



The state of education in Wales in the 1830s and 1840s

The most popular schools in Wales at this time were Sunday Schools, Charity Schools and Private Schools, with Sunday Schools being most popular. The government was concerned that educational standards in Wales were poor. Their main areas of concern were the facilities and quality of teaching, the limited curriculum being taught, the widespread use of the Welsh language and the influence of religious organisations (who weren't Anglican) on the population. The man to request the inquiry was the MP for Coventry, William Williams, who was born in Wales and spoke Welsh fluently.

Concerns about social unrest in Wales in the 1830s and 1840s

Due to numerous protests, in particular the Merthyr Rising of 1831, the Newport Rising of 1839 and the Rebecca Riots between 1839 and 1843, Wales had a heavy military presence by 1840. The government was very concerned about losing control over the nation. One way of attempting to re-establish this was to investigate, then influence, the way children were educated in Wales.

The roles of Ralph Robert Wheeler Lingen, Jelinger Cookson Symons and Henry Robert Vaughan Johnson in producing the reports

The man overseeing the inquiry was the secretary of the government's Committee of the Privy Council on Education at the time, James Kay-Shuttleworth. He chose three commissioners to undertake the inquiry: R.R.W Lingen, J.C. Symons and H.R.V Johnson. All three were upper-middle class barristers who specialised in law, not education. None of the three spoke Welsh and required translators to help them.

The criticisms of education in Wales in the report

The main criticisms of education in Wales were the poor standard of education, the lack of understanding of English, the immorality among the population and the negative influence of mothers on their children. However, there were contradictions in the reports, highlighting that religion was important for many of the population and that the literacy levels were as good as England's, if not better. Some suggest this shows that the fact that they were mostly non-conformist (not Anglican) and spoke Welsh were the real issues.

The impact of the report in Wales

Education in Wales was the subject of numerous reforms in the period after 1847. The most impactful concerned the Welsh language. It was not official government policy to eliminate the Welsh language, but efforts were made to prioritise English over Welsh in schools across Wales. This was done by replacing Welsh-speaking teachers with ones who could only speak English and by encouraging the use of the Welsh Not. This meant that children could face beatings if they were caught speaking Welsh in schools, leading to a significant decline in the number of Welsh speakers in the country by the end of the 19th century.

Welsh responses to the report

The Welsh response was one of anger, especially regarding the questioning of Welsh women and suggestions of immorality in Welsh societies. These feelings were summed up by Robert Jones Derfel's play *Brad y Llyfrau Gleision*, published in 1854. It also led to a growth in Welsh nationalism and forming of Plaid Cymru, as men like Saunders Lewis aimed to stop the decline of the Welsh language.

The Blue Books Inquiry timeline

March 1846:	William Williams, MP for Coventry, delivered a speech in Parliament highlighting the poor state of education in Wales and calling for an inquiry.
July 1846:	The British government agreed to the inquiry, and commissioners were appointed to investigate the state of education in Wales.
1846–1847:	The commissioners conducted their investigations, visiting schools and gathering information across Wales.
April 1847:	The reports, known as the Blue Books, were completed and submitted to the government.
July 1847:	The Blue Books were published, detailing the findings of the inquiry and providing a comprehensive account of educational conditions in Wales.



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