

Impending changes to ALN policy in Wales

Out with the old - Special Educational Needs (SEN) and Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities (LDD) system

In with the new - **Additional Learning Needs (ALN) and Educational Tribunal (Wales) Act (2020)**

The changes to the new ALN reform were due to be rolled out September 2020, however, due to unforeseen circumstances the roll out will continue September 2021 instead. Pembrokeshire County council are at the forefront in the delivery of training and support in one of the key areas of the new ALN Act (2018); the Individual Development Plan (IDP).

Statement to IDP

One of the key changes within the Additional Learning Needs (ALN) and Educational Tribunal (Wales) Act is the replacement of statementing, with a new person centred Individual development plan (IDP). It is hoped that the IDP method will be a much simpler approach providing a more holistic process than that of SEN statements (Welsh Government, 2018a). The timescale for issuing a statement under the SEN can take up to 26 weeks, it is proposed that an IDP will be in place within seven to twelve weeks (Welsh Government, 2019c). Formal Statements were only provided for children with severe complex needs therefore previously the needs of all children who required additional support were not being met or identified (Blatchford, Russell and Webster, 2013). IDPs will be provided for all children and young people aged 0 to 25 with ALN regardless of the severity or complexity of their learning difficulty or disability (Welsh Government, 2019b). For practitioners observations of children remain crucial as the gathering of information will ensure quality and increase consistency, therefore empowering practitioners and give them the flexibility to respond to individual needs and interests (Dauncey, 2018). Information gathered on the IDP will identify and allow the removal of any barriers that may arise during a transition process due to lack of knowledge about the child. Practitioners have raised concerns about training not being made available for everyone. Guidance and best practice examples in person-centred practice (PCP) (Welsh Government, 2018b) aims to make sure that practitioners work with pupils to gain a better understanding of their views, aims and needs and act upon these in the planning and delivery of their support.

Welsh Language

If additional learning provision is required in Welsh by a child or young person, 'all reasonable steps' must be taken to deliver its provision (Welsh Government, 2018c). The ALN Act (2018) aims to deliver a truly bilingual system which supports and protects children who require additional learning to be delivered through the medium of Welsh. The ALN Act (2018) focusses on relevant Welsh training and courses readily available for practitioners as part of the wider ALN Transformation Programme; the specialist skills development part of the programme states that the education workforce will be up-skilled and equipped to deliver the new system (Welsh Government, 2018d). The Welsh Government's strategy, Cymraeg 2050 - A million Welsh speakers, states, 'Education is central to our vision, but we must ensure our young people come out of the education system ready and proud to use the language in all contexts as set out in Welsh in Education Action plan 2017-2021' (Welsh Government, 2017).

SEN to ALN

The Role of Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) has always been an important one ensuring the support for children with additional needs. The new legislation has recognised this vital role and developed it further (Edukey, 2019). The SENCO will now be referred to as Additional Learning Needs Coordinator (ALNCO). The allocated person to take on the role should have the same status as that of a Head teacher. The allocated Person will be a school teacher; or a special educational needs co-ordinator within the school immediately prior to the coming into force of new regulations (Welsh Government, 2019b). There will be a need to continue to develop knowledge and skills in coordination, leadership and ALN specialism (National Assembly for Wales, 2017), whilst always endorsing a person-centred practice ethos. Pembrokeshire county council are fully supportive of the impending changes by offering training for ALNCOs including person-centred planning in the form of PowerPoint presentations. The training focusses on one page profiles, importance of collaboration and legislation (Pembrokeshire County Council, n.d).

In conclusion ...

To ensure the successful delivery of the ALN reform, a skilled workforce is essential. Training has been identified as being paramount for practitioners to be able to support children with additional learning needs within settings. Welsh Government aims to provide training in Person-Centred Planning (PCPs), multi-agency working, Welsh language and progressive pathways for ALNCOs. Practitioners must be aware of their roles to ensure that good practice continues throughout the current and into the future ALN system.