

Introduction

In recent years Wales have put a great efforts into education and legislation reform. These major overhauls mean that there is much change happening at this current time. As many of us may be aware Wales the law is currently changing for children and young people

in Wales with special educational needs. This is changing to the new Additional Learning Needs and Education Act (Wales) 2018, and this has replaced the previous Special Educational Needs (SEN) framework with a more current, relevant and updated system based on Additional Learning Needs (ALN) (Dawnsey, 2018). According to Dawnsey, 2018, the introduction of new legislation and reform has been long awaited and a complete overhaul was required as the old system was no longer fit for purpose as the previous SEN system was based on a model that is more than 30 years old. In 2018, the Welsh government described the new legislation as an ambitious law to create a bold new approach for children and young people with Additional Learning Needs in Wales (Gov. Wales, 2018). In order to achieve this, the new act combines the two separate systems operating for SEN in schools for ages 0-16 and the system for learners that have LDD in higher education to create a single system that supports all learner with ALN from the age of 0 through to 25 years in Wales (Gov. Wales, 2018). As the transition to the new system will involve major changes for local authorities, schools and further education colleges it will be introduced gradually and the Welsh Government has produced new guidance explaining the timescales involved. The change will be a phased approach starting with implementation from September 2020 to 2023.

Changes to SEN in Wales

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SENCO to ALNCO

The new Additional Learning Needs and Education (Wales) act 2018 replaces the previous 'Special Educational Needs' system that was in place. This means that the former role of SENCO will be replaced with ALNCO (Gov. Wales, 2021). Section 60 of the new act states that all maintained settings must designate at least one person as an ALNCO therefore will have the responsibility for co-ordinating provision for all learners with Additional Learning Needs (Gov. Wales, 2021). However, there is an exception within section 60 of the new act for maintained special schools in Wales where all staff will have the required training and experience of ALN (Gov. Wales, 2020). To support this change of role within settings, the Additional Learning Needs Co-ordinator (Wales) regulations 2020 came into force in January this year (Gov. Wales, 2021). These regulations present the required qualifications, training and experience that the appointed ALNCO must have. 'A learner's needs must be established following an assessment by a suitably qualified person' (Tsana, 2015). The Additional needs code for Wales (2021) gives clear guidance on the role of the appointed ALNCO. The code highlights the duties of the ALNCO and in addition to the compulsory tasks listed also highlights the key responsibilities. However, the code stated that an ALNCO must have sufficient time and resources to carry out their responsibilities effectively but if the ALNCO has responsibility for other duties they must ensure that they do not conflict with their role as ALNCO and master the skill of managing their time accordingly (Gov. Wales, 2021).

Individual development plans

A key aspect of change within The new Additional Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018 is the introduction of Individual Development Plans (IDP'S) that will replace the current individual education plans, statements of special educational needs and learning and skills plans (Erw. Wales, 2018). Under the new act, if it has been decided that a learner has Additional Learning Needs an Individual Development Plan must be made for the individual. The IDP's will provide a single system for children and young people from the age of 0 to 25 that identify as having an additional learning needs instead of the separate systems that operate under the SEN system. (Gov. Wales, 2018). When an IDP is maintained by a school, under the new act the school must secure additional learning provision (ALP) described within the IDP and the school should take all reasonable steps to secure that provision for learners. From September 2020 IDP's began to replace plans that currently support all learners with SEN. Learners that have statements that were prepared under the SEN system will convert to the new system during the two academic years of 2020-21 and 2021-22 (Gov. Wales, 2018). And until a learner has changes to the new ALN system, the provisions of the SEN system will still apply, and maintained schools must still comply with the education act 1996 along with the regulations made under it for as long as they apply to the learner (GOV, Wales, 2018). Chapter 4 of the Additional Learning Needs code for Wales (2021) states that there is a duty to involve and support children and their parents in meetings and the decisions about them. Meetings are paramount in helping to put the child at the heart of the process and discussion about their ALN and any ALP that's needed. (Gov. Wales, 2021). However, this might not always be possible or appropriate as meetings can be intimidating for children, especially if there are a number of professionals present. In cases such as this practitioners and professionals will need to make a different arrangements that are best appropriate.

The ALN Code

Under the new Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018, the Additional Learning Needs Code was created. As section 4 of the new Act for Wales requires Welsh Ministers to issue a Code on Additional learning Needs (Dawnsey, 2018). Together, the act and the code and all regulations made under them provide the legal framework for meeting the additional needs of children and young people in Wales. According to Dawnsey (2018), the code provides greater details and instruction than the SEN code of practice that was produced in 2002. However according to Snapcymru.org, (2019) the new ALN code is 384 pages long and with feedback from schools, professionals and LA's it's difficult and confusing to read. The structure isn't always clear, and rather than being able to read specific sections you need to cross reference back and forth to get the full picture, and having a code that is not clear can cause conflict (Snapcymru, 2019).

Conclusion

The new Additional Learning Needs and Education (Wales) act 2018 and the Additional Learning Needs Code for Wales (2021) have been developed over a significant amount of time (Gov. Wales, 2019) and great contributions have been made to the developments through consistent meetings with external stakeholders, which included representatives from local authorities, schools, Estyn the children's commissioner and the Welsh language commissioner. The Welsh Government is committed to transform the experiences, expectations and outcomes for children and young people with ALN in Wales with the new Additional Learning Needs reform. The reform focuses on delivering effective support to learners with ALN in education in Wales, as well as having support, information and advice that is more accessible (provisionmap, 2019).

