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Evaluating the Foundation Phase

Key Findings on Welsh Language

Research Summary

Social research

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The Foundation Phase (introduced in 2008) provides a developmentally appropriate experiential curriculum for children aged 3-7 in Wales. The Welsh Government commissioned independent evaluation (led by WISERD) aims to evaluate how well it is being implemented, what impact it has had, and ways in which it can be improved. The three-year evaluation utilises a range of mixed methods at a national and local scale.

This is one of five papers focused on **practice**. It draws on 239 classroom and setting observations, 341 practitioner interviews, 604 school and setting survey responses, 37 Local Authority interviews and four non-maintained organisation interviews.

Key Findings

- Generally, there was **no variation** in how English- and Welsh-medium schools and funded non-maintained settings **implemented** the Foundation Phase.
- The **‘Welsh Language Development’** and the **‘Language, Literacy and Communication Skills’** areas of learning in English- and Welsh-medium schools and funded non-maintained settings respectively were observed to occur during both structured and ‘typical’ Foundation Phase activities.
- **Incidental Welsh** was prevalent in the majority of English-medium schools, and was present verbally (e.g. at lunchtime) as well as non-verbally (e.g. on wall displays) around the school.
- 42% of Foundation Phase leaders believed that the **introduction of the Foundation Phase had meant an improvement** in developing children’s Welsh language skills (in both English- and Welsh-medium schools.)

Dadansoddi ar gyfer Polisi



Analysis for Policy

Further Key Findings

General Findings

There was a tendency for schools and funded non-maintained settings to **develop children's Welsh language skills** (in varying degrees dependent on age/ language of instruction) **in targeted morning circle time sessions**, where songs and rhymes were used to practise e.g. days of the week, months of the year, the weather and counting, as well as registration and dinner duties.

There was a tendency for English-medium schools and funded non-maintained settings to **develop children's Welsh language skills in isolation**, whereas Welsh-medium schools and funded non-maintained settings adopted a more cross-curricular approach across all areas of learning.

A **minority** of local authority stakeholders and practitioners reported that the **quality of additional practitioners' Welsh** (of varying fluency dependent on the school's language of instruction) impacts on the

successful implementation of the 'Welsh Language Development' (English-medium schools) and the 'Language, Literacy and Communication Skills' (Welsh-medium schools) areas of learning within the Foundation Phase. However, the low number of responses seems to suggest a general satisfaction with how Welsh language acquisition and development is being delivered and implemented within the Foundation Phase.

A high percentage of Welsh language interactions were observed for more typical Foundation Phase activities, such as first hand, practical and active activities in both English- and Welsh-medium schools and settings. It is also noteworthy that a high percentage of Welsh language interactions were observed when no adults were present.

English-medium Findings

Foundation Phase leaders reported children's English literacy skills in English-medium schools had **improved more compared to their Welsh literacy skills.**

A **minority** of local authority stakeholders and practitioners reported that the more formal teaching of Welsh in English-medium schools seems to be beneficial, and saw **language modelling within the Foundation Phase as difficult when children are learning independently.**

Welsh-medium Findings

The way in which children are immersed in the Welsh language (e.g. only using Welsh, simultaneous translation etc.), as well as practitioners' and pupils' **attitudes towards learning and developing Welsh language skills** varied across Welsh-medium schools. Some stakeholders suggested initial formal immersion would benefit the implementation of the Foundation Phase as children would **develop better understanding of the Welsh language**, which would iron out future immersion issues.

More head teachers, in Welsh-than English-medium schools, thought Welsh language development was a **key issue in early years education** for their schools.

Children who were being taught through a language that was not their first (e.g. children attending Welsh-medium schools and settings who do not speak Welsh at home) were seen to be a group that are **benefitting the most from the Foundation Phase** (as reported by head teachers).

Head teachers and Foundation Phase leaders in Welsh-medium schools reported **more of an improvement in children's Welsh literacy skills** since the implementation of the Foundation Phase.

A **minority** of local authority stakeholders and practitioners reported that having a high percentage of children from non-Welsh speaking homes attending Welsh-medium education makes immersion hard, and the likelihood of children reverting to English more likely.

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