

Changes to the way children and young people's special educational needs will be identified, assessed and met

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What is the new legislation and why is it changing?

A reform on the current arrangement for identifying and supporting children with Special Education Needs (SEN) has been long intended for policymakers in Wales (Dauncey, 2016). The Education Act (1996) states that children that have learning difficulty which requires special education intervention are children with Special Education Needs (SEN). One in five children in Schools in Wales are identified with SEN, these children's needs are met through a range of strategies from additional support to a legal entitlement to a specifically tailored support package (Dauncey, 2016).

The current SEN Framework was introduced more than 30 years ago, it has been recognized that this system needs updating (WG, 2021). After several years of consultation between government official, local authorities, school staff, parents and children the final draft of the additional learning needs bill was approved by Welsh Government, The Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018 makes provision for a new statutory framework for supporting children and young people with ALN and this will replace existing legislation (Welsh Government, 2021).

The new Additional Learning Needs (ALN) framework aims to provide a more unified approach through multi agency working, earlier collaboration and identification through assessments and planning and a transparent system that provides information and advice to all involved (Snap Cymru, 2021).

Implications to school and staff roles

- The first significant change will be the term 'special educational needs SEN' will be replaced with 'Additional learning Needs' ALN – this also means SENCOs will be known as ALNCOs (Snap Cymru, 2021).
- The ALNCO is a statutory role which will replace the existing non-statutory SENCO role that exists in most maintained schools in Wales (Snap Cymru, 2021).
- This means ALN will cover a whole spectrum of needs, from autism, dyslexia, ADHD to serious global learning delays and difficulties and major physical disabilities (Dauncey, 2016).
- Funding and training to develop ALN workforce (WG, 2017).

Concerns and Implications

- As there will now be a larger group of ALN learners there is risk of diluting the support available to those with the greatest need (National Assembly for Wales, 2015).
- Changing SEN to ALN will not remove stigma already associated with this term (National Assembly for Wales, 2015).
- Systems for sharing ALN best practice need to be identified (Kirwan, 2018).
- Funding may be affected by budget cuts and potential impact on training (National Assembly for Wales, 2017).

A Child centered Approach

The new system takes a person centred approach and the act requires the views wishes and feelings of the child and parent to be considered at all stages of the process (WG, 2020).

- The new ALN framework supports the UNCRC rights of a child (WG, 2017).
- Hayes (2012) states practitioners may need to modify practice to develop a child centred approach.
- Taylor (2011) highlights that it would be beneficial for practitioners to be skilled and experienced to address the anxiety felt by pupils in the reviews

Concerns and Implications

- Disagreements of ALN arrangements could put a direct strain on relationship between parent and school staff (Duff, 2018).

Individual Development Plan (IDP)

The act creates a single statutory plan to replace the existing variety of statutory and non-statutory plans.

- Introducing a single plan provides fairness and continuity (Dauncey, 2018)
- IDPs will be more flexible to a child's ever changing needs in circumstances (Dauncey, 2018).
- Obtaining an IDP is expected to be a quicker process than Current SEN Framework (WG, 2019).

Concerns and Implications

- IDPs are a timely process to create (WG, 2015).
- Increased number of children will now fall into ALN category, increasing the amount of IDPs needed, this only serves to add more pressure on already stretched schools and practitioners (WG, 2015).

Conclusion

The new ALN Framework provides a more transparent and inclusive framework for children from birth to 25 year old within education (WG, 2021). . Introducing a single plan IDP provides fairness and continuity, the IDPs will be more flexible to a child's ever changing needs in circumstances (Dauncey, 2018). With a person centred approach it is a positive move in raising standards and attainment for individuals with ALN (Welsh Government, 2021).