

Implications of impending changes to Additional learning needs legislation in Wales for Early Years Practitioners.

Why is the legislation changing?

The current legislation is referred to as the Special Educational Needs legislation as stated by the Department of Education (2015) however the legislation is in transition to become Additional Learning Needs. Dauncey (2016) demonstrate that the Welsh Government have recognised for a number of years the current system is 'no longer fit for purpose'. The Welsh Government believes that the model introduced more than 30 years ago needs to be replaced with a more 'modern approach to multiagency working'. Welsh Government (2018) highlight that the reason for the change is to be able to deliver a more inclusive education system, furthermore it aims to ensure early years practitioners are more skilled and confident when it comes to identifying additional learning needs and deploying strategies to help learners.

Process of change

- Special Educational needs (SEN) > Additional Learning Needs (ALN)
- Age range – Current up to 16 > 0-25 years old
- Statements of SEN and Learning Difficulty Assessments > Individual development plan (IDP)

Practitioner training and experience

- Esytyn (2018) reported that across Wales teachers' knowledge and understanding of Special Educational Needs (SEN) in general and of the specific needs of pupils they teach vary. Teachers do not recognise or adapt their teaching approaches well enough to meet the needs of pupils with SEN. Similarly, guide to the law (2019) states mainstream practitioners don't often have the experience or knowledge to deal with SEN children which would make identifying and assessing SEN children difficult.
- In contrast the Welsh Government (2018) explain, the new legislation works to improve the process in identifying children and young people with additional learning needs through the process of early intervention. NSPCC learning (2019) propose that providing early intervention will have a positive impact on the child in question, it will benefit the family and improve identification of any additional learning needs required.

Individual development plan (IDP)

Special educational needs legislation operates through old statements of special educational needs and learning difficulty assessments. Welsh Government social research (2014) state that there are weaknesses of the exiting legislation and framework, following the assessments of the weaknesses the individual developmental plan has been introduced for the new legislation. Welsh Government social research (2014) explain that a individual developmental plan have been introduced for the child's learning needs furthermore, it is provided to support them. Alongside a IDP comes into place a quality assurance system which is provided to monitor outcomes and enable additional learning needs provisions to be evaluated by practitioners.

Special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) > Additional learning needs co-ordinator (ALNCO)

- The role of a SENCO is a role that has been within the education system for many years, Welsh Government (2017) stated the role of a SENCO is the overall responsibility of ensuring the coordination for the learners with SEN is completed. However, since the development of the new legislation Swansea council (2019) have stated the role of a SENCO has developed further and is now referred to as an additional learning needs co-ordinator.
- All maintained school now must have a ALNCO.
- Provision Map (2019) have stated that a ALNCO must now have an equal status as a head teacher/deputy head teacher.