

Introduction

The new additional learning needs (ALN) is the new statutory support system for children and young people in Wales, which is stated by the Welsh Government (2016) which is replacing the acts and arrangements in Wales for special educational needs (SEN).

This has been done as the Government recognized that the old system was no longer fit for purpose as it was introduced more than 30 years ago which Dauncey (2016) stated.

The Welsh Government (2020) state that this is being done as they are determined to deliver an education system for learners that is inclusive, and that the new system will concentrate on children's needs being identified early and addressed quickly, and where all learners are supported to reach their full potential.

There were 3 overarching objectives that was proposed for the new system, with a total of 11 overall aims of the new act which Dauncey (2016) mentions in his paper.

ALN implementation timeline



Above is an image showing the implementation timetable. (ERW 2021).

The New ALN Legislation in Wales

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SEN replaced with ALN

The additional learning needs and education tribunal (Wales) bill was passed by the National Assembly for Wales in December 2017 as stated by Estyn (2018).

One of the 11 aims of the act is the introduction of the term 'additional learning needs' to replace the old term which is 'special educational needs' and this will be applied within a single legislative framework for all children who are identified as having needs. Under section 2 (2) of the act a child has a disability/needs if they have a significant difficulty in learning than typically developing peers or has a disability for the purposes of the equality act 2010 which prevents or hinders the child from making use of the facilities for education which is stated by Dauncey (2018). The Welsh Government (2018) explains how the terminology of 'SEN' stigmatizes children and believes that by using a single term such as ALN, a move to a more equitable system will be reflected.

Individual Development Plan

The Welsh Government (2018) talks about how within the old SEN legislation, learners with additional learning needs would have had an IEP or a statement, but within the new framework they will be removed and an individual development plan (IDP) will be given to each child with ALN instead. The Welsh Government (2019) explains how a IDP is available for a child from birth to the age of 25 which will make things easier for the child when they transition from school to college or to university. They also talk about the time it takes for an IDP to be prepared, and it depends on the nature of the child's needs, so for a ALNCO this could take up a lot of time and added stress.

The Welsh Government (2018) explain how with the old legislation and the use of statements, practitioners would find an unclear divide between those requiring statements and those who do not, which is why they believe that IDP's will be easier for the ALNCO's.

SENCO's replaced with ALNCO's

Under the new legislation, the term 'special educational needs coordinator' (SENCO) is going to be replaced by 'additional learning needs coordinator (ALNCO) (Welsh Government, 2020). The designation of an ALNCO within each setting is crucial in ensuring that there is a consistency of high standards and under section 60 of the act, it is required that all mainstream schools have a designated person for this, and that the ALNCO has to have the required qualifications and also experience.

The ALNCO also has the responsibility of ensuring that all children with ALN across the educational setting have an individual development plan, which could put extra stress on the ALNCO, and they have to be actively involved in decisions surrounding the budgets and resources to help plan appropriate provision.

Conclusion

With the new legislation being implemented across Wales throughout 2020 onwards, there are both good and bad aspects on the new legislation.

As stated above, the new legislation is going to be up to date and the purpose of it is to ensure that an education system for children with ALN is inclusive and concentrates purely on the children's needs and well being as stated by The Welsh Government (2020).

However, with the ALNCO's now having to be a member of the senior team, and having the relevant qualifications as well as normal teaching duty, this could put added stress and workload onto them, as it is them who make the IDP's, but the Welsh Government (2018) state that IDP's are going to be easier for practitioner to use when compared to the old SEN statements.