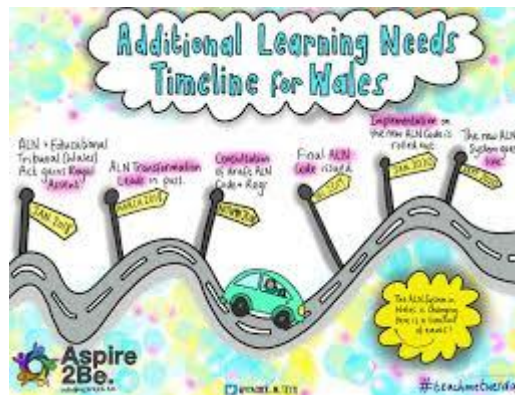


The Role of the ALNCo: A Reflective Journal

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Introduction

Inclusion lies at the heart of the Curriculum for Wales, and the role of the Additional Learning Needs Coordinator (ALNCo) is central to its implementation. Under the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018, the ALNCo is tasked with coordinating provision, championing inclusive practice, and ensuring that the needs of learners with ALN are met in a holistic, person-centred way (Welsh Government, 2021). This journal reflects on the key responsibilities of the ALNCo, based on shadowing an experienced ALNCo in a Welsh primary school. It integrates real observations, case study insights, academic literature, and critical reflection, ending with forward-looking targets linked to the QTS Professional Standards.



Inclusive education is not just about meeting statutory obligations but about ensuring every learner can thrive, regardless of background or ability. Research by Norwich (2008) emphasises the moral and educational imperative of inclusion as a shared responsibility. In Wales, the transformation from SEN to ALN is rooted in rights-based practice, recognising that all children and young people have the right to equitable access to education. The role of the ALNCo has therefore evolved into one of both leadership and advocacy (Griffin & Shevlin, 2011).

The ALNCo's Responsibilities and Strategic Role

The ALNCo is more than a manager of provision; they are a strategic leader of inclusion. Their responsibilities, outlined in the ALN Code for Wales (2021), include leading the development and implementation of Individual Development Plans (IDPs), ensuring a whole-school approach to ALN, and liaising with external agencies to meet learner needs.

During my placement, I shadowed an ALNCo over three days and saw first-hand the complexity and range of their duties. They led multi-agency meetings, mentored LSAs, supported new class teachers with differentiation, and met with anxious parents. This mirrored findings by Szwed (2007), who argues that ALNCoS act as both emotional

anchors and policy implementers — a balance that requires empathy, knowledge, and authority.

 Reflection:

Watching the ALNCo meet with a parent who was worried about their child’s transition to secondary school helped me understand the sensitivity of the role. The ALNCo not only explained the IDP review process clearly but also listened attentively and offered practical support. It reinforced for me how central relationships are to inclusion.

Estyn Case Study Insight: Whole-School Inclusion

Estyn (2021) published a case study of Ysgol y Ddraig, where a successful whole-school approach to ALN was established by embedding inclusive values across the curriculum. In the school I shadowed, I saw similar practices — staff training on autism strategies, accessible classroom design, and clear expectations for using the universal provision triangle.

The ALNCo ensured all staff were trained in trauma-informed approaches, and learners were seen as partners in their learning. Estyn’s findings stress that effective ALNCos do not work in isolation but are central to school leadership and culture. The school’s ethos was underpinned by the belief that “every teacher is a teacher of ALN.”

Pedagogical Knowledge and Inclusive Practice

The ALNCo regularly advised class teachers on adaptive teaching strategies, highlighting the difference between differentiation and personalisation. They often drew on the work of Florian & Black-Hawkins (2011), who advocate for inclusive pedagogy that benefits all learners, not just those identified with ALN.

For example, one Year 4 teacher wanted to support a learner with ADHD. The ALNCo encouraged them to restructure group work, introduce movement breaks, and minimise distractions — strategies that ultimately improved learning for the whole class.

**Inclusive Education
Classroom**

 All students learn together	 Giving teachers assistance and support	 Focus on abilities not disabilities
 Teachers learning to expand their skills	 Connecting with individual learning styles	 Honoring the needs of all pupils, equally
 Valuing other cultures and perspectives	 Celebrating diversity and individuality	 Nurturing shared respect and empathy

Inclusive pedagogy encourages teachers to focus on what learners have in common rather than how they differ (Florian & Spratt, 2013). By supporting classroom teachers in embedding universal design for learning, ALNCos help reduce the need for later, more intensive interventions. During my time in school, I also saw the use of technology (e.g. Clicker 8 and speech-to-text tools) to support literacy,

which aligns with recommendations from the National Centre for Technology in Education (2020) for inclusive edtech strategies.

Reflection:

I realised that supporting ALN isn't about adding more tasks — it's about teaching smarter, not harder. The ALNCo showed me that inclusive strategies often just look like good teaching, and I now feel more confident in applying those ideas in my own classroom.

Barriers and Challenges

Despite the positive ethos, the ALNCo voiced concerns about capacity and time. Managing dozens of IDPs, coordinating agencies, and responding to urgent pastoral issues often meant their workload was overwhelming — echoing Layton (2005), who warned that ALNCos risk being swamped by admin.

Another challenge was early identification. Some children with speech and language needs had been missed due to COVID-19 disruptions. The ALNCo highlighted the importance of high-quality universal provision and close collaboration with speech therapists to avoid long delays in support.

A further issue is the tension between accountability and flexibility. As Ainscow (2020) argues, data-driven cultures can constrain inclusive practice when schools feel pressured to 'show' progress in narrow ways. The ALNCo I shadowed shared her frustration at limited access to educational psychologists, which often delayed formal assessments — a finding echoed by the Children's Commissioner for Wales (2021), who has warned that capacity in the system must be increased to meet the ambitions of the ALN reform.

Reflection:

I was struck by how much the ALNCo had to advocate for pupils, especially when navigating external systems. It reminded me that inclusion doesn't stop at the school gate — it requires partnership working and persistence.

Professional Learning and Growth

Shadowing the ALNCo allowed me to develop both practical skills and deeper understanding. I reviewed IDPs, sat in on annual reviews, and co-wrote an intervention plan for a learner with sensory processing needs. These experiences supported my development in the following areas:

- Pedagogy – Adapting planning for neurodiverse learners
- Leadership – Observing strategic decision-making
- Collaboration – Communicating with LSAs, parents, and outside agencies
- Reflection – Critically reviewing practice to promote learner progress

The experience helped me understand that professional learning is a continuous journey. Schon's (1983) concept of the 'reflective practitioner' underpins how I now view my development — not just acquiring strategies, but interrogating the values that guide them. My learning was not limited to observation; I actively participated in reviewing provision maps and drafting short-term targets in line with the Four Purposes.

Closing Reflections and QTS-Aligned Targets

As I near the completion of my Initial Teacher Education and prepare to gain Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) in Wales, this experience has been transformational. It has not only shaped how I view inclusion but how I intend to lead it — however early in my career.

This journal links directly to the Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership (Wales, 2017) in the following ways:

- Pedagogy – I have developed inclusive planning and adaptive teaching skills
- Collaboration – I worked meaningfully with professionals and families
- Innovation – I reflected on new ways to engage all learners in classroom life
- Professional Learning – I took responsibility for deepening my knowledge through shadowing and critical reading

My Professional Targets:

1. Continue developing my understanding of the ALN Code through wider reading and CPD
2. Apply inclusive strategies routinely, particularly for learners with social communication needs
3. Collaborate with my future school's ALNCo to co-plan IDP-linked lessons
4. Reflect regularly on the inclusivity of my teaching, using pupil voice as a key lens

Final Reflection:

Inclusion is not a bolt-on. It's a mindset. The ALNCo helped me see that inclusion is about listening deeply, acting thoughtfully, and planning creatively. As I step into the classroom as an NQT, I am committed to being an inclusive practitioner who places all learners at the centre of their journey.



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