



Additional Learning Needs (ALN) in Wales: Promise, Pressure and Persistent Gaps

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“Bridging the gap between policy intentions and classroom reality is essential for every learner to thrive.”



1. BACKGROUND

- ALNET (Wales) Act 2018 replaced the former SEN system.
- Creates a unified system to support learners aged 0–25.
- Emphasises inclusion, person-centred practice and the rights of the child.
- Around 12% of learners in Wales are identified with ALN.



Critical insight:

Highlights increasing demand on mainstream schools and the need for early and consistent support.



2. POLICY

- Individual Development Plans (IDPs) replace Statements and IEPs.
- Provide a single plan for all learners (0–25 years).
- Promote collaboration across education, health and social care.
- Align with UNCRC and UNCRPD commitments.



Critical insight: Aims to reduce fragmentation and create a child-centred system. **However**, IDPs may increase administrative demands on teachers.



3. KEY IDEAS



Critical insight: Aims to address inequalities and improve coordination. **However**, implementation remains inconsistent across Wales.



4. CHALLENGES



- Delays in assessment and decision making.
- Complex multi-agency processes and long referral pathways.
- Increased workload and time pressures for educators.
- Unequal access to specialist support and resources across Wales.



Critical insight: These challenges can lead to inequality in provision and a disconnect between policy goals and classroom reality.



5. MEDIA & PUBLIC VIEWS

- Parents report long delays in assessments and support.
- Teachers highlight workload pressures and confusion over IDP requirements.
- Unequal, patchy access to provision across local authorities.
- Calls for clearer guidance, regular funding and greater accountability.



Critical insight: Reflects real experiences of policy in practice and shows the gap between intentions and reality.



6. KEY DEBATES

- Tension between the ambition of person-centred practice and limited time, staffing and resources.
- Debate over whether IDPs reduce bureaucracy or simply shift it to schools.
- Concerns that reforms do not fully address inequalities in access to specialists.
- Long-term funding and training needed to ensure sustainable delivery.



Critical insight: Raises important questions about the sustainability and effectiveness of ALN reform in the long term.



7. CONCLUSION

- ✓ ALN reform in Wales is a positive step towards inclusion, equity and person-centred support.
- ✓ However, significant challenges remain in implementation, resources and consistency.

Bridging the gap between policy intentions and classroom reality is essential for every learner to thrive.



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