

Changes to ALN Legislation in Wales

Introduction: School systems to support people aged 0-25 years with additional learning needs are transforming under new legislation in Wales to better support those with additional learning needs. Following the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018, education systems for children with ALN are being replaced by a new system that is focused on identifying children's needs early and efficiently, as well as ensuring that children are provided with appropriate early interventions to support them. The child will be at the centre of everything that is offered to them through a more inclusive education system that can better support their needs. The new system aims to identify children's needs faster and to provide better responsive strategies to help children with ALN to achieve to their best potential in their education (Welsh Government, 2018).

1. Aim 3: "a unified plan" (Welsh Government, 2018).

Schools in Wales are estimated to have to convert up to a total of 85,200 existing plans into IDPs within the first 3 years of the implementation of the new ALN legislation, as stated by Welsh Government (2018).

Lewis (2019) states that the implementation of the new ALN system has already been delayed for a year because schools are not ready in capacity and resources and that they needed more time to implement the new ALN system correctly and effectively.

Creating an IDP can put pressure on the school's ALNCO because, as Snap Cymru (no date) explains, they will be responsible for starting the IDP process and arranging meetings with parents and appropriate professionals which will add to their workload. With the child's parents and/or carers contributing to the development of the IDP, the ALNCO may also have to deal with complaints or disagreements from families if they do not have faith in the IDP and the ALNCO will have a duty to resolve these issues which can be challenging if all parties cannot come to an agreement on the child's IDP (Snap Cymru, no date).

2. Aim 4: "increased participation of children and young people" (Welsh Government, 2018).

Estyn (2018) informs that almost every ALNCO in schools in Wales have been provided with training from their local authority to ready them for the new ALN system, including training on how to deliver the Person Centred Practice (PCP) approaches. From the new training, staff are aware of the importance of involving children in their support strategies and listening to their views. However, in accordance with Estyn (2018), around half of the schools only had their ALNCOs trained and not the school staff as a whole.

Rudduck and Fielding (2006) express that some childcare practitioners may feel uncomfortable allowing children to participate in any decision making processes because they feel anxious that it will compromise their authority and they may fear that negative feedback will be given on their practice.

Todd (2012) notes that the practitioner's interpretation of the child's view or opinion could also be an implication because they may interpretate something wrong and may not understand what the child is trying to express.

3. Changes to the role of the ALNCO.

According to Welsh Government (2021), having a designated ALNCO in every school in Wales became a statutory requirement from January 2021 to follow the new ALN legislation. Because of the additional duties and responsibilities of the ALNCO, it has become a role of which is a part of the leadership team in the setting. Examples of additional duties and responsibilities of the ALNCO:

- Ensuring a child's suspected ALN is identified.
- Ensuring that effective IDPs are being developed for each child with ALN in the setting.
- Providing appropriate resources.
- Organising ALN training for other staff (Welsh Government 2021).

The ALNCO will need designated time slots out of their classroom for regular training to maintain their professional qualities as the ALNCO. This can cause implications for the ALNCOs class because they may not get as much time with their students and spend more time trying to complete their high workload which, as expressed by Ofsted (2019), can negatively affect their mental health and well-being because their work-life balance becomes poor.

Conclusion:

The new ALN legislation helps to support children with ALN by using simpler and more effective systems that practitioners must be trained to deliver correctly. Welsh Government (2018) explains that funding grants have been offered to local authorities to be used for new training to develop the skills of education practitioners at three different levels to help prepare them to deliver the new ALN system effectively.