils' decisions about continuing to study a foreign language in key stage 4. Whilst it is not possible to state categorically that these attitudes are stronger in Welsh medium than English medium schools, it is certainly fair to say that such attitudes exist.

### **What schools can do to improve attitudes to languages**

Schools can counteract negative attitudes by publicising the reasons for learning languages among parents and pupils alike<sup>4</sup>. The small number of schools in this survey whose key stage 4 option scheme strongly encourages pupils to continue with languages took great care to explain their philosophy to parents when they introduced the scheme. In fact, many of the schools and language departments visited for this survey make enormous efforts to encourage pupils to continue in key stage 4. A number of actions stood out in this survey.

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<sup>4</sup> Reasons for learning languages are explained in 'Languages count'

Among the measures taken to promote modern foreign languages, teachers in these schools have:

- worked hard to convince the parents through newsletters, the school handbook and parents' evenings;
- established good liaison with the school careers teachers and the careers service, in order to ensure that they give a positive message about the value of language study;
- taken pupils to the careers room each year to investigate careers involving languages;
- set up a notice board with information on careers which use languages;
- shown year 9 pupils (and sometimes their parents) the 'Languages work!' video produced by CILT Cymru (The National Centre for Languages);
- invited officers from CILT, university lecturers or representatives from industry to talk to year 9 pupils about careers opportunities involving languages;
- distributed a pamphlet which describes the value of learning languages;
- included units on languages in the world of work in the language syllabus;
- organised whole school language days;
- provided a French breakfast once or twice a year in the canteen at break;
- organised a French café during parents' evenings;
- provided a weekly languages club in the lunch-break, in some cases as an opportunity for pupils to begin the study of a second foreign language; and
- arranged visits abroad that enable year 8 and year 9 pupils to enjoy the experience of the foreign country and hearing people speak the foreign language<sup>5</sup>.

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5 The National Assembly classifies a Welsh medium school as one in which more than half the foundation subjects other than English, Welsh or religious education are taught wholly or partly in Welsh.

## 5.4 Pupils' progress in key stage 3

In the schools surveyed, there is no obvious link, in modern foreign languages, between pupil numbers in key stage 4 and the standards in key stage 3 reported in Section 10 inspections. A significant number of the schools with relatively low take-up in key stage 4 were reported as having good standards in key stage 3. Equally, several of the schools with high take-up in key stage 4 were judged to have only satisfactory standards in key stage 3. Nevertheless, in all schools, pupils' perceptions of their progress in key stage 3 appear to influence their decision whether or not to continue studying foreign languages in key stage 4.

### Factors affecting all schools

The comments of pupils interviewed during school visits make it clear that a negative perception of their progress in languages has a strong influence on their decision to abandon the subject. Many of these pupils felt that they had not made enough progress by the time they made their option choices in year 9. Typically, they stated that they knew a lot of vocabulary but could not put sentences together, and therefore felt that they were not at all close to speaking the language fluently.

The National Curriculum levels that pupils typically reach in foreign languages, often two levels below those for other subjects, reinforce this perception of a lack of progress. This is despite the fact that language departments usually explain to them that their levels will be lower because they have studied foreign languages for less than three years. School reports in year 9 reinforce this perception: although a number of schools explain the lower levels in the school report, the explanation does not always convince the pupils or their parents. Concerned to choose subjects in which they feel confident of a good GCSE grade, they give up foreign languages.

As school visits for this survey were often short, inspectors saw only a limited sample of lessons. This sample was not large enough to allow any meaningful links to be made, in individual schools, between overall standards in key stage 3 and high take-up in key stage 4. However the sample was large enough to allow general comments about overall standards in the schools as a whole.

Lesson visits did confirm pupils' opinions that progress is too slow in key stage 3. Standards were good in several of the lessons visited, but were more often only satisfactory. Teachers invariably plan well, provide a good variety of activity, and often teach in a lively way. However, there is still too much use of the low-level exploitation exercises provided in many textbooks, and too little emphasis on re-cycling language by requiring pupils to repeat, re-use and adapt it. Teachers do not challenge pupils often enough to develop sentences or widen their understanding of linguistic structures, and the National Curriculum level reached, even at the start of year 9, is too rarely higher than level 3.

Pupils' progress in key stage 3 is undoubtedly a factor, but it applies equally to English medium schools. Analysis of Section 10 inspection reports provides no reason to suppose that standards in Welsh medium schools are better or worse than in English medium schools. If pupils' perception of their progress affects their choices more strongly in Welsh medium schools than in English medium schools, the reason may well be found more in the linguistic nature of pupils' instruction.

### **Factors that may affect progress in Welsh medium schools – dealing with several languages**

Pupils in Welsh medium schools should benefit from the fact that they are already fluent in two languages because, as a general rule, knowledge of other languages contributes to learning new languages. However, there may be some factors at work that have a negative effect.

In many Welsh medium schools, there is a high proportion of pupils who do not speak Welsh at home. These pupils have learnt Welsh only in school, and are a testament to the success of Welsh medium schools, at both primary and secondary level, in developing pupils' bilingual ability.

Nevertheless, although they are usually fluent, some of these pupils are not always completely at ease in Welsh, and speak it less well than they speak English. By contrast, particularly in naturally Welsh speaking areas, many other pupils have a better command of Welsh than English, because they rarely speak English at home or at school. Either group may have difficulty in understanding some linguistic concepts or explanations in one or the other language.

As a result, one or other group of pupils can sometimes be confused when:

- the teacher explains structures or vocabulary in a mixture of either Welsh and the foreign language, or English and the foreign language;
- the teacher draws analogies between the foreign language and one of Welsh or English, rather than with both;
- they learn from a text-book in which the explanations are in English, whilst the explanations of the teacher are in Welsh; and
- they learn from materials in which explanations are only in Welsh.

In some classes, teachers explain the meaning of structures in the foreign language (whether in Welsh or in English) without ensuring that pupils understand the component part of the foreign language structure. As a result, pupils understand the overall meaning but do not understand the precise meaning of individual parts of a phrase or construction. This is a common problem in English medium schools as well, but is perhaps more likely to hamper learning in the situations described above<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> A more detailed description of issues concerning standards can be found in 'Aiming for Excellence in Modern Foreign Languages' (p. 9-11). Detailed guidance on making links between languages can be found in ACCAC's recent publication, 'Making the Link, Language learning 5-14.'

## The influence of good teaching

This is an important influence, whatever the language of the school. As with standards, quality of teaching is neither better nor worse in Welsh medium schools than in English medium schools. However, it is important that, in Welsh medium schools, foreign language departments pay attention to the linguistic issues described above. Not all of them do so enough, and too few collaborate effectively with the school's English and Welsh departments to ensure that pupils benefit fully from the potential advantages of learning several languages.

In the lessons seen in this survey, teaching had a positive influence on standards when teachers or departments:

- used English, Welsh or both, as appropriate, to provide analogies or examples when explaining grammar or vocabulary, eg when comparing the perfect tense in French with its equivalent in English, or comparing the French use of 'jour'/'journée' with the Welsh use of 'dydd'/'diwrnod';
- were aware that some pupils had difficulty in understanding explanations in either English or Welsh, when it was not their first language;
- collaborated with the Welsh and English departments, for example in agreeing on the use of grammatical terms;
- integrated the foreign language assistant into key stage 3 lessons, so that pupils heard the foreign language spoken by someone other than just their teacher;
- made good use of technology, particularly interactive whiteboards and videos;
- organised games that were both fun and competitive, as well as educative;
- provided an element of surprise, and used a wide variety of appropriate resources; and
- made imaginative use of a variety of published course materials, rather than sticking to the suggestions in a course book<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> A more detailed description of issues connected to the quality of teaching can be found in 'Aiming for Excellence in Modern Foreign Languages' (p.12-19).

## 5.5 The attitude of boys

Nationally, in all schools, far more girls than boys enter foreign languages at GCSE. According to National Assembly for Wales Statistical Bulletin 81/2003, 'Modern Foreign Languages in Wales, 2002', approximately 60% of entries since 1995 have been by girls. Analysis of detailed figures provided by National Statistics gives figures for GCSE entries in 2002, for French, German and Spanish combined, of 39% boys and 61% girls.

This gender gap is also a strong feature in Welsh medium schools. The percentages of boys and girls in foreign language classes in the 35 schools which responded to the Estyn survey are provided below:

	Year 10	Year 11
Boys	32%	35%
Girls	68%	65%

It is not possible to compare these figures with those for English medium schools in the current academic year because comparative figures are not available. It is also important to point out that there are slightly more girls than boys in both year 10 and year 11 in these 35 schools, although this goes only a small way towards accounting for the gender gap.

The survey returns show that the gender gap is extremely wide in some Welsh medium schools, but that there is no consistent pattern. In nearly one third of the schools that responded, the difference in the take-up of languages between boys and girls in the current year 10 is slight, and in three schools there are actually slightly more boys than girls.

However, in other schools the difference is enormous. In four of the 35 schools, the percentage of boys in year 10 foreign language classes was below 15%; in a further four it was between 16% and 20%, and in another five it was between 21% and 25%. These 13 schools have the following numbers of boys and girls studying foreign languages in year 10:

School	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M
Number of boys	1	4	3	6	4	5	6	4	3	10	7	11	11
Number of girls	11	30	20	36	20	24	27	17	11	37	24	34	33
Percentage of boys	8%	12%	13%	14%	17%	17%	18%	19%	21%	21%	23%	24%	25%

In the above cases, it should be noted that the figures are influenced to some extent by lower numbers of boys in the whole cohort: in the 13 schools combined there are 808 boys and 901 girls in year 10, but in several there are more boys than girls.

Clearly, in order to increase the proportion of pupils who take foreign languages at GCSE, all schools would do well to look for more ways to make languages attractive to boys. This appears to be particularly true for some Welsh medium schools.

Some schools have thought particularly hard about this issue. Their actions are described below.

Among other measures, some schools have tried to appeal to boys by:

- using competitive games in class;
- including in the scheme of work units on sport, leisure, motoring and the geography of the foreign country;
- planning kinaesthetic activities that seem to appeal to boys;
- providing sentence frames for creative writing exercises;
- increasing the emphasis on short-term rewards;
- increasing the amount of activities which use ICT; and
- putting up posters, or providing resource materials, which feature male role models who speak other languages.

## 5.6 Staffing

Schools in the survey generally have just enough language teachers to cover the lessons provided in the school curriculum. However, most schools do not have enough teachers for the extra classes they would have to provide if pupil numbers increased a lot in key stage 4. A few schools have had significant difficulties in staffing the language department.

There is only a limited supply of foreign language teachers who can speak Welsh. Headteachers state that there is usually only a small number of applicants for language vacancies, and several schools have appointed teachers who cannot speak Welsh. Some of these, nevertheless, are effective teachers and many, including some foreign nationals, have made good efforts to learn Welsh. A few schools have to use teachers who are not suitably qualified, although in most cases these teachers work hard to make up for this. A very small number of heads stated that they had to appoint staff who might not find a job elsewhere.

## 5.7 The views of the pupils

Some schools have conducted useful surveys to find out pupils' attitudes to languages. This gives the department helpful ideas about the aspects of language learning that pupils enjoy, dislike or find difficult. During the school visits, inspectors interviewed groups of year 10 pupils who had given up foreign languages. Among other questions, they were asked to explain why they did not like languages enough in key stage 3 to choose them in key stage 4. Their answers correlated closely with the findings of the individual school surveys.

Some pupils thought that they did not need another language as well as Welsh and English.

Many said that they found languages harder than other subjects. This view was found even in quite a lot of the pupils who had chosen languages.

In this context they referred particularly to:

- listening to tapes which they did not understand, without a transcript;
- doing homework that involved a lot of learning by heart;
- their inability to use structures and manipulate sentences;
- continually having to learn new vocabulary rather than use what they already knew in sentences;
- frustration at a lack of understanding of how the language worked; and
- a lack of emphasis in class on practising the spoken language.

Other specific aspects of language lessons that they highlighted were:

- too much copying of vocabulary lists, or other low-level writing tasks such as gap-filling;
- too many tests; and
- singing songs, or other activities which they considered 'childish'.

Of course, many pupils in the same, or other, schools who have opted to study foreign languages may well have done so because they like some of the above, or these things were not a problem for them.

