

The Additional Learning Needs Code for Wales

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Introduction

The Additional Learning Needs Code is due to be implemented in September of this year. The Code has been pushed back several times due to Covid implications. (Williams, 2021)

The Code is part of the Additional Learning Needs Education Tribunal Bill [Wales] that was passed in December 2017. After receiving royal assent, it became the Additional Learning Needs Act. The Welsh Government is using a phased roll out, due to this the current SEN system is to stay in place until all children are on the new ALN system.

The ALN Code was brought in after there were lots of consultations, reviews and inquiries. For many, this was well overdue. The previous legislation was the SEN bill, this was over 30 years old. It was time for a new direction. (Dauncey, 2018)

Lewis (2019) explains that the proposed changes are intended to be simpler and a more cohesive way to meet a child's needs. Inger (2019) states that Local Authorities throughout Wales have been using different systems and their own policies. This can be confusing for families who can get lost in the system.

ALN Not SEN

Dauncey (2021) stated that the accepted terminology will change from Special Educational Needs (SEN) and Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities (LDD) to Additional Learning Needs (ALN). This he explained was to promote inclusion of all groups who need extra support with their education. Snap Cymru (2015) add that SEN was changed to ALN to promote a child centred approach with a holistic view.

Dauncey (2018) explained that the Special Educational Needs (SEN) Framework had been replaced by the Additional Learning Needs Educational Tribunal Act of 2018. This was a reformed system basing itself on the Additional Learning Needs of individual children. He continues; that Additional Learning Provision (ALP) will be used under the same terms as Special Educational Provision is used. This would be for a child over three years old that requires educational provision that differs from others of the same age in a mainstream maintained nursery or school. Or a child under the age of three under any educational provision. The Welsh Government expects there to be the same number of children that fall under the ALN criteria as those currently with SEN or LDD. However, as the ALN terminology will stay with learners until they are 25, this will bring coherence under their new system and this term will also show a clear break from a system that needs a large amount of change.

Bilingual System

Dauncey (2018) explained that the Welsh Government expects the new ALN system to be a bilingual one. The legislation requires all schools and other service providers to consider if their provision should be made available in Welsh. If the setting believes that they should use Welsh then this must be recorded in each child's IDP, to ensure that all reasonable steps are taken to make Welsh available. The sufficiency of ALN provision will be reviewed every five years under section 89 of the ALN Act. However, there is also section 90 which allows ministers to remove the use of the Welsh language if they saw reason to. The Welsh Government have suggested that this is included in similar acts and works with the Welsh Language Standards, which can be used to reflect different areas and circumstances. Although the inclusion of Welsh language forms and speech have been welcomed by many, there are learners and their families that do not want this to happen. Head teachers have questioned where the money for all these changes will come from, especially now when schools are facing consistent cuts and recruitment problems. It is also worth noting that only 34% of registered teachers in Wales count themselves as Welsh speakers. So, delivering provision and completing paperwork may fall to the few teachers that are prolific in the Welsh medium. (Wightwick, 2019a; 2019b) However, the Welsh Government in their 1 million Welsh Speakers stratagem (2018) are keen to state that they will be providing lots of new training opportunities for staff to develop their Welsh skills. They have also explained that there will be new funding plans to allow this scheme to reach its potential.

Individual Development Plan (IDP)

Snap Cymru (no date) explain that under the ALN Code Individual Development Plans (IDP's) will replace all statements and IEP's. These will stay with a learner until they are 25 years old. IDP's are for anyone that requires additional support in their learning. This includes the current school/early years action and action plus, any medical needs and any disabilities. The Welsh Government has proposed moving away from a school centric view with IDP's, to a partnership with all professionals that would be involved in an individual child's care. The child, depending on their age and ability are to be involved in the IDP process as they have the most knowledge about their own needs. An IDP will have an 'Action Plan' section which will be reviewed on an annual basis. (Snap Cymru, 2014) Dauncey (2018) explains that the ALN Tribunal Act 2018 will bring an end to local authority statements and school led interventions. The separate legislative arrangements will be integrated into the one format of an IDP, this is regardless of the severity of a case; all children with ALN will have an IDP.

Conclusion

In conclusion, there are many changes that the Additional Learning Needs Code will bring. Some are being met with positivity from teachers, practitioners, families and learners. Some changes seem to be bringing a lot of work with them. Changing SEN to ALN is a chance to unify all learners under one term, so children do not get lost in the system with different LA's using different forms. Having a bilingual system promotes the use of Welsh and allows all families to access it. Finally, moving all ALN children to IDP's no matter their condition or its severity allows schools and other professionals to work more in collaboration, with the voice of the child at its core.