



Johnson with the pupils at the language unit in Ysgol Eifionydd

Pupils taught Welsh with the use of signing

A TOP Welsh teacher from Porthmadog has used signing for the deaf to show her pupils that learning the language is fun and interesting, compared to many taught in secondary schools where standards are falling.

Carys Lake, who set up the only centre of its kind in Wales at Porthmadog's Ysgol Eifionydd for teaching Welsh to English pupils who have moved to Gwynedd, and was named the best at encouraging the language, held a workshop with Jane Johnson, of Tremadog, a former teacher of deaf children.

Canolfan Iaith Uwchradd Gwynedd teaches children aged 11-14 during an intensive eight-week course for which Carys was given a Welsh Assembly Government award at the prestigious Teacher of the Year awards in Cardiff last October.

But schools inspectors recently warned the quality of teaching

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Welsh as a second language generally in Wales is much worse than other subjects and is in decline.

An Estyn report by Dr Bill Maxwell, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training in

'Neither Welsh nor signing are textbook languages, they are best learned through using them'

Wales, said standards in compulsory Welsh lessons continue to cause concern, with two-thirds of work showing "important shortcomings".

He said standards for 138,000 pupils up to the age of 16 were falling, with many opting for a short course in the language which gave it a second-class status in some schools.

The Assembly's chair of the enterprise and learning committee said pupils who spent five years in primary and five years in secondary school learning Welsh, left barely able to communicate in the language, and there is a shortage of suitably trained teachers for the subject.

Mrs Lake, whose pupils said her energy and enthusiasm make learning fun during their language immersion, said: "Our signing workshop - where the pupils learned that language in Welsh so beautifully and automatically without any preconceptions, just six weeks through their course - was a fantastic way to show the simplicity of great communicating."

"Neither Welsh nor signing are textbook languages, they are best learned through using them, and both are a gift shared between all of us. Learning is best through different experiences that are fun.

"It was such a nice and positive aspect about what language actually is, compared to all the politics recently surrounding how it is being, and should be, taught.

"The passion for the mission has to come from the teachers, and there is more to inspiring the use of a language than old-fashioned methods to try to achieve targets."

Mrs Lake said her passion for conveying the language has also included workshops with "hands on" rapping, singing and role play, learning guitar with Aaron Elias and crafts with Porthmadog florist Sue Owen, and she is holding a two-day residential course at Plas Tan y Bwlch this week on Welsh places and geography.