

CREATING A STANDARDISED READING ACCURACY TEST
IN WELSH: PRAWF DARLLEN CYMRAEG SAFONEDIG CONSORTIWM
CANOLBARTH Y DE

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ABSTRACT

Despite the growth of Welsh-medium education (WME), there is a shortage of standardised tests in Welsh for assessing literacy development and tracking progress over time. This article reports on the development and standardisation of a new test to assess reading accuracy among learners in WME: the Central South Consortium Standardised Welsh Reading Test. The test comprises two forms, each consisting of 17 sentences of increasing complexity, which were designed following an analysis of authentic reading materials for children aged 3–16. The standardisation exercise involved 761 learners from Years 1–11 in schools in south-east Wales. We present an analysis of the

raw data, the results of which showed no significant difference in scores between boys and girls, but a strong positive correlation between school year and test score. Significant differences were also found between learners from Welsh-speaking families and those from mixed-language or English-speaking families in Years 1–4. The article discusses the implications of these findings for practitioners and calls for broader samples for the development of Welsh-language standardised tests that account for sociolinguistic differences in communities across Wales.

Keywords: Welsh, Literacy, Assessment, Bilingualism, Education

1. Introduction

The importance of first language and immersion education for the revitalisation of minority languages is well documented (e.g. Lloyd-Williams et al. 2024). In the Welsh context, Welsh-medium education (WME) is cited as the “principal method for ensuring that children develop their Welsh language skills, and for creating new speakers” (Welsh Government 2017: 21). WME is thoroughly embedded in the education system in Wales due to a long history of public campaigning and increasing legislation to ensure that local authorities assess the need for Welsh-language provision, and react accordingly, in their areas (see Jones and Jones 2014 for an overview). In 2023/24, there were 465, 840 learners in maintained schools in Wales. Of these learners, 22.9% were attending Welsh-medium, bilingual, or dual stream schools ($n = 106,605$, Welsh Government 2025a).

Furthermore, the *Welsh Language and Education (Wales) Act 2025* places duties on Welsh Ministers, local authorities, and schools to increase the number of learners in WME and sets minimum levels of Welsh provision and Welsh language goals for each type of school. Learners in WME will be expected to receive at least 80% of provision in Welsh, compared to 50% in dual stream schools, and 10% in primarily English-medium schools. With regard to learner outcomes, learners in WME will be expected to achieve C1/C2 levels according to the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR), whereas those in dual stream schools will be expected to achieve B1/B2 levels and those in English-medium schools will aim towards A1/A2 levels. Consequently, there will be an increased focus on learner assessment in order to ensure progress towards these goals (see also *Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Act 2021*).

Despite the continued development of WME and legislated increases to Welsh-language provision across the sector, there is a shortage of assessment and diagnostic tools in the Welsh language. Thomas et al. (2022: 51) argue for “the urgent need to develop tools that are both language and context specific, with relevant bilingual speaker norms, that have practical applications in the classroom”. The ability to monitor literacy development, for instance, is an

important aspect of assessing children's language skills, tracking progress over time and, ultimately, diagnosing additional learning needs (henceforth ALN) and implementing interventions (e.g. Sacre and Masterson 1997). Such tests are more readily available in English and are standardised based on a largely monolingual sample. This is inherently problematic for children in WME as language difficulties often manifest differently in different languages and bilingual speakers often have different patterns of acquisition compared to their monolingual peers (see Thomas et al. 2022 for an overview). In 2023/24, there were 10,050 learners with additional learning or special educational needs in WME (Welsh Government 2025b), and Davies (2023) suggests that these learners are systematically disadvantaged because of, among other things, lack of resources available in Welsh.

This article reports on the development of one assessment tool designed, in Welsh, specifically for learners in WME (Morris et al. 2022). The Central South Consortium Standardised Welsh Reading Test was commissioned by the Central South Joint Education Consortium in 2019 and developed by the authors to allow practitioners to compare reading accuracy in Welsh against standardised scores, as well as track improvement over time. In this article, we present an overview of the methodology and analysis of the data, based on 761 learners from south-east Wales, which compared differences in reading accuracy between learners in Years 1–11, male and female learners, and between those from Welsh-speaking families and those from Welsh- and English-speaking or English-speaking families. More broadly, we discuss avenues for future work.

2. Research context

Standardised tests of literacy, whereby learners' performance is assessed against the standardised scores of a wider sample of the population, are commonplace internationally and serve a number of purposes such as the evaluation and monitoring of the education system more broadly or the formative assessment of an individual's skills (Morris 2011: 9–12). In the case of the latter, such tests assess learners' performance on one aspect of literacy development (e.g. reading accuracy, comprehension or spelling accuracy) in comparison to peers of the same age in order to give an indication of whether additional support for skills development might be needed (e.g. Cook 1999). Learners who achieve below-average scores when compared to their peers may receive an intervention from teaching staff, the success of which can then be tracked longitudinally using the same tests (which often have multiple, comparable versions to avoid rote learning). In the diagnosis of ALN, such as dyslexia, various tests are often used as the child undergoes formal assessment (e.g. Thomas 2025). As Thomas et al.

(2022: 53) note, “children’s linguistic profiles are usually obtained via the implementation of a battery of standardised tests or ‘tools’ that capture various aspects of language difficulties to various degrees.”

Child language acquisition is known to be influenced by psychosocial factors that result in individual differences (e.g. McKean et al. 2015). In the case of bilingual learners, an issue arises in testing when standardisation is based on samples of largely monolingual speakers. Despite early definitions of bilingualism that emphasised equal ability in two languages (Bloomfield 1933: 56), it is now known that a number of factors can affect language acquisition as well as its production and, as a result, challenge the idea of the existence of balanced bilingual speakers. As Meisel (2006: 93) adds, “this reflects a perspective biased towards monolingualism in that it implicitly assumes that monolingual acquisition is the norm.” For learners growing up in a Welsh-English bilingual environment, a potential issue in the use of standardised tests is that bilingual learners are compared to monolingual norms in English, or that all learners are compared to the norms of those from Welsh-speaking families.

There has been much work on the role of home language and other factors in the acquisition of both Welsh and English (e.g. Gathercole et al. 2008; Gathercole and Thomas 2009; Thomas et al. 2013; Rhys and Thomas 2013; Gathercole et al. 2016). Gathercole and Thomas (2009) show that language exposure is a key factor in acquisition and that its effects tend to be stronger in Welsh than in English, even in Welsh-dominant communities. They suggest that “children growing up in a stable bilingual community in which there is a dominant language alongside a minority language may all acquire the dominant language to equivalent levels regardless of home language patterns, but may only fully acquire the minority language under certain conditions” (Gathercole and Thomas 2009: 233).

Rhys and Thomas (2013) investigated vocabulary acquisition and literacy development among learners in north Wales. Vocabulary and reading tests were given in Welsh and English to 207 learners aged between 7 and 11 years. A distinction was made between (1) learners from Welsh-speaking families, (2) learners from Welsh- and English-speaking families, (3) learners from English-speaking families who acquired the Welsh language at school, and (4) monolingual English learners attending English-medium schools (who did the English tests only). When largely controlling for socio-economic background and IQ, performance improved over time (as expected) but there were cross-linguistic differences and differences between the linguistic groups. Children from Welsh-speaking families performed better than the other groups (including those from mixed-language families, see also Gathercole and Thomas 2009) on both Welsh tests, although results fell within the normal range.

The results of the English tests also showed that the range of individual scores was in the normal range, although there were differences between linguistic

groups. There were no significant differences between bilingual learners from English-speaking families and monolingual English learners. Learners from English-speaking families tended to perform better than children from Welsh-speaking families and Welsh- and English-speaking families. Taken together, the results show the extent to which linguistic experience, and exposure to two languages, may affect acquisition among learners who are defined as ‘L1 speakers’ of a language, and raise the question of whether this needs to be accounted for in standardised testing.

Gathercole et al. (2008) created a Welsh vocabulary test that provides standardised scores according to a child’s age and home language (Welsh only, Welsh and English, or English only). They propose that “adequate language measures for bilingual children must take (at least) children’s language exposure into account in order to provide an adequate assessment of their linguistic abilities” (Gathercole et al. 2008: 715). Thomas et al. (2013) highlight the influence of other, yet inter-related, social factors on test performance based on an analysis of a version of the vocabulary test used with 11- to 15-year-olds. For instance, they found that the progress of learners from English-speaking families tended to be more uniform in this age group compared to other home language groups. An analysis of only those from English-speaking families also found differences related to exposure to Welsh in the community, with those living in communities with higher percentages of Welsh speakers improving over time compared to those from English-speaking families living in communities with fewer Welsh speakers (Thomas et al. 2013: 181).

Similarly, Gathercole et al. (2016) examined the performance of 732 Welsh-English bilinguals (both adults and children) on Welsh and English vocabulary and grammar, as well as cognitive measures. They considered the interaction of home language types and socio-economic indicators on performance in both languages and among different age groups. They found that, in general, both home language and socio-economic level can influence performance, but that home language tended to be more influential at younger ages whereas socio-economic level was a greater predictor among older people. They also found differences between languages, with home language effects being more prevalent in Welsh than in English (Gathercole et al. 2016: 1075; cf. Gathercole and Thomas 2009).

The use of English tests in WME is therefore problematic due to the largely monolingual profile of the sample typically recruited in standardisation, but also because results often presuppose a level of exposure to English in the home, community, and education system which might not reflect reality for the bilingual speaker. Ideally, children would be tested in both of their languages in order to address the asymmetrical way in which linguistic profiles may develop in a bilingual child’s two languages. Moreover, Thomas et al. (2022: 57) point out

that “failing to provide measures that are normed on a representative sample of children that share similar linguistic experiences is grossly incongruous with legislative duties” (see also Davies 2023: 218–219).

Packer and Rhys (2025: 261) further explain that “while some resources and assessment materials can be translated or adapted from other languages into Welsh, often cultural nuances and references are lost. Materials with a focus on language development need to consider the features of the language, such as grammatical structures and orthography.” Orthography is particularly relevant in the case of Welsh-English bilingualism. Welsh has a transparent orthography, meaning that there is a largely one-to-one relationship between graphemes and phonemes. By contrast, there is a more ambiguous relationship between graphemes and phonemes in English, which is said to have an opaque orthography (Ellis and Hooper 2001). Ellis and Hooper (2001) compared reading accuracy performance between learners from Welsh-speaking families in Welsh and monolingual English learners in English and found that the former performed significantly better. As Thomas and Lloyd (2008: 4–5) note, “bilingual children learning one transparent and one opaque system who are suspected as having certain difficulties with literacy are likely to be formally identified as having difficulties via testing in English since there is, at present, limited scope for profiling their equivalent abilities in Welsh” (see Thomas 2025 for the development of Welsh tests). Thomas et al. (2022: 56) stress the need for profiling in both languages, particularly as the transparent nature of Welsh orthography might not reveal the underlying difficulties that become apparent when reading English.

In the context of the current study, which reports on the development of a single test for reading accuracy rather than a battery of tests that aim to provide a more holistic diagnostic profile (cf. Thomas 2025), it is important to note that the demand for a convenient way to assess reading accuracy came from education practitioners despite other similar tests being available (e.g. Payne 1998; Forbes 2020). The rationale for the project was that an open-access, relatively quick test was needed for reading accuracy that considered grammatical structures and the orthography of the Welsh language, and which reflected the contemporary language patterns, vocabulary, and cultural references to which children in WME are exposed. In addition, an aim of the project was to develop a tool that could be used flexibly across time, allowing for a second administration (e.g. within a pre- and post-intervention framework) to support the monitoring of learner progress and/or the evaluation of intervention efficacy, in line with Curriculum for Wales expectations for ongoing assessment and the tracking of learner progression over time (Welsh Government 2024).

3. Methodology

3.1 Test design

A Working Group was established with practitioners from seven schools within the catchment area of the Central South Joint Education Consortium (which funded the research), and the test design was co-created during a series of workshops. A consensus was reached around how the test should be administered, and it was decided, in order to adhere to the principle that the test should be easy to use for practitioners, that it would comprise a series of sentences that increase in complexity (cf. McCarty and Lallaway 2012). Sentences were chosen over the presentation of non-words in order to ensure that the test items reflect the authentic experiences of learners in WME. Similarly, sentences were preferred to longer prose to reduce the cognitive load on learners undertaking the test (e.g. Sweller 1994).

The sentences were formulated based on an analysis undertaken by the authors of an initial corpus of 30 books and reading materials aimed at children between 3 and 16 years old. This corpus included a range of authentic Welsh-language texts, including commercially available children's books, books forming part of structured reading schemes, the Welsh Government's National Reading Tests, GCSE Welsh Language assessment materials, and poems on the GCSE Welsh Literature syllabus. From this initial corpus, six sources were selected for detailed linguistic analysis, representing a range of difficulty levels from Year 1 through to Year 11. These sources were analysed across four dimensions: sentence complexity, grammatical complexity, vocabulary, and phonotactics. Table 1 provides a summary of this analysis:

Table 1: Summary of linguistic features by difficulty level

Year group	Sentence complexity	Grammatical features	Vocabulary	Phonotactics
Years 1–2	Simple declaratives	Present tense periphrastic verbs; basic pronouns (<i>nhw/fe</i>); <i>Ble mae?</i> ; <i>Dyna</i>	Common nouns (e.g. <i>tŷ</i>); basic verb-nouns	Short words of one or two syllables, mainly open (CV) and simple closed (CVC) syllables (e.g. <i>dy.na</i>); some simple clusters (e.g. <i>ble</i>). Limited examples of diphthongs and later-acquired sounds

Year group	Sentence complexity	Grammatical features	Vocabulary	Phonotactics
Years 3–4	Simple sentences; some subordinate clauses; <i>sydd</i> clauses	Imperfect (<i>roedd</i>); pre-nominal pronouns (<i>ei mam</i>); aspirate mutation (<i>ei char</i>); imperative; <i>does dim</i> ; <i>dydy...ddim</i> ; <i>pan fydd</i> ; periphrastic and some non-periphrastic verbs	Common nouns and verb-nouns; some less frequent items (e.g. <i>geneth</i> , <i>hadau</i>)	Mainly CV and CVC syllables and monosyllabic or disyllabic words as above; consonant sequences across a syllable boundary (e.g. <i>gwis.godd</i> , with a /gw/ onset and /s.g/ sequence).
Years 5–6	Simple compound sentences (<i>ac felly</i>); subordinate and <i>sydd</i> clauses; copular (<i>ydy</i>)	Periphrastic verbs; <i>cael</i> passive; imperfect; pluperfect; imperatives; soft, nasal, and aspirate mutations; <i>os bydd</i>	Adjectives and adverbs; prepositional phrases; limited abstract concepts (e.g. <i>Synnwyr</i> , <i>cyffredin</i>); less frequent nouns (e.g. <i>perchennog</i>)	More examples of complex onsets and codas: /pl/ onset (<i>plas.tig</i>); /gw/ onset with /t/ coda (<i>gwyllt</i>); /r.t/ across a syllable boundary (<i>cor.tyn</i>); final /rn/ coda (<i>sis.wrn</i>). Three-syllable words (<i>per.chen.nog</i> , <i>def.nydd.io</i>).
Years 7–9	Compound and complex sentences; adverbial subordinate clauses; relative clauses (<i>a glywai</i>); noun clauses (<i>Sylwodd fod</i>)	Periphrastic and non-periphrastic verbs; mixed register including quotations; non-standard/dialectal forms; prepositions (e.g. <i>ohonynt</i>); all mutation types	Wide use of adjectives and adverbs; literary and less frequent vocabulary (e.g. <i>cris-croes</i> , <i>derw</i> , <i>brethyn</i> , <i>deheuig</i>)	As above, with more frequent complex onsets (/kr/ <i>cris-croes</i> , /br/ <i>brethyn</i>); polysyllabic words with medial consonant sequences (<i>hat.go.ffa</i>); internal /h/ at the onset of the stressed syllable (<i>de.heu.ig</i>).
Years 10–11	All features above; flexible syntax (e.g. fronted adverbials)	Impersonal past; negative <i>ni</i> ; pre-verbal particles (<i>Fe/Mi</i>); all features above; register variation	Abstract and formal vocabulary; low-frequency items (e.g. <i>anesmwytho</i> , <i>annaearol</i> , <i>anwylaf</i>)	Longest words with dense medial sequences (<i>an.es.mwy.tho</i>); vowel sequences across syllable boundaries (<i>annaearol</i>).

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Novel sentences of increasing complexity were devised based on the analysis of reading materials. Examples were not copied directly from the texts, but the analysis of complexity, grammatical features, vocabulary, and phonotactics informed the design. Working Group meetings were held to review items, consider the linguistic parameters above, and agree on final sentence forms. The group also discussed specific linguistic decisions, such as the consistent use of the copular form *ydy* rather than *yw* or *ydi*, the avoidance of forms that vary between dialects (such as *ef/fo* or *Mae gen i/Mae gyda fi*), and the treatment of dialectal pronunciations in scoring. The tests were piloted in two schools and slight changes were made based on learner and teacher feedback.

The final test consists of two forms (Form A and Form B), each comprising 17 sentences. The number of sentences was decided upon in consultation with the Working Group and aimed to strike a balance between including enough complex sentences and ensuring that older learners did not experience test fatigue. The sentences span five broad levels of difficulty broadly corresponding to Years 1–2, Years 3–4, Years 5–6, Years 7–9, and Years 10–11. Teachers were given instructions on how to administer the tests, which can be summarised as follows: The learners started from the first sentence and teachers marked any instances where the learner had difficulty in reading the word. The test stopped when the learner encountered their sixth difficulty and the corresponding word number was the score. In instances where the test was completed, teachers noted the number of errors (1–5). This protocol follows the *New Salford Sentence Reading Test* (McCarty and Lallaway 2012), which presents individual sentences to learners but in which not every word in the item is assessed (due to the repetition of the most frequent words). Both forms and instructions are reproduced in full in Appendix A. Only words printed in bold type were assessed, yielding a possible total of 104 assessed words in each form.

3.2 Ethical considerations and recruitment

The project was advertised among schools in the Central South Joint Education Consortium catchment area and schools received an honorarium for taking part in the standardisation. A total of five schools took part in the standardisation exercise.

Ethical approval for the project was granted by the Research Ethics Committee, School of Welsh, Cardiff University. Information leaflets outlining the objectives of the tests and the data collection process were produced and consent forms were signed by headteachers. In order to obtain appropriate informed consent from parents and, where appropriate, from learners themselves, a letter and information sheet were sent to parents at least one week before learners sat the first

test. This approach was adopted in accordance with the ethical principles of BERA (2018), which are grounded in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and establish that the best interests of the child are the primary consideration, and that children capable of forming their own views should be granted the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting them, commensurate with their age and maturity.

3.3 Administration of the tests

Practitioners were asked to administer Form A at least one week after distributing the project information to parents. Form B was administered around a fortnight after Form A. Both forms were administered individually by the practitioner, who recorded scores on the paper score sheet. Completed paper score sheets were returned to the school coordinator.

3.4 Data coding

School coordinators submitted the data from individual learners via an online form. For each individual learner, coordinators were asked to provide information on the learner's gender (boy/girl/other), date of birth, and home language (Welsh/Welsh and English/English/Other). They then entered the date of testing and score for Form A along with the date of testing and score for Form B.

There are some limitations to the background information on learners that we collected. Firstly, it is based on self-report from learners and teachers and is somewhat crudely operationalised. For instance, the categories for language background may be open to interpretation and it might have been more fruitful to ask for the language(s) the learner used with their parent(s) or caregiver(s). Secondly, we did not collect additional background information that may have helped to investigate other factors that might influence scores (such as socio-economic background, e.g. Gathercole et al. 2016). This was not possible due to the nature of the project and the need to collect a substantial amount of data for the standardisation. The lack of consideration for other modulating factors should be kept in mind, however, when we outline differences within the sample below.

3.5 Sample

In total, 761 learners from Years 1 to 11 participated in the standardisation exercise. Table 2 shows the numbers of boys and girls who took part in each

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year group. One learner's gender was recorded as 'other' and is not included in the table. Based on Table 2, 46.6% of the sample were boys ($n = 354$) and 53.4% were girls ($n = 406$).

Table 2: Number of participants by gender and year group.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	Total
Boys	30	36	36	46	15	27	38	41	33	24	28	354
Girls	33	42	38	55	33	37	41	53	32	21	21	406
Total	63	78	74	101	48	64	79	94	65	45	49	760

Table 3 shows the number of participants by home language and year group. The majority of learners came from families where only English was spoken (56.4%, $n = 429$) compared to 30.9% from Welsh- and English-speaking families ($n = 235$) and 12.7% from Welsh-speaking families ($n = 97$). No other languages were noted as home languages.

Table 3: Number of participants by home language and year group.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	Total
Welsh only	6	8	12	35	4	6	2	10	9	2	3	97
Welsh and English	16	40	24	40	27	40	10	20	13	1	4	235
English only	41	30	38	26	17	18	67	64	44	42	42	429
Total	63	78	74	101	48	64	79	94	66	45	49	761

3.6 Data transformation

The original scoring was based on the word where the sixth error was made or, in the case of those who completed the test, the number of errors (fewer than six). This resulted in a minimum score of 6 and a maximum score of 104 in the first instance, and a score of 1–5 in the second instance. For the purposes of statistical analysis, these raw scores were transformed to a 0–104 scale to represent the number of words read without difficulty. For instance, if a learner scored 6 originally, the transformed score was 0 as they read no words without difficulty. If a learner completed the test, but had difficulties with three words, then their transformed score would be 101.

4. Results

To ensure that the two tests were comparable, we first compared individual learners' scores from Form A with those of Form B. Figure 1 shows a scatter plot and histogram which compare the scores of the two tests. The scatter plot examines the correlation between a pupil's score on Form A and their score on Form B. The histogram shows the distribution of learners according to the difference in the score between Form A and Form B.

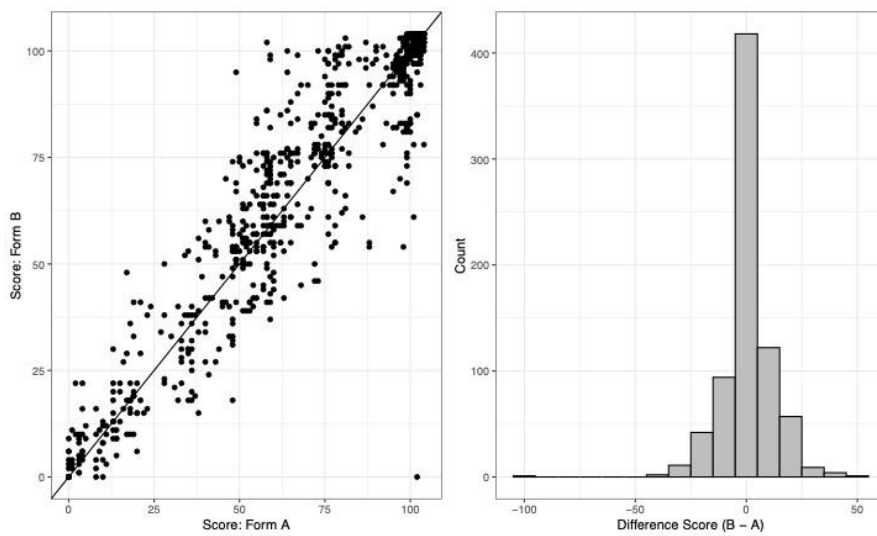


Figure 1: Distribution of differences in scores between Form A and Form B.

The clustering of points around the $y = x$ line on the scatter plot, as well as the higher number of counts for zero on the histogram, suggests little difference in learners' performance between the two forms (although the variability between the two forms is larger for higher scores). In order to substantiate this, we conducted a paired-samples t -test between the scores of the two forms which suggested that there was a significant difference ($p = 0.005$). Despite this, Cohen's d indicated that the effect size is negligible (Cohen's $d = 0.101$; Form A: $M = 65.59$, $SD = 31.64$; Form B: $M = 66.74$, $SD = 31.95$; $t(760) = -2.793$). It is therefore concluded that there is no meaningful difference between the two forms, and they can be used interchangeably. For all subsequent analyses, each pupil's mean score across the two forms was used as the dependent variable.

The second stage of the analysis aimed to ascertain the extent to which learners' gender, age and school year, and home language influenced test scores. Turning to gender, Figure 2 shows box plots of boys' and girls' scores (there was one

observation of ‘other’ gender, which is not included in the analysis). The figure shows no obvious difference between the scores, and this was supported by the results of an independent-samples *t*-test used to ascertain whether the difference in scores between boys and girls was significant (Boys: $M = 66.03$, $SD = 32.58$; Girls: $M = 66.20$, $SD = 30.12$; $t(758) = -0.075$, $p = 0.940$).

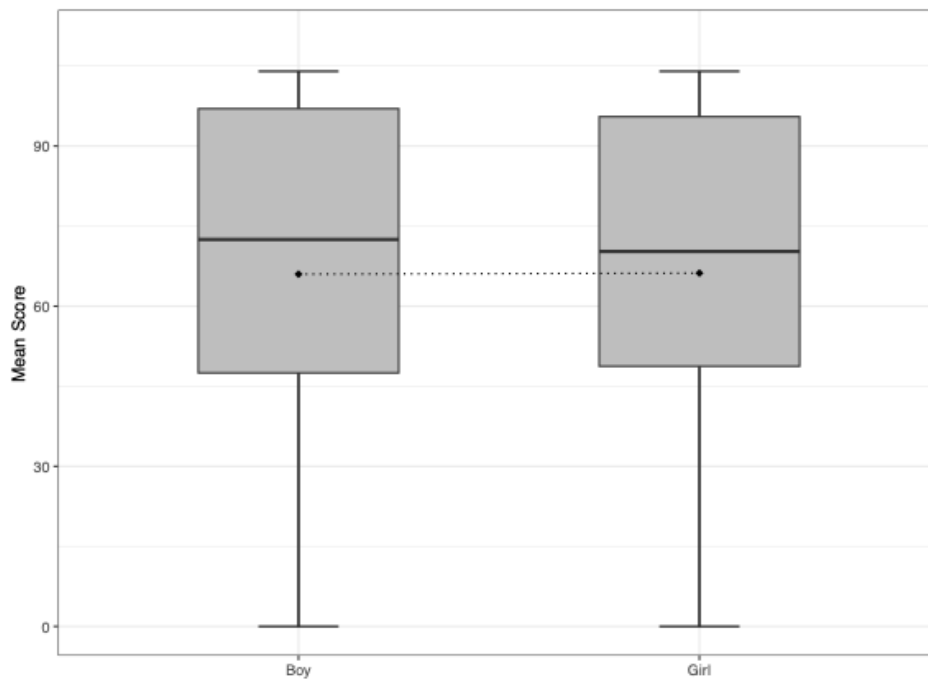


Figure 2: Box plots of the boys’ and girls’ scores.

We then looked at the relationship between age (calculated as the date on which the learner took Form B) and mean score. Figure 3 shows a scatter plot between age and mean score. We see that there is a clear positive correlation, which is not linear. The correlation between test score and age was highly significant, indicating that (as expected) scores increase among older learners (Spearman’s $\rho = 0.707$, $p < 0.001$).

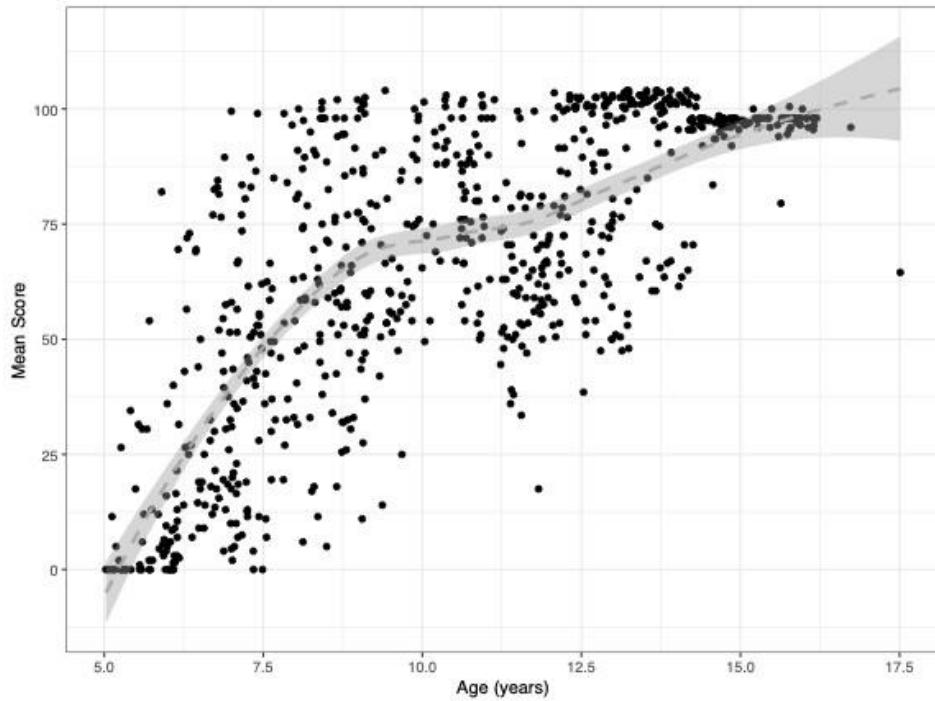


Figure 3: Scatter plot between age and mean score.

In order to investigate the effect of age further, Figure 4 shows box plots of scores by school year. The results of a one-way ANOVA (which treated school year as a categorical factor) showed a significant effect of year group on mean scores ($F(10, 750) = 116.3, p < 0.001$).

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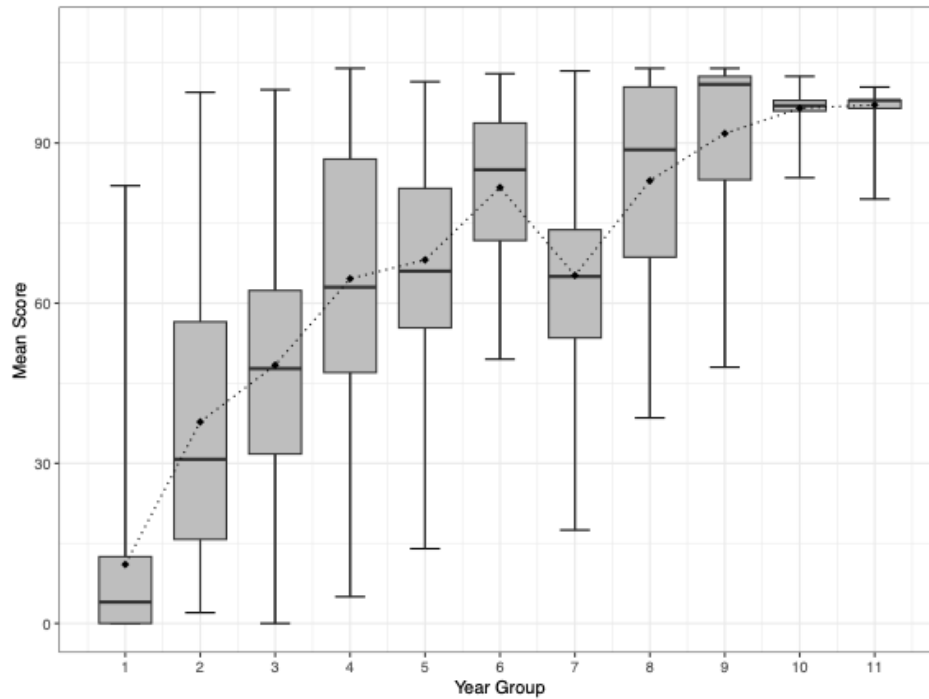


Figure 4: Box plots of score by year group.

Table 4 presents the mean scores, standard deviations, and medians by year group. Mean scores rise consistently from Year 1 ($M = 11.05$, $SD = 17.00$) through to Year 11 ($M = 97.15$, $SD = 2.87$), with the exception of Year 7 ($M = 65.21$, $SD = 16.01$), where scores are notably lower than in Year 6 ($M = 81.68$, $SD = 15.52$).

Table 4: Mean scores, SDs, and medians by year group.

Year group	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Median
1	63	11.05	17.00	4.0
2	78	37.76	26.13	30.8
3	74	48.40	26.29	47.8
4	101	64.58	26.08	63.0
5	48	68.10	18.83	66.0
6	64	81.68	15.52	85.0
7	79	65.21	16.01	65.0
8	94	82.94	18.62	88.8

Year group	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Median
9	66	91.80	16.55	101.0
10	45	96.52	2.72	97.0
11	49	97.15	2.87	98.0

Turning to the analysis of the influence of linguistic background on the scores, Figure 5 shows a box plot of the learners' mean scores by home language. A tripartite distinction was made between Welsh, Welsh and English, and English.

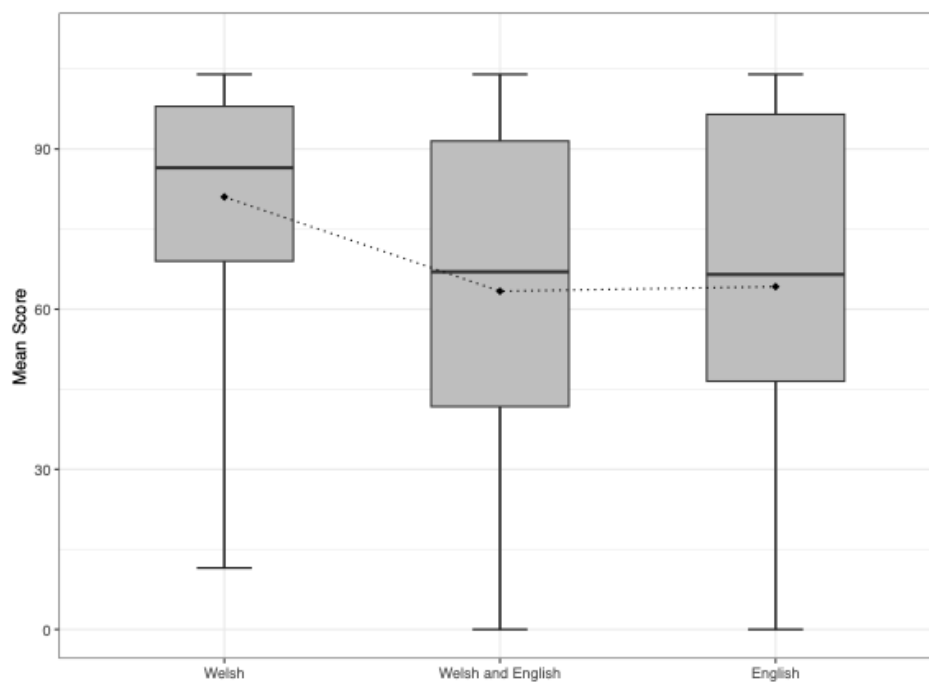


Figure 5: Box plots of score by home language.

Figure 5 suggests that there is a clear difference between children from Welsh-speaking families and other children (Welsh only: $M = 81.03$, $SD = 21.12$; Welsh and English: $M = 63.36$, $SD = 30.95$; English: $M = 64.34$, $SD = 32.49$). A one-way ANOVA confirmed this: $F(2, 758) = 13.03$, $p < 0.001$. A Tukey HSD post-hoc test identified the specific pairwise differences. Table 5 shows the results.

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Table 5: Tukey HSD post-hoc test results comparing mean test scores between home language groups.

	Mean difference	<i>p</i> -value	Significant?
English vs Welsh	16.69	< 0.001	Yes
English vs Welsh and English	0.98	0.919	No
Welsh vs Welsh and English	17.67	< 0.001	Yes

From this we can say that there is no evidence of any difference between the English and Welsh and English scores, but that there is a significant difference between the Welsh only scores and all other groups ($p < 0.001$). We therefore combined the English and Welsh and English language groups into one category, in order to examine the interaction effect of language and school year on the scores.

Figure 6 shows the interaction effect of home language and year on the scores. We see that the language effect on the score is greater in the early years, and weaker as the children get older. These results should be treated with caution, however, given the unequal numbers in each home language group.

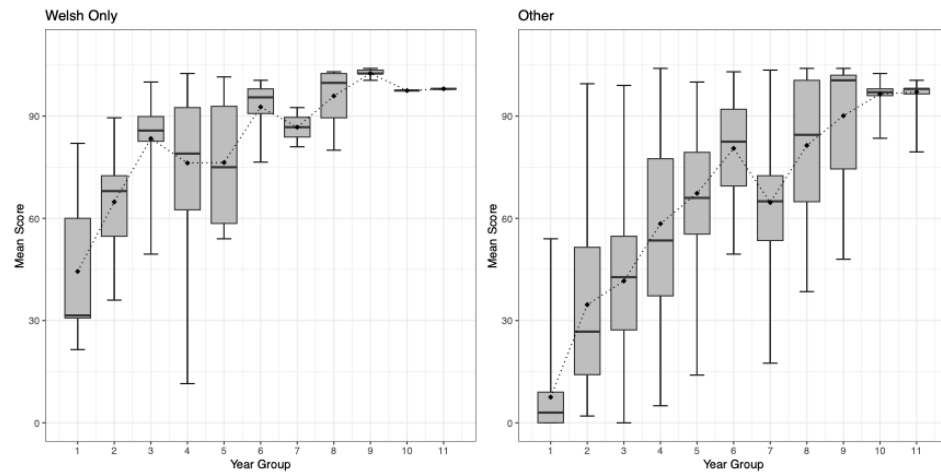


Figure 6: Box plots of scores by year group and language.

To investigate the effects of language and year group, we conducted a two-way ANOVA test. The results showed significant effects for language ($F(1, 739) = 73.29, p < 0.001$), year group ($F(10, 739) = 137.51, p < 0.001$), and an interaction

between language and year group overall ($F(10, 739) = 3.09, p = 0.001$). An ANOVA was used for the test conducted on the full sample, where the F-test has been shown to be robust to non-normality (Blanca et al. 2017). To investigate more closely how language background affects scores in each year group, we conducted a series of Mann-Whitney U tests with Bonferroni correction ($\alpha = .05/11$) comparing Welsh-only and Other learners for each year group. These comparisons of home language within each year group involved smaller and more unbalanced subgroups, with evidence of heterogeneous variance. Table 6 shows the mean scores for each language group by year, together with the p -values.

Table 6: Mann-Whitney U test results by year group and home language (Bonferroni-corrected threshold: $p < 0.00455$).

Year	n (Welsh)	M (Welsh)	n (Other)	M (Other)	p - value	Significant?
1	6	44.42	57	7.54	< 0.001	Yes
2	8	64.81	70	34.66	0.003	Yes
3	12	83.42	62	41.62	< 0.001	Yes
4	35	76.23	66	58.41	< 0.001	Yes
5	4	76.38	44	67.35	0.467	No
6	6	92.67	58	80.54	0.060	No
7	2	86.75	77	64.65	0.053	No
8	10	95.90	84	81.40	0.021	No
9	9	102.56	57	90.10	0.007	No
10	2	97.50	43	96.48	0.521	No
11	3	98.00	46	97.10	0.292	No

As Table 6 shows, learners from Welsh-speaking families have significantly higher scores than learners from mixed-language or English-speaking families in the early years (Years 1–4). Differences from Year 5 onwards did not reach significance after correction, although this could be due to the small numbers of observations in the Welsh-only cohort.

5. Discussion and conclusions

The analysis of the data showed broad improvements in reading accuracy in line with the increasing age of year groups. There were ceiling effects, however, from Year 9 onwards, which mean that the test is less useful in distinguishing between reading accuracy performance among older learners. This may be due to the nature

of the test, and more complex sentences at the end of the test might remove the ceiling effect currently found in the data. However, this may also be due to the transparent nature of Welsh orthography, which has been shown to influence reading accuracy (Ellis and Hooper 2001). Thomas et al. (2013: 183) also found that learners from English-speaking families who lived in areas where Welsh was less spoken did not progress in their knowledge of Welsh vocabulary after the age of 13. Given the nature of our sample, which was skewed towards children from English-speaking families and drawn entirely from English-dominant communities, it is an open question whether this finding would be replicated in other areas of Wales.

The exception to the progression between year groups was found in Year 7, whose scores tended to be lower than those in Year 6 before recovering again in Year 8. It is interesting to note that this decrease occurs during the transition from primary to secondary education. A number of studies have found a so-called “dip” in attainment during this transition, which is linked to several factors such as engagement with peers and teachers (Jindal-Snape et al. 2019). Further work examining the transition from primary to secondary education in WME settings may shed additional light on this.

The results showed learners from Welsh-speaking families scored higher than those from mixed-language or English-speaking families. These results support previous work that has shown a clear tendency for children from Welsh-speaking families to score higher on tests that examine linguistic skills in the Welsh language compared to other home language groups (e.g. Gathercole et al. 2008; Gathercole and Thomas 2009; Thomas et al. 2013; Rhys and Thomas 2013; Gathercole et al. 2016). It is worth repeating that the absence of significant home-language differences among older learners may reflect the relatively small number of observations in the Welsh-only group from Year 5 onwards and it remains to be seen whether home language differences in reading accuracy persist for children in WME. The final test contains standardised scores by home language for Years 1–4 in addition to global standardised scores based on year group. As argued by, for example, Gathercole et al. (2008) and Thomas et al. (2022), providing bilingual norms is only one part of the issue when creating standardised testing for language development in bilingual contexts and the linguistic background of individual learners should be considered.

Another question that arises is to what extent other social and psychological factors affect the results (e.g. McKean et al. 2015). Previous work has shown, for example, that community exposure to Welsh and socio-economic level influence acquisition (Thomas et al. 2013; Gathercole et al. 2016). The aim of the current study was to create a standardised assessment for reading accuracy rather than investigate the factors that might influence literacy development. It seems clear, however, that a deeper understanding of literacy development in WME, and the

possible influence of a myriad of factors thereon, could be achieved in a more extensive study that specifically aims to answer these questions. It is only by considering these issues that it will be possible to move on from recording difficulties to addressing them.

Moving away from the analysis of the data, and to the issue of standardised tests as a tool more broadly, the project has succeeded in creating a tool that gives practitioners in WME the opportunity to assess the development of their learners' reading skills and to record progress over a period of time. There are, however, a number of avenues for further work. Firstly, the current standardisation has been based on learners who all come from urban areas in south-east Wales. Consequently, the learners in the sample are all from communities where the majority of people do not speak Welsh and where learners in WME come predominantly, though not exclusively, from English-speaking families. It is clear that re-standardisation is needed so that a more inclusive sample can be obtained and, in particular, so that home language and community differences in performance across age groups can be investigated. Secondly, further qualitative work with practitioners and learners is needed to evaluate both the utility of the test in the classroom and its potential impact on monitoring literacy development.

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Appendix A: Individual learner scoring sheet and instructions

Ysgol / School	
Blwyddyn / Year group	
Enw'r Ymarferwr (Llythrennau cyntaf) / Practitioner Name (Initials)	
Enw'r Dysgwr (Llythrennau cyntaf) / Learner's Name (Initials)	
Iaith (neu ieithoedd) ar yr aelwyd / Language(s) spoken at home	
Rhywedd / Gender	
Dyddiad geni / Date of birth	
Dyddiad Prawf 1 / Date of Test 1 (Form A)	
Sgôr Ffurflen A / Score Form A	
Dyddiad Prawf 2 / Date of Test 2 (Form B)	
Sgôr Ffurflen B / Score Form B	

- Mae'r prawf hwn yn asesu cywirdeb darllen. / This test assesses reading accuracy.
- Wrth farcio, rhwch gylch o amgylch pob anhawster. / Circle each difficulty on the score sheet as it occurs.
- Peidiwch â sgorio anhawster os bydd y disgybl yn cywiro ei hunan. / Do not count a difficulty if the learner self-corrects.
- Peidiwch â sgorio ynganiadau tafodieithol/lleol e.e. <pethau> → <pethe>. / Do not count dialectal or regional pronunciations as difficulties.
- Os na fydd modd i ddisgybl ddweud gair, mae croeso ichi ddweud y gair (er mwyn ei helpu) ond dylid nodi anhawster. / If a learner cannot produce a word, you may supply it, but it must still be recorded as a difficulty.
- Stopiwch y prawf ar ôl y chweched anhawster. / Stop the test after the sixth difficulty.
- Sgôr = rhif y gair y cododd y chweched anhawster arno. Os llwyddodd y disgybl i ddarllen tan ddiwedd y prawf, rhwch nifer y camgymeriadau fel sgôr (1–5). / Score = the word number of the sixth difficulty. If the learner reads to the end, record the total number of difficulties (1–5).

- DYLA'I'R DISGYBL SEFYLL YR AIL BRAWF (FFURFLEN B) BYTHEFNOS AR ÔL CWBLHAU FFURFLEN A. / THE LEARNER SHOULD SIT THE SECOND TEST (FORM B) TWO WEEKS AFTER COMPLETING FORM A.
- Ar ôl cwblhau'r ddau brawf, cyflwynwch sgorau drwy'r ffurflen ar-lein: / After both tests are complete, submit scores via the online form.
- Rhowch y ffurflen bapur hon i'r cydlynnydd yn eich ysgol. / Return this paper sheet to the school coordinator.

Ffurflen A / Form A	Nifer y geiriau a asesir (Geiriau mewn print trwm a asesir yn unig) <i>Number of words assessed (only words in bold are assessed)</i>
Dyma afal. <i>Here is an apple.</i>	1 / 2
Mae lemon yn felyn. <i>A lemon is yellow.</i>	3 / 4 / 5 / 6
Mae hi 'n hoffi moron . <i>She likes carrots.</i>	7 / 8 / 9
Does dim cathod yn y sw. <i>There are no cats in the zoo.</i>	10 / 11 / 12 / 13 / 14
Sali sy 'n byw yn y tŷ mawr . <i>It is Sali who lives in the big house.</i>	15 / 16 / 17 / 18
Torrwch y papur gyda siswrn. <i>Cut the paper with scissors.</i>	19 / 20 / 21 / 22
Pan fydd y tywydd yn braf, bydd hi'n amser chwarae. <i>When the weather is fine, it will be playtime.</i>	23 / 24 / 25 / 26 / 27 / 28 / 29
Dyma'r plant sydd wedi gwyllo'r teledu. <i>These are the children who have watched the television.</i>	30* / 31 / 32 / 33 / 34 / 35 *Dyma'r = un gair *Dyma'r = one word
Coch ydy lliw'r paent sydd ei angen i addurno'r ystafell ddosbarth. <i>Red is the colour of the paint that is needed to decorate the classroom.</i>	36 / 37 / 38 / 39 / 40 / 41 / 42 / 43 / 44

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Pan ddaeth yr actores enwog i'r ysgol, roedd pawb yn gweni o glust i glust drwy'r dydd. <i>When the famous actress came to the school, everyone was grinning from ear to ear all day.</i>	45 / 46 / 47 / 48 / 49 / 50 / 51 / 52
Pe na bai'r arbenigwr dawnus wedi sylwi bod brech yr ieir* ar sawl un ohonyn nhw, byddai'r sefyllfa wedi gwaethgu. <i>If the talented specialist had not noticed that several of them had chickenpox, the situation would have worsened.</i>	53 / 54 / 55 / 56 / 57* / 58 / 59 / 60 / 61 *Brech yr ieir = un gair *Brech yr ieir = one word
Teimlad pleserus oedd hiraethu am ei phlentyndod yng Nghaerffili a chafodd ei hatgoffa o'r holl gyfnodau hapus. <i>Longing for her childhood in Caerphilly was a pleasant feeling, and she was reminded of all the happy times.</i>	62 / 63 / 64 / 65 / 66 / 67 / 68 / 69
Brasgamodd y cyflwynydd teledu yn fwriadus tuag at ei gerbyd er mwyn gadael mewn da bryd. <i>The television presenter strode purposefully towards his vehicle in order to leave in good time.</i>	70 / 71 / 72 / 73 / 74 / 75 / 76
Daeth tîm rhyngwladol o ymchwilwyr i'r casgliad amlwg fod canfyddiadau’r gwaith yn annealladwy. <i>An international team of researchers reached the obvious conclusion that the findings of the work were incomprehensible.</i>	77 / 78 / 79 / 80 / 81 / 82
Lluniwyd y cyfryngau cymdeithasol gan fyfyrwyr llewyrchus a feithrinodd eu sgiliau dros nifer o flynyddoedd. <i>Social media was designed by successful students who developed their skills over a number of years.</i>	83 / 84 / 85 / 86 / 87 / 88 / 89 / 90
Fe arbrofodd gwyddonwyr â gwahanol ddulliau o atal ergydion difrifol i'r pen yn ystod gemau rygbi. <i>Scientists experimented with different methods of preventing serious blows to the head during rugby games.</i>	91 / 92 / 93 / 94 / 95 / 96

Dywedir mai gorfodi chwaraewyr i wisgo penwisg amddiffynnol wrth chwarae a fyddai'n lleihau'r peryglon yn sylweddol. <i>It is said that obliging players to wear protective headgear while playing is what would reduce the risks substantially.</i>	97 / 98 / 99 / 100 / 101 / 102 / 103 / 104
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Ffurflen B / Form B	Nifer y geiriau a asesir (Geiriau mewn print trwm a asesir yn unig) <i>Number of words assessed (only words in bold are assessed)</i>
Dyna oren. <i>That is an orange.</i>	1 / 2
Mae Cyw yn fach. <i>Cyw [a children's TV character] is small.</i>	3 / 4 / 5 / 6
Mae hi'n blasu bwyd. <i>She is tasting food.</i>	7 / 8 / 9
Does dim pysgod yn y môr. <i>There are no fish in the sea.</i>	10 / 11 / 12 / 13 / 14
Magi sy'n gwisgo crys gwyrdd. <i>It is Magi who is wearing a green shirt.</i>	15 / 16 / 17 / 18
Eisteddych ar y mat gyda llyfr. <i>Sit on the mat with a book.</i>	19 / 20 / 21 / 22
Pan fydd y gwanwyn yn dod, byddwn ni ar wyliau. <i>When spring comes, we will be on holiday.</i>	23 / 24 / 25 / 26 / 27 / 28
Dyma'r plant sydd wedi ennill y rygbi heddiw. <i>These are the children who have won the rugby today.</i>	29* / 30 / 31 / 32 / 33 / 34 / 35 *Dyma'r = un gair *Dyma'r = one word
Blasus iawn ydy'r bwyd sy'n cael ei goginio yn y caffi moethus. <i>The food that is cooked in the luxurious café is very tasty.</i>	36 / 37 / 38 / 39 / 40 / 41 / 42 / 43 / 44
Pan welodd y gantores ddisglair y gynulleidfa fawr, roedd hi wrth ei bodd drwy'r nos. <i>When the brilliant singer saw the large audience, she was delighted all night.</i>	45 / 46 / 47 / 48 / 49 / 50 / 51 / 52 / 53 / 54

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Pe ysgrifennwn ni lythyr parchus at y cyfarwyddwr, byddai'n rhoi'r cyfle inni fod yn rhan o'r gynulleidfa. <i>If we were to write a respectful letter to the director, he would give us the opportunity to be part of the audience.</i>	55 / 56 / 57 / 58 / 59 / 60 / 61
Teithiau mewn hofrennydd oedd yn denu twristiaid anturus i Langollen ond cawson nhw eu canslo. <i>Helicopter trips were what attracted adventurous tourists to Llangollen, but they were cancelled.</i>	62 / 63 / 64 / 65 / 66 / 67 / 68 / 69
Gwrandawodd y nyrs yn amyneddgar wrth i'r claf esbonio sut yr anafodd ei goes. <i>The nurse listened patiently as the patient explained how he injured his leg.</i>	70 / 71 / 72 / 73 / 74 / 75 / 76
Daeth yn fwyfwy amlwg ar ôl y refferendwm y byddai codi trethi'n annerbyniol ac yn dangos esgeulustod. <i>It became increasingly clear after the referendum that raising taxes would be unacceptable and would show negligence.</i>	77 / 78 / 79 / 80 / 81 / 82
Cynhaliwyd sesiynau byw dros blatfform Instagram, sy'n ffordd arloesol o ddarlledu diweddariadau am eich bywyd. <i>Live sessions were held over the Instagram platform, which is an innovative way of broadcasting updates about your life.</i>	83 / 84 / 85 / 86 / 87 / 88 / 89 / 90
Fe sbardunodd newidiadau trawiadol i hinsawdd y ddaear yn y blynyddoedd diwethaf orymdeithiau brwd. <i>Striking changes to the earth's climate in recent years triggered passionate marches.</i>	91 / 92 / 93 / 94 / 95 / 96
Dylid ailystyried ein harferion er mwyn lleihau effaith llygredd ynghyd â newid i ddulliau gwyrddion o gynhyrchu egni. <i>Our habits should be reconsidered in order to reduce the impact of pollution, along with a change to green methods of producing energy.</i>	97 / 98 / 99 / 100 / 101 / 102 / 103 / 104