



Prifysgol Cymru
Y Drindod Dewi Sant
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Contested Issues in Welsh Education Policy

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Introduction

The Warnock Report (1978) and the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018 (ALNet) are two important documents in the history of special educational needs (SEN) provision in the UK, particularly in Wales.

Both are important and significant milestones in the development of SEN policy and reflect the change in societal attitudes towards disability and the educational needs of children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

The Warnock Report introduced important concepts about inclusive education with the recommendation that children with special educational needs being integrated and taught in mainstream schools. The recent ALNet Act represents a change toward a more flexible, tailored, and holistic approach to supporting students with additional learning needs in Wales.

Time Line of SEND policies

1870: Education Act

1944: The Education Act (Butler Act)

1970: Education (Handicapped Children) Act

1978: The Warnock Report

1981: Education Act

1993: Education Act (Code of Practice for SEN)

2001: Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA)

2008: Welsh Government SEN Policy Review

2018: Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act

The Warnock Report (1978) : A Contested Issue

Historical Context

The Warnock Committee was tasked in reviewing the provision for children with learning disabilities and disabilities in 1974 by Education Secretary Margaret Thatcher.

The Report was prepared during a Conservative government that was deemed right-wing. The study recommended an inclusive education that reflected on their values and ideals of individual opportunity and in keeping with the conservative ideals and vision where “education is one where individuals, families, school staff and communities will be given ‘freedom’ to ‘take responsibility’ for the education system” (Exley&Ball,2011).

While the Conservative government focused on structural reforms where better infrastructure could improve outcomes, Labour adopted the report's ideas for equality for everyone. The emphasis on equality and inclusiveness, which aligned with Labour's left-wing beliefs, indicated that these values were not limited to a single political party. (Lindsay et al 2020)

The Warnock report came about at a time where there was a societal change in attitude both in the UK and internationally for students with special educational needs. The emphasis on inclusion for students with disabilities also saw the US pass the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) in 1975. This act gave all American children the right to “a free and appropriate public education regardless of disability status”. The act stated that all public schools had the duty to provide an education that met the needs of students with disabilities and that this would be publicly funded. (Ross,2022)



SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

Report of the Committee of Enquiry into the Education of Handicapped Children and Young People

Chairman: Mrs HM Warnock

*Presented to Parliament by the Secretary of State for Education and
Science, the
Secretary of State for Scotland and the Secretary of State for Wales by
Command
of Her Majesty
May 1978*

Key recommendations of the report

The Warnock Committee's findings were presented in a 400-page document in 1978 and made 30 recommendations to improve the education of children with disabilities including addressing teacher preparation, professional development, and multi agency collaboration.(Norwich,2019).

Among the significant outcomes were:

- **Terminology** - The report introduced the inclusive concept of 'Special Educational Needs' (SEN) replacing the stigmatising word of "handicapped" in the 1944 Education Act.
- **Mainstream Integration** - It also advocated for more inclusion of children with SEN in mainstream schools and emphasised the importance of a flexible, needs-based approach to education, emphasising that a child's educational requirements should take precedence over their specific disability or impairment (Wearmouth, 2016).
- **A Statementing System** - The report also proposed a new statutory framework for identifying and assessing SEN, leading to the introduction of the statementing process, which outlined the support needed for individual children with the most complex disabilities.

“A statement of SEN is a document which has legal status and is provided to parents, teachers and other professionals working with a child after a statutory assessment of a child's learning difficulties. It details a child's SEN and the educational provision that will be needed to address the barriers that a child is experiencing” Hodkinson & Vickerman (2009)

Warnock Report (1978)

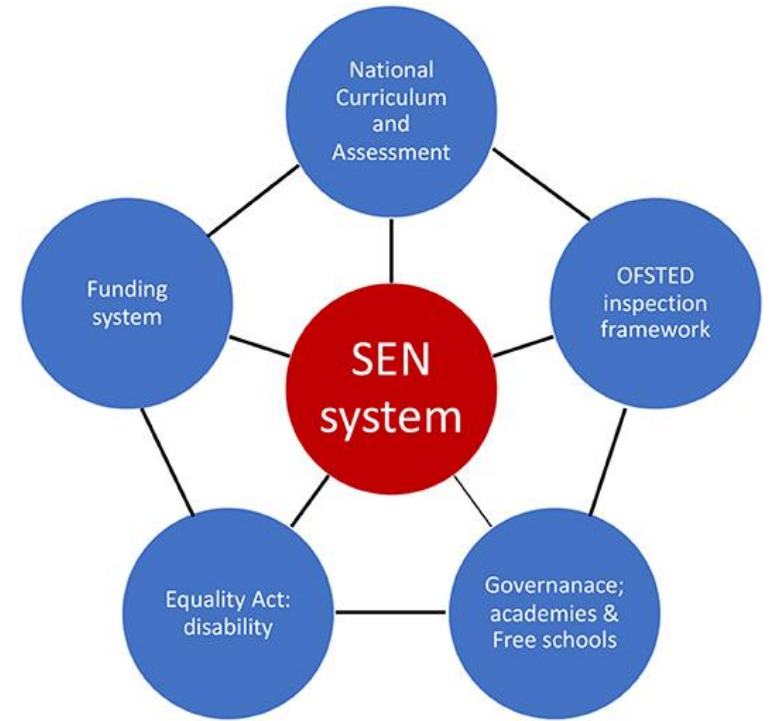
Key Period in Education

The Warnock Report was produced at a time when education for children with disabilities was mostly segregated, with little government backing for inclusive approaches. Charities and individuals frequently supported institutions for children with 'difficulties,' which only served a small number of pupils (Wearmouth, 2016).

At this time there was also no National Curriculum in Wales, and schools were left to create their own curriculum. This raised concerns surrounding the quality of education among schools and areas. (Welsh Government 2018).

Another issue at this time was that education was overseen by local governments, again resulting in differences in educational quality and funding among areas. This resulted in different experiences for pupils, especially those with special needs.

Although it was a major step in the direction of inclusivity in the provision of special education services for students with special needs (SEN), the Warnock Report generated a great deal of controversy. The report's support for integrating special needs students into mainstream classes, its emphasis on resource allocation, and its new statementing system have all generated controversy. (Lindsay *et al* 2020)



<https://images.app.goo.gl/5MRyMMDoEqfG39297>



Inclusiveness and Resources

The Warnock Report highlighted the need to replace outdated terminology. The term "handicapped children" to be replaced with "special educational needs" (DES, 1978). Although "special educational needs" (SEN) is a better phrase than "handicapped children," it had its own problems and caused some debate. According to Barton (2005) the term "special" may indicate a deviation from the norm, contributing to societal stigma. It may promote exclusion rather than inclusion in educational settings, even if the primary objective was to create a more inclusive framework. Norwich (2021) suggests that the difficulty in differentiating between various needs and severity of disability also caused confusion and unequal access to support resources (Norwich 2021). Ofsted (2004) claim this could be because the term "special educational needs" was too general.

The report suggested that children with SEN should not be segregated from their peers but instead integrated into mainstream schools wherever possible.

Booth and Ainscow (2002), say that integrating children with special educational needs into mainstream schools enhances social and emotional development, variety, and prepares all students with the necessary life skills. Some critics including Warnock herself argue that the Warnock report resulted in "integration" without "true inclusion." for students with SEN (Warnock, 2005)

Warnock stated that the challenge of achieving full integration, although being admirable, fell short in its implementation in mainstream schools (Warnock 2005). The resources and experience needed to provide SEN pupils with the help and support in mainstream school were frequently lacking according to Norwich (2021) and according to Carrera *et al.* (2023), several parents expressed concerns about their children being isolated and having a lack of support. This also highlights the practical difficulties of inclusion in mainstream schools.

A study by Ochs *et al.* from 2001 provides more evidence for this, revealing that parents of Autistic pupils said they "lacked awareness and understanding of their children's unique learning needs in the mainstream school system at all levels." According to Lindsay *et al.* (2020), the Warnock Report's goal of establishing equity is undermined because many schools, particularly those in underprivileged regions, still find it difficult to provide the resources needed to satisfy the requirements of their SEN pupils.

Statementing system

Another contentious issue with the Warnock report was the recommendation for the “statementing process”. The purpose of this was to determine and evaluate the requirements of children with severe special education needs. Although the system's aimed to ensure that all pupils got the help they needed, it ended up becoming resource-intensive, bureaucratic, and unresponsive to parents.

Warnock later acknowledged that one of the report's "disastrous legacies" was the statementing procedure (Warnock, 2005). Other critics such as Barton (2005) state that instead of allowing parents to rely on the statementing system to address their children's needs, it became a source of frustration for them because they often had to fight for necessary resources. Barton also argued that the system also resulted in children in different areas receiving different levels of help as a result due the different ways they were assessed.

Resistance to change

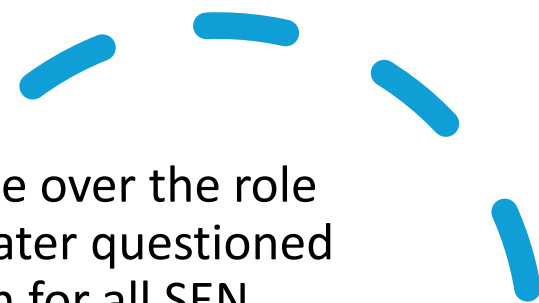
The recommendations for a more inclusive system by the Warnock report was hampered by opposition from some parents, teachers, and local government representatives. As Wearmouth (2016) points out, the challenges of attaining full inclusion were made worse by the lack of collaboration and understanding between parents, health providers, and educational experts.

Warnock highlighted the importance of "mutual respect" and an "awareness of what benefits the other professionals can bring to a particular child" (Warnock, 1979) in the report and it is obvious that these were important factors for the new system to work successfully.





The renewed role of special schools



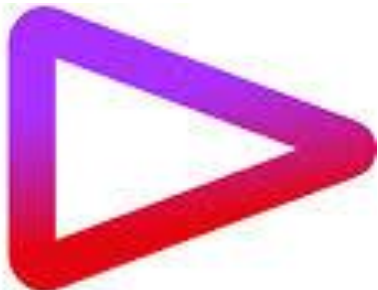
The Warnock report caused a debate over the role of special schools. When Warnock later questioned the successfulness of full integration for all SEN students, she suggested that special schools were essential for children with complex needs, such as Autism.

Barton (2005), argued against this view suggesting that by having some students in special schools and some in mainstream provision would increase discrimination. Barton stated that inclusion was not just about placement but about creating an equitable education system that addressed the needs of all students within a mainstream setting.



Conclusion

Despite these criticisms surrounding integration, resources allocation and the statementing system the principles of the Warnock Report continue to influence discussions on SEN education today with an emphasis on individual needs-based approaches such as that in the ALNet Act but the challenges that were also identified with the report such as true inclusion and resource allocation are also still issues today.

40 
YEARS
ON

Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018

The [Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal \(ALNet\) Act](#) (Wales) 2018

Wales, as a devolved nation can shape its own education policies, reflecting its distinct cultural and societal priorities (Senedd Cymru (2020). The Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (ALNet) Act (Wales) 2018 is an important reform in the education system of Wales and is based on the idea of inclusion, which was founded in the Warnock Report's 1978 recommendations that "education must be about the development of individual, person-centred potential, whatever the nature of that potential may be" (DES, 1978).

The main aim of the act is to make sure that all learners with additional learning needs have their needs met (Marsh & Jeans, 2024) and to update and replace SEN processes with a simplified framework, removing the barriers that SEN learners may have previously faced (Welsh Government, 2022).



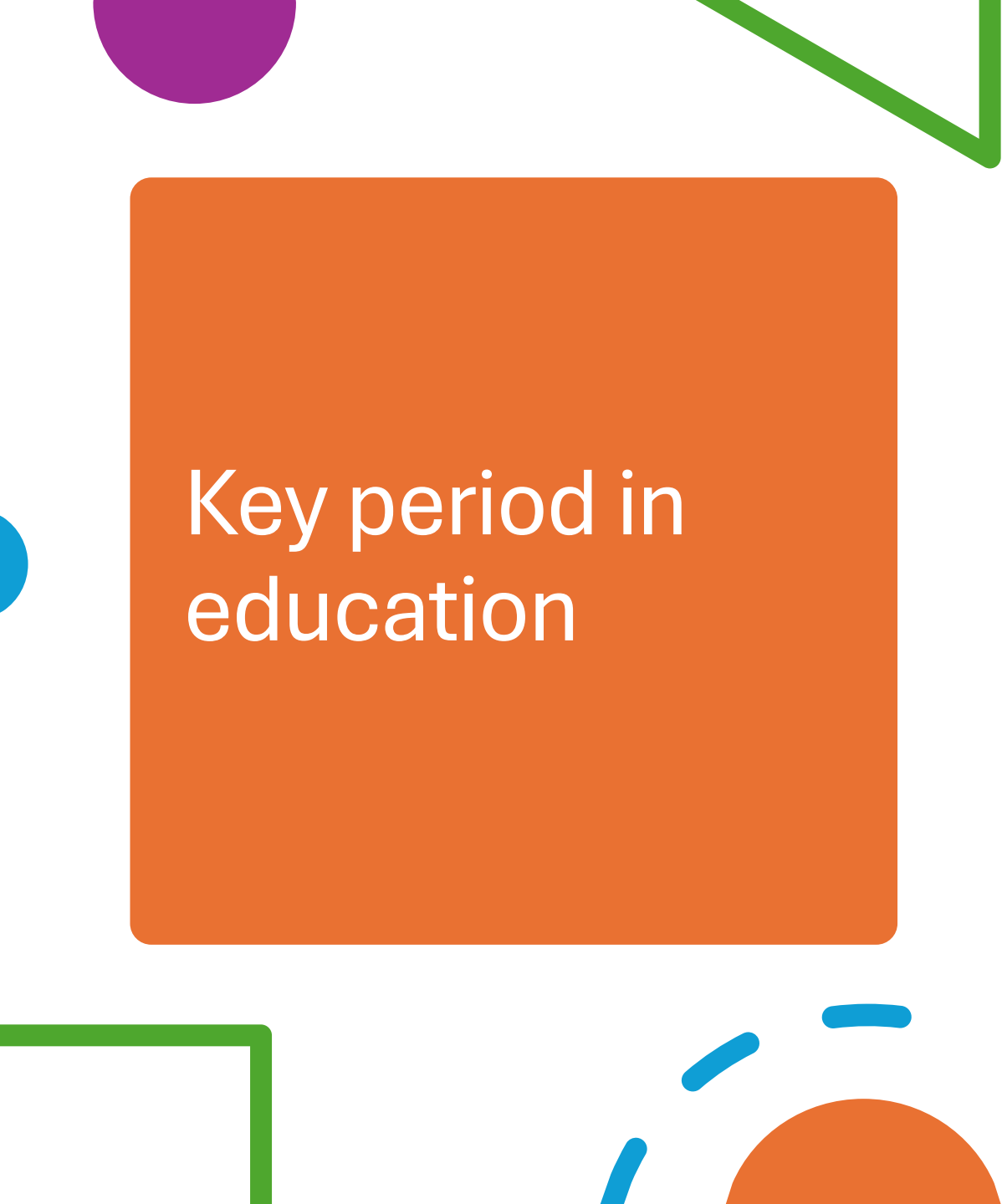
Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

ADDITIONAL LEARNING NEEDS AND EDUCATION TRIBUNAL (WALES) ACT

Key features of the ALNet Act

- The Welsh Government state that the Act's primary goals include:
- 1. Replacing the term 'special educational needs' (SEN) with 'additional learning needs' (ALN).
- 2. Replacing SEN statements with a single statutory plan called an Individual Development Plan (IDP),
- 3. Provide effective support for learners with additional learning needs through multi-agency collaboration. .
- 4. Ensure a person-centred approach, giving a greater voice to learners and their families in decisions about education (Welsh Government, 2018).

"The ALNet is designed to be more person-centred, emphasising the rights of learners and ensuring that the voices of children and young people are heard in decisions about their education" (Welsh Government, 2018).



Key period in education

Mark Drakeford, the First Minister of Wales at the time of the introduction of the ALNet stressed the Welsh Government's commitment to building a "fairer and more inclusive society," stating, "But I am determined that as we move Wales forward, no one will be left behind and no one will be held back" (Welsh Government, 2021). At a similar time was the introduction of the Curriculum for Wales (2022). This also focused on creating an inclusive, skills-based education system designed to meet the needs of all learners with the offer of 'successful futures' for all (Donaldson, G. 2015)



Contested issues for ALNet act 2018

The Act aimed to be more person-centred and promote more inclusivity replacing the previous Special Educational Needs (SEN) framework. Despite the Act being mainly supported by stakeholders, studies such as that by Duggan et al (2023) have found criticism and concerns regarding its implementation, resource allocation, and practical impact.

The Act aimed to be more person-centred and promote more inclusivity replacing the previous Special Educational Needs (SEN) framework. Despite stakeholders being involved in the process and the Act being mainly supported by stakeholders it has faced criticisms.

In a Welsh Government report looking at the progress of schools and local authorities in supporting pupils with additional learning needs they found that the implementation of the ALNet has created “significant additional workload for both local authorities and schools” (Welsh Government, 2023)

Resource allocation

One area of issue in the implementation of the ALNet Act appears to be the allocation of resources to meet the needs of learners. A statistical analysis of the Governments figures by Jeans and Marsh in 2023 showed big differences in Local Authorities' spending on SEN services.

According to Evans *et al.* (2021), financing concerns were the main obstacle in getting help, with stakeholders noting "cutbacks to specialised services, delays in Individual Development Plans (IDP) evaluations, and an overreliance on untrained staff". In 2019 research by the Welsh Government also discussed concerns with schools and other educational facilities 'lacking resources' to meet the aims of the ALNET.

A report by the National Assembly for Wales (2019) found that there were also inequalities geographically. They found that schools in rural areas faced greater difficulties in accessing specialised support or equipment to meet some of the needs of their learners



Welsh public services must make cuts, Mark Drakeford says

9 August 2023



The financial situation doesn't look to get any better with the Labour-run administration stating in 2023 that it was £900m short in its £20bn budget than when it was set in 2021.

First Minister Mark Drakeford at the time asked his ministers to find cuts in public services as inflation and public sector pay put the squeeze on Welsh government budgets.

“No department - including the NHS and education - has been ruled out”

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-politics-66438471>

Inadequate staff training

The Welsh Government (2018) published a report outlining the ALNET legislation's requirements and how it will be carried out and implemented in Welsh schools. This research emphasizes the importance of well-trained and competent professionals at all levels of education for the new system. (The Welsh Government, 2018)

The Estyn Report (2024) however discovered "variability in the quality of local authority guidance for inclusive teaching and learning" and stated that certain staff did not get appropriate training to properly implement the changes, adding to inconsistency throughout the sector.

A progress report in 2019 by Swansea local authority also found that lack of training as an issue with the implementation and in particular found that delays in Welsh Government-led training for ALN Co-ordinators (ALNCos) had created challenges. (Swansea Council, 2019)

The Welsh Government suggests that staff training would be key to the successful implementation of the Act's changes with the introduction of IDP's and the new role of The additional needs coordinators. (Welsh Government, 2018)

Wheeler (2017) found that although progress at pioneer schools had been encouraging there were persistent issues in providing staff with necessary skills and training to properly implement the ALNET. Wheeler suggested that lack of resources to provide continuous professional development (CPD) for all staff was a concern. ALNCOs and school leaders also highlighted access to training as an issue across the education sector. (Welsh Government, 2015)

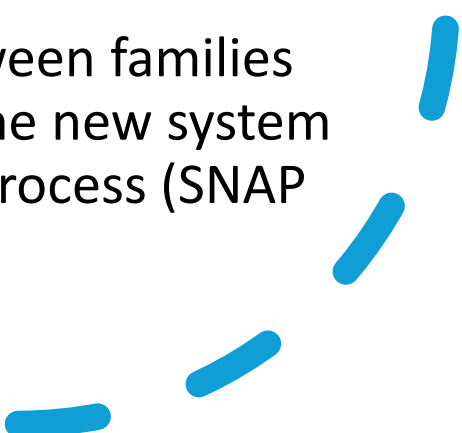
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Collaboration issues

For the successful implementation of the ALNet the Welsh Government (2019) stresses the importance of collaboration. Reports suggest that collaboration is system but for the success of the ALN system, particularly in creating Individual Development Plans. Collaboration isn't always successful however, and difficulties in coordinating meetings with multi agency teams can often prove difficult due to resource and communication barriers (Llwyd, 2021).

Ainscow (2020) suggests that successful collaboration relies on valuing the expertise of all stakeholders, including families but Llwyd (2021) suggests that system constraints, such as limited time and access to information is a barrier to this being successful.

Collaboration and partnership working between families and settings is essential for the success of the new system but is reliant on all parties engaging in the process (SNAP Cymru, 2021).

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Bilingualism Welsh speakers being at a disadvantage

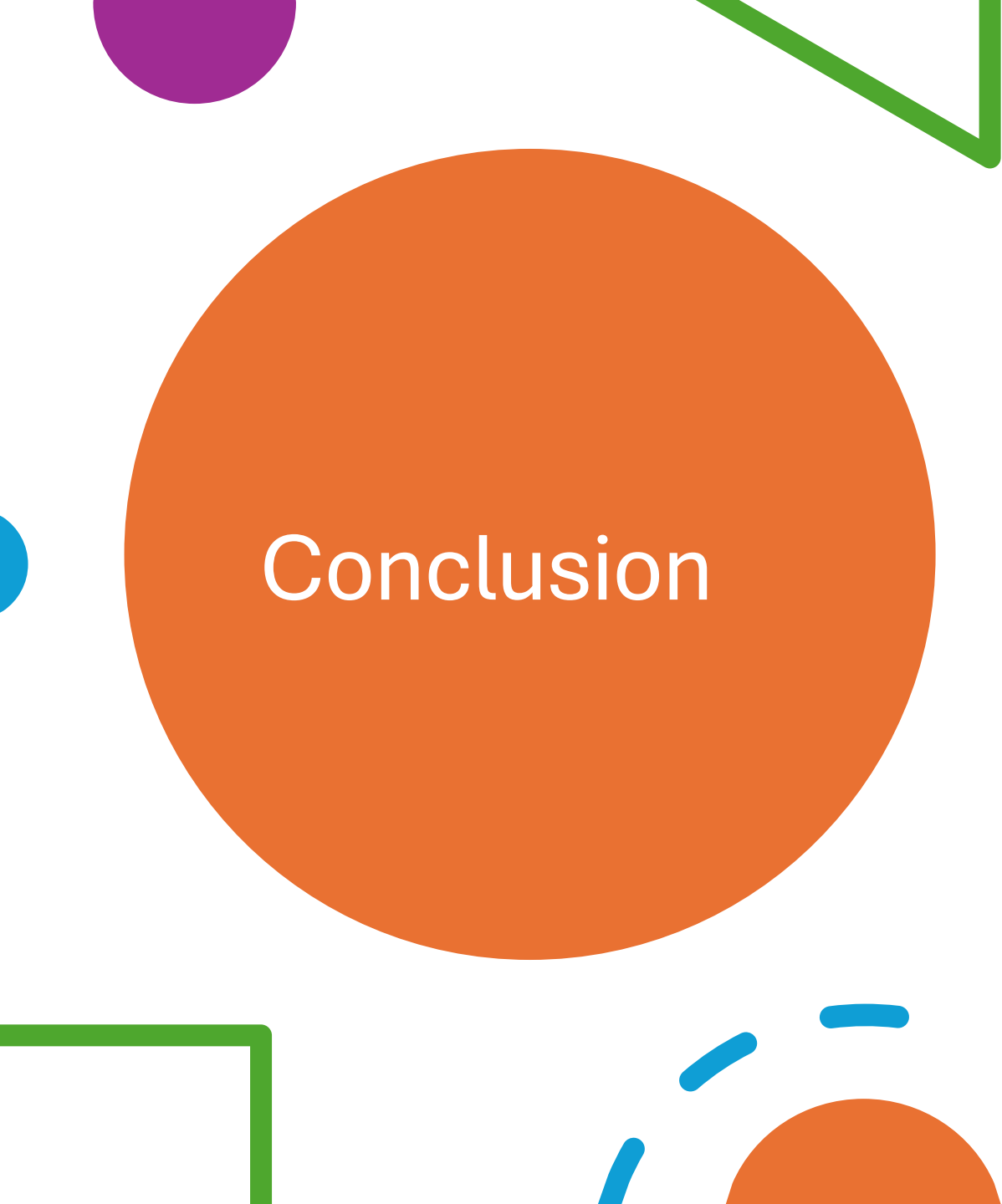


The ALNet places a legal obligation on schools and local authorities to support learners requiring Additional Learning Provision (ALP) through the medium of Welsh (Welsh Government, 2021). However, there appears to be controversy due to a lack of Welsh-medium resources.

A study by Davies (2023) found that Welsh speaking students are at a disadvantage compared to their English-speaking peers.

Davies goes on to say that teachers and additional learning needs coordinators have identified issues with implementing the ALN system, mostly owing to a lack of Welsh assessments, classroom resources, and Welsh speaking staff. (Davies, 2023)

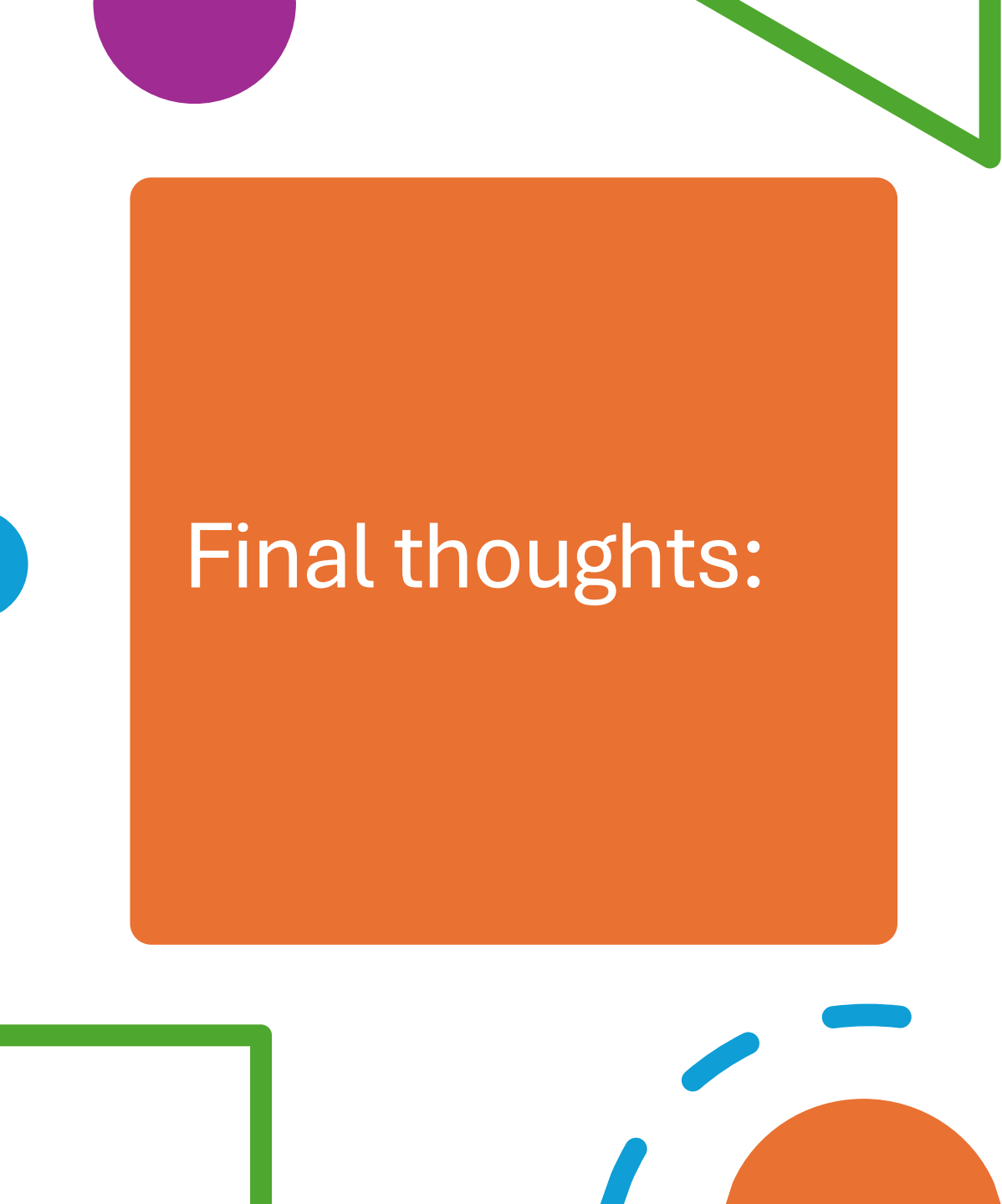




Conclusion

The Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (ALNet) Act (2018) is an important step in creating a more inclusive, person-centred-approach to education in Wales. With the main aims being to replace SEN with ALN, create Individual Development Plans (IDPs), and improving partnerships by working collaboratively are mostly welcomed there have also been criticisms.

Discrepancies in the allocation of money, inadequate staff training, and barriers to collaboration have prevented it from being completely successful. Addressing these concerns is crucial to ensuring that the ALNet Act achieves its goal of providing an inclusive education for all learners.



Final thoughts:

Both the Warnock Report and ALNet have good intentions, and they support an inclusive education system. However, it is evident from both that for there to be a truly inclusive education system there needs to be time, ongoing funding, clear communication among stakeholders and a full commitment to meeting the different needs of all learners.



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Ai declaration

I acknowledge the use of Co Pilot to research the Warnock report and key period in Education.

I acknowledge the use of Co Pilot for information on the Governments in control at the time of the Warnock report and how this was relevant to the report.

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