

Introduction

The law for children and young people with Additional Learning Needs (ALN) is changing, the Welsh Government (2018) plans to change expectations, outcomes and experiences for all additional learning needs children. The Welsh Government itself has recognised that the current arrangements are no longer fit for purpose, and the new additional learning needs bill will completely change the way children and young people's needs are met (Welsh Parliament, 2017). The new bill will determine a new statutory framework for supporting children and young people with ALN from birth to age 25 which will replace previous legislation and arrangements which currently exist for children aged up to 16 (Welsh Parliament, 2017). The new bill aims to ensure that all children and adults with ALN are correctly supported to overcome barriers to learning which will enable them to achieve their full potential, planning should be improved along with delivery of support for learners aged 0-25 putting the views, wishes and feelings at the heart of the process and all decisions. Needs should be identified early allowing effective intervention to be introduced in a timely manner (Rhondda Cynon Taff County Borough Council Cabinet, 2021). The three main points I will discuss today along with implications for practitioners are increased collaboration, the use of Welsh provision and the use of Individual Development Plan's (IDP'S).

Increased Collaboration

The expansion of new roles can sometimes lead to confusion for practitioners regarding roles amongst the team and some practitioners questioning how their role will work, some practitioners also feel that multi agency working can have an impact on their professional status, for example some agencies not seeing the importance of others (Atkinson et al., 2008). Despite this multiagency working and increased collaboration gives practitioners time to invest in building quality relationships with those they work with, receiving clearer and improved information on where and how to refer children and more relevant and up to date knowledge and information (The Benefits and Challenges of Multiagency Working, 2008). Multiagency working also benefits teacher understanding of the work that multi-agency workers carry out, meaning they can easily signpost children and families in the future alongside strengthening their own knowledge, Improved co-ordination of services also results in better relationships and improved referrals which in some cases can be less stress for school staff (The Benefits and Challenges of Multiagency Working, 2008). Increased workload would also be an implication for practitioners due to the work required to share information in a timely manner and to the correct people, this can increase demands and pressure on people to get jobs done (Atkinson et al., 2008). Nevertheless, working together avoids duplication of processes amongst agencies, there is also argument that multiagency working decreases workloads rather than increases them due to the amount of people allocated to each child, as working as a team improves efficiency. Some professionals even state that there was overall a better understanding between professionals and communication improved resulting in better delivery of recourses (Home Office, 2014).

IDP's

The IDP aims to be more accessible for practitioners and will make keeping up with children and young people's needs more straightforward (SNAP CYMRU, 2020). As it will now be easier to obtain an IDP due to the fact it focuses on needs rather than a diagnosis this does come with a bear of more paperwork for staff as they will be providing IDP'S for a wider range of pupils (SNAP CYMRU, 2019). This can in turn cause stress levels to rise, according to the UK's Health and Safety Executive teaching staff and education professionals report the highest rate of work related stress, depression and anxiety in Britain (Welsh Government, 2019). The report from Estyn showed that teachers suffer from high workloads, lack of work life balance and lack of recourses, teachers stated that the main causes for heavy workload are, lack of support from specialist agencies and frequently changing government policies and regulations (Welsh Government, 2019). The new IDP system relies on the family of the child being involved to create the new plan SNAP CYMRU (2020) states that this could be an implication because some families may choose not to engage making it more difficult for staff members to support said child. Despite this the new IDP could bring families and school practitioners closer together due to the general duty to involve children and families in decision making by putting the child at the heart of the process (Welsh Government, No Date). This could in turn build trust between and practitioners and strengthen relationships ensuring better provision for children (National Day Nurseries Association, No Date). Time scale requirements have been deemed impractical, and unlikely that a plan for the child will be drafted and finalised in the designated timescale, again causing stress to practitioners and those involved (Welsh Government, No Date).

Bilingualism

A document explaining the findings of a census taken in 2015 shows that just over 40% of children aged 3-15 have Welsh as a first language (Welsh Government, 2015), The Census results also show that in places such as Monmouthshire and Newport have a very small percentage of people who use Welsh daily, with an average of 24% of fluent speakers in comparison to Carmarthenshire with a number of 71% (Welsh Government, 2015). This could have positive implications on current practitioners because there will be a need to train staff in the Welsh medium to enable the Welsh Government to provide the provision they are promising. Welsh Government (2016) state that in 2019 they are offering free Welsh courses to school and education staff, to help support the new curriculums for the foundation phase, the courses vary in skill level but for beginners the course lasts approximately 5 weeks. Although this could look like a positive implication for practitioners, there is already a worry that teachers are overworked and underpaid with a majority of teachers admitting they work an average of 50 hours per week, 19 hours above the average recommended full time hours which comes in at 39 hours a week (Kane, 2016). A study from 2020 suggests that 23% of teachers in the UK reported that the mental health was very poor due to unrealistic workloads and work related stress, this percentage is 360% higher than it was two years ago (Randstad, 2016). This suggests that adding the added pressure of intensive courses to teachers and teaching staff could result in even higher levels of stress. A positive implication of the Welsh training courses would be a chance for practitioners to improve their professional development, this could open up job opportunity or promotions within their current role, improve confidence and enable them to communicate with a wider range of the community (National Centre for Learning Welsh, No Date).

Conclusion

To conclude, the Welsh Government have themselves recognised that current arrangements, provision and support for children and adults with ALN are no longer fit for purpose and need to be updated (Welsh Parliament, 2017). These changes will have some positive implications on practitioners such as extra training, more clarity on certain situations and better relationships with multi agencies and some negative implications such as more training, heavier workloads and possible longer working hours. Overall, the new ALN bill will better the lives and education of all the children it impacts, enabling schools and staff to offer better provision which will be personalised to each child, implementing a person centred approach.

ALN implementation timeline



(Welsh Government, 2018).