

Wales Changing from SEN to ALN

Introduction - The Additional Learning Needs and Educational Tribunal (Wales) Act was introduced in 2018 (Children's Commissioner for Wales, 2019), replacing the current Special Education Needs (SEN) framework with a new framework based on Additional Learning Needs (ALN) (National Assembly for Wales, 2019). The new framework is designed to address the needs of children with ALN from birth to further education (Children's Commissioner for Wales, 2019). The Welsh Government (2018b) claims 'We want to transform expectations, experiences and outcomes for children and young people with ALN'. Thus, recognising that the current framework is 'no longer fit for purpose' (Dauncey, 2016).

The framework is intended to be used by organisations, such as local authorities, maintained school governing bodies, school teaching staff and additional learning needs coordinators (ALNCos) (Snap Cymru, 2018). It will therefore become a 'more modern approach to multi-agency work for the benefit of children or young people, which will support them in their journey through education and their life choices' (Dauncey, 2016).

Funding

In 2017, a £20 million funding package was announced to support the Welsh Government's implementation of the legislation and ALN Transformation programme (Dauncey, 2018). The Welsh Government has also set up a £2.1 million ALN Innovation Fund to assist local authorities and their partners in the development and improvement of multi-agency work arrangements to implement the new framework (ERW, 2018).

However, The Children, Young People and Education Committee recognises that there are potential savings in terms of staff time spent statementing and dealing with appeals, and supports the reinvestment of these savings into the ALN framework (Nation Assembly for Wales, 2017).

Furthermore, a national programme will be delivered regionally/locally with additional funding available to support the ALNCOs' professional learning (ERW, 2018).

ALN implementation timeline



(Source: Welsh Government, 2018)

Training

The Welsh Government (2018a) supports the reform process of ALN by providing ongoing training and guidance materials and a pilot programme. Schools as learning organisations provide sufficient support and training for staff to ensure effective adaptation to the resources, curricula and teaching strategies used to meet individual pupils' ALN (Estyn, 2018).

The Welsh Government (2018b) set out a three-level skills development programme for education practitioners:

Core skills development for all practitioners to deliver the new ALN system. This involves person-centred practice (PCP), across all educational settings/schools. While providing a two-year funding grant to local authorities and further education institutions (FEIs) for developing PCP skills across the workforce (Welsh Government, 2018b).

Advanced skills development by developing the role of ALNCos, replacing existing Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCos) (Welsh Government, 2018b).

Specialist skills development by funding to facilitate post-graduate training for local authority-provided specialist support services available to educational settings/schools (Welsh Government, 2018b).

The Welsh Government (2014) aims to set out the key principles and coverage of quality assurance systems to support successful delivery of ALN to children, and to facilitate training to ensure that all educational settings/schools provide consistent and equivalent support.

Independent Development Plan (IDP)

Implementation of Individual Development Plans (IDP) for children with ALN (Dauncey, 2016), are set to replace statements and Individual Education Plans (IEP) for children supported by School Action or School Action Plus (Estyn, 2018). Unlike statements, that cease when a child leaves school, IDPs will remain up to 25 years of age (Snap Cymru, 2019). However, there is significant concerns among parents about the legal status of IDPs, and whether they will lose the legal protection they feel a Statement of SEN provides (Dauncey, 2016).

Inequalities arising from current statutory and non-statutory SEN categories are claimed to be solved by ensuring each child with an ALN has the right to receive the same statutory plan, the IDP, which considers their learning needs as equally significant, regardless of how complex they are (Welsh Government, 2014). However, the transition from one system to another and especially the replacement of statements with IDPs has the potential to cause anxiety (Snap Cymru, 2019).

Conclusion - Approximately 23 per cent of pupils in educational settings/schools in Wales have SEN. Generally, pupils with SEN have low academic performance relative to the majority of the pupils (Welsh Government, 2018).

The new ALN code refers to the five principles of 'A Children's Rights Approach' and highlights the need for local authorities to consider these rights under the new legislation (Children's Commissioner for Wales, 2019).

The Children, Young People and Education Committee recognises that the ambition of the Welsh Government to revise the ALN support system extends beyond the Bill itself, although it believes that the expense of implementing the Bill has been underestimated (Nation Assembly for Wales, 2017).

Although the new ALN was scheduled to be implemented from September 2020 onwards, it will now take place from September 2021. The reason for the delay seems to have to do with the drafting of the Code and the regulations accompanying the reforms (Cerebra, 2019).

Further Information:

Welsh Government - <https://gov.wales/additional-learning-needs-transformation-programme>

Snap Cymru - <http://www.snapcymru.org/how-the-additional-learning-needs-education-tribunal-alnet-act-will-be-implemented/>