

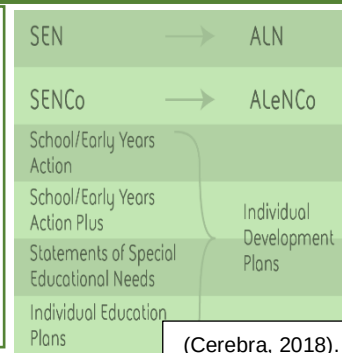
The Implications of the Impending Changes to SEN/ALN Legislation Changes in Wales

Introduction

The Additional Learning Needs (ALN) and Educational Tribunal Act was passed in January 2018 by the Welsh Government (Cerebra, 2018). The ALN Code and regulations were approved by the Senedd on 23rd March 2021. The Additional Learning Needs (ALN) and Educational Tribunal Act along with the ALN Code and regulations will set a new statutory ALN support system for young people aged 0 to 25 in Wales (Cerebra, 2021). To respond to growing issues surrounding children with special educational needs (SEN) in Wales, the Welsh Government's new ALN system 'aims to ensure that all learners with ALN are supported to overcome barriers to learning and can achieve their full potential' (Welsh Government, 2020). Due to the new ALN system substantial changes for schools, colleges, and local authorities the system will be introduced gradually with a three-year implementation period beginning from September 2021 (Snap Cymru, 2021; Welsh Government, 2021). Initially the system was due to start September 2020 but due to the unprecedented impact of COVID-19 the Welsh Government decided to extend the start date to September 2021 (Welsh Government, 2021). During the implementation period the ALN system will 'operate in parallel to the existing Special Educational Needs (SEN) system' (Welsh Government, 2018a, page 2). The SEN system will be progressively phased out during the three-year transition period.

SEN transition to ALN

Welsh Government (2014, page 2) notes how the SEN system is more than 30 years old and is 'no longer fit for purpose'. Therefore, the new ALN system that will replace SEN, aims to provide a more modern approach to promote collaboration with parents, children and multiagency to support the individual needs of children with ALN in a more timely and effective way (Dauncey, 2015). Welsh Government (2018b) agrees with the need for reform within Wales in order to reduce bureaucracy and to allow for a more transparent system for all stakeholders. Furthermore, A significant change to the new act is the terminology. The term Special Educational Needs (SEN) and Special Educational Provision and 'Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities (LDD), will be replaced with the term Additional Learning Needs (ALN) and Additional Learning Plan (Dewis Cymru, 2020). The terminology change from Special Educational Needs to Additional Learning Needs is intended to be a more inclusive and descriptive term to reduce the stigma attached to labelling young people with differing needs (Snap Cymru, 2016).



IEP transition IDP

Individual Education Plans, School/Early Years Action, School/Early Years Action Plus and Statements will be phased out and all children with recognised Additional Learning Needs will be issued with a new statutory document called an Individual Development Plan (IDP) (Snap Cymru, 2021). All children and young people with ALN will be entitled to an IDP and these children and young people will receive support called Additional Learning Provision (ALP) which will be included within their IDP document (Welsh Government, 2021c). A process called Person Centred Planning (PCP) will be used when creating an IDP, this process ensures that the child is at the centre of all decisions being made and the views, wishes and feelings of the child and their parents are considered throughout the creation of the IDP (Gwynedd Council, 2021). Current statements cease when a young person leaves school, however, IDP's will continue until the young person is 25 years of age if they choose to enter further education (Snap Cymru, 2021). Welsh Government (2018b) supports this change by explaining how the extension of the age range can enable children and young people 'to receive seamless education support throughout their school life'. Furthermore, the ALN code's intentions for IDP's is to ensure that it is as child centred as possible. Children and young people should be able to make decisions over their IDP's and the document should be written in a child friendly way in which children can understand (Children's Commissioner for Wales, 2019). Therefore, a 'One-page profile' will be created as part of the IDP document as a summary of the child. This will include information about what is important to the child and what is important for the child (Welsh Government, 2021d). This profile gathers key information about the child which can be 'quickly shared and understood' (Welsh Government, 2015). However, issues have been discussed regarding the lack of information sharing between teaching staff and support staff, with the Department for Education (2017) reporting how support staff are not always aware of children with ALN within their classroom. With support staff not having up-to-date information regarding the needs of the children, children with ALN may not be supported in the most effective manner.

Role of the ALNCo

The non-statutory role of the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCo) will be replaced with the new statutory Additional Learning Needs Co-ordinator (ALNCo) role. 'The ALNCo is the individual who at a strategic level within a school ensures the needs of all learners with ALN within the education setting are met' (Welsh Government, 2020b). The ALNCo is responsible for the management of within the school setting and plays a key role in the development of the ALN policy and provision within the setting (Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council, no date). Welsh Government (2021c) guidance notes how 'it is vital' for the ALNCo to be given sufficient time to ensure their responsibilities are undertaken effectively. However, a NASUWT (2021) report argues that '81% of SENCos/ALNCo's/ASN Co-ordinators report that they have insufficient time to fulfil their SEN/ALN/ASN responsibilities' and are therefore finding it difficult to manage the increasing demands and expectations being placed on them. This is also supported by Welsh Government (2018b) who labelled the new level of workload placed on ALNCo's to be 'unmanageable'. Although Welsh Government (2018b) also claims that the writing and reviewing of IDP's would be a 'bureaucratic burden' on ALNCo's, it is stated within the 'Role of the Additional Learning Needs Co-ordinator -Non-statutory guidance' that ALNCo's have an overall responsibility for ensuring that all ALN children within the setting are issued with an IDP. However, ALNCo are not required to develop every IDP.

Conclusion

Although the new ALN system has not yet began the implementation period, the new system has many positive elements to ensure that all children and young people with ALN in Wales are identified in a timelier manner and the most effective support is put in place. The continuity of the IDP's, along with the promotion of multiagency collaboration can allow for a more transparent system, which can improve child and parent engagement and build resilience in children and young people with ALN as they progress through their education journey (Radley, 2020). Careful consideration of the workload of ALNCo's can ensure that their role remains manageable, which can allow ALNCo's to carry out their statutory responsibilities in the most effective manner in order to create a more supportive and inclusive provision for children with ALN within their setting.

