

Impending Changes to Additional Learning Needs (ALN) Legislation in Wales

What is the additional learning needs (ALN) transformation programme?

The main focus of the additional learning needs transformation programme is to change the experiences, expectations and outcomes of life for children and young people aged 0 to 25 who have additional learning needs (ALN) (Welsh Government, 2018a).

The Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018 will replace the Special Educational Needs (SEN) framework that is currently in place with a restructured system that will be centred on Additional Learning Needs (ALN). The Act will also enhance cooperation between local authorities and the health boards, it will also be establishing a fairer and more transparent system with greater emphasis on disagreement avoidance and dispute resolution (Dauncey, 2018).

The Welsh Government (2018b) states that the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018 has a focus to form a united legislative framework to make sure children of compulsory school age or younger as well as young people who are in school or further education (FE) who have additional learning needs (ALN) have the support they need. They will also aim to provide a united, process of assessment, planning and observing which allows initial and effective interventions within a time frame. There will also be a reasonable and understanding system for providing the information and help as well as solving appeals and concerns.

The introduction of the term 'Additional Learning Needs (ALN)'

The Act will change the terms 'special educational needs (SEN)' and 'learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD)' with the new term 'additional learning needs (ALN)' (Welsh Government, 2018a). The special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCo) will also now be known as the additional learning needs co-ordinator (ALNCo). Role of the Additional Learning Needs Co-ordinator (ALNCo) establishes the role, responsibilities and obligations of the ALNCo. Whilst all teachers and education staff are mentors of all pupils with Additional Learning Needs, it is the ALNCo who has the responsibility of higher knowledge to make sure the needs of all pupils with Additional Learning Needs are met within the education setting. Their role is essential to the pupils with additional learning needs and as a result of this form part of the team of senior leadership. As a result, the setting will be able to plan, handle and carry out its duties and responsibilities in recognizing and ensuring the needs of the children and young people with Additional Learning Needs are met (Welsh Government, 2018c). Although the additional learning needs co-ordinator no longer needs to have a postgraduate qualification, there are Regulations in place to prepare for the additional learning needs system that will take place from September 2021, the Additional Learning Needs Co-ordinator (Wales) Regulations 2020 began from the 4 January 2021. The regulations include the necessary qualifications or experience that an ALNCo must have. They also explain the role of an ALNCo's (Welsh Government, 2021).

Individual Development Plan (IDP)

According to Snap Cymru (No Date) The Welsh Government is planning a new, easier and more approachable system of meeting the Additional Learning Needs of children and young people. An Individual Development Plan (IDP) is essential to the plans for changing the way children and young people are assessed and allows for their Special Educational Needs to be met. It is predicted that the individual development plan will replace the current Statement of Special Educational Needs over a phased period. The individual development plan will be carried out using a person-centred planning approach. All IDP's will include each child or young person having an Action Plan suited for them, as well as promoting a key-working where needed and use an adaptable process. The Additional Learning Needs Act allows for the use of Individual Development Plans (IDPs) for all children and young people with Additional Learning Needs. The use of individual development plans will allow the current discrepancy between school led interventions and statements issues by the local authority to come to end. It will also enable individual legislative procedures that are in place for children in schools and post-16 students in colleges and further education (Dauncey, 2018).

Increased participation of children and young people

The Act requires that the views of learners' should always be taken into consideration as part of the planning process, as well as the views of their parents/carers. It is vital that children and young people can see the planning process a process that is done together with them instead of to them (Welsh Government, 2018a). These requirements are known as a 'person-centred' approach by the Welsh Government. The draft Code states that 'anyone exercising functions under the Act, or this Code will need to involve children and young people at every stage of the process, with their views, wishes and feelings listened to' (para 22) (Dauncey, 2018).

A 0 to 25 age range

There will be one legislative system involving the support given to children and young people aged between 0 to 25 years who have Additional Learning Needs. This will replace the two different systems currently in place to support children and young people of compulsory school age who have Special Educational Needs and support young people in further education who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities (Welsh Government, 2018a). The Welsh Government has stated that by having the age range from 0 to 25 it will allow the learners in further education who currently have separate Learning and Skills Plans (LSPs) to be able to have more of an equal position with their school-based equivalents. The government have also said it will enhance the transition between school and further education (Dauncey, 2018).

Additional learning needs (ALN) timeline



(Welsh Government, 2018a)

Conclusion

To conclude by having a system in place to support children and young people with Additional learning needs will have a positive impact on both them and the practitioners and settings they are in. There will be a system in place to ensure the needs of the children and young people are met within a time frame. However, the Welsh Government (2021) argues that the needs of each child will be different and so the time frame will also differ. There will also be a process that will need to be carried out in order to reach a final decision on the Individual development plan of each person which can take some time. Children and young people who have additional learning needs are at a clear disadvantage compared to those who do not have an additional learning need. The educational achievement levels for those with additional learning needs are considerably below average and as a result of this their future life can be seen as being compromised (Welsh Government, 2021).