

The Additional Learning Needs (ALN) Code Wales

Implications on Practice

The ALN Code sets out the way the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) 2018 Act will be put into practice and the duties of the various organisations involved in such provision (Welsh Parliament, 2021). This will replace the current SEN Code of Practice for Wales 2004 (NDNA, 2019) and is the first major overhaul of a system over 30 years old which was developed following the Warnock report of 1978 (Lindsay et al. 2019). From September 2021 the new Code will be gradually phased in, whilst operating in parallel with the current SEN system (Welsh Government, 2021). The transformation has a rights-based approach, underpinned by UNCRC and UNCRDP principles (Welsh Government, 2019). As well as imposing requirements onto local authorities, schools and further education institutions as to what they **Must**, **May** and **Should** do, it describes the functions and processes of the 2018 Act to inform professionals involved in ALN provision (Welsh Government, 2019). With a quarter of school pupils in the West Wales region being on the SEN register, and the majority attending mainstream school (ERW, 2018), there will be major implications for practice, below are some key areas of change and potential implications for practice.

A person-centred approach

All Welsh Government policy related to children and young people is underpinned by the UNCRC and children's rights are enshrined in Welsh law under Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011 (Welsh Government, 2019). This and the UNCRDP inform the new ALN Code, where there is an emphasis on participation, built upon the views of children and their parents being taken into account and their involvement in the whole process (Welsh Government, 2021). For practitioners, this will mean really getting to know the child, through close and meaningful observations and working closely with parents and families to gain a deep understanding of the needs and wishes of the child (Lewis, 2021). It will also mean sharing information in an accessible way, raising awareness of their rights and the processes involved for securing appropriate provision whilst encouraging children and families to participate fully in the process (Welsh Government, 2021).

The Individual Development Plan – IDP

Those who have an ALN, and enter the system following the introduction of the Code in September 2021 will have an IDP. An IEP or a Statement will need to be converted to an IDP as part of the process of moving from the SEN to ALN system (Welsh Government, 2018). This single, statutory plan is designed to replace all existing plans, leading to greater consistency and continuity (ProvisionMap, 2019). Responsibility for preparation, implementation and maintenance of an IDP lies with local authorities, schools or further education institutions (SNAP Cymru, 2021). However, the need for collaboration is a key principle, and involves local authorities, governing bodies and health authorities providing information to each other as requested (Welsh Government, 2021). This integrated and collaborative process when combined with timely and effective interventions is designed to lead to better outcomes (Dauncey, 2016). This will involve a new way of organisations and individuals working, which draws on the expertise of all those involved, including family and the child themselves (Ainscow, 2020).

A fully bilingual system

Additional Learning Provision ALP should be offered through the medium of Welsh for those who require it, so far as is possible, as should the IDP (Welsh Government, 2021). This is in line with the Welsh Government's Welsh in education Action Plan 2017-2021, which has placed requirements on local authorities to put the Welsh language at the forefront of ALN support through from planning to delivery. Although this can be viewed as a positive step in achieving equity for children to receive support in their own language, there is no such equity for those with Welsh/ English or both as an additional language. Multilingual children achieve similarly or better than those with only one language, with or without speech and language concern (McLeod et al. 2015). However, practitioners will need to consider whether a child needs differentiated support because they are learning through an additional language or whether they have ALN. To do this they will need to take a holistic view of performance across the curriculum (Welsh Government, 2021).

ALN implementation timeline



Additional challenges:

- **Resources:** Transformations of this scope require additional funding to cover staff training and recruitment to certain roles e.g. ALNCo, as well as the ongoing costs of increased collaboration, which settings and local authorities may find challenging (National Assembly for Wales, 2017).
- **Engagement:** Partnership working between families and schools is essential for the success of the new system, but is reliant on all parties engaging in the process (SNAP Cymru, 2021).
- **Recruitment:** Poor wages and pensions are amongst the reasons that the childcare sector faces a recruitment crisis (NDNA, 2019; Pacey, 2017). Welsh language requirements could exacerbate this, as despite rates rising, just 29.1% of the population speak Welsh (Welsh Government, 2021).