

Implications of changes to legislation

(Special Educational Needs) SENCo to ALNCo (Additional Learning Needs)

Introduction

According to Snap Cymru (2021) "A person has additional learning needs if he or she has a learning difficulty or disability which calls for additional learning provision".

The responsibility of the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCo) has gradually increased in significance over the years (Provision map, no date). The role will be further developed from September 2021 when the new ALN system will come into force over a three-year phased implementation period (Snap Cymru, 2021).

The Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018 ('the Act') will construct the legislative framework. An ALN Code will support the act providing assists to individuals and organisations to work within the law (Welsh Government, 2018 A). The Government's aim of the act is to transform the current separate systems for special educational needs (SEN), to establish a unified system for assisting learners from 0 to 25 with ALN (Welsh Government, 2018 A).

A person centred practice

A Person-centred practice (PCP) will be fundamental to the ALN system (Welsh Government, 2018 B). It is key to achieving a balance of what is important to and for a learner (Welsh Government, 2015). The ALN code requires that anyone applying purpose to the act must engage the children at every step of the process, ensuring that their wishes, feelings and views are listened to (Welsh Government, 2021; Welsh Government, 2018 A). Ensuring that their views are heard should aid timely and effective interventions which are monitored and adapted to ensure they deliver the desired outcomes (Welsh Government, 2018 A).

Individual Development Plan (IDP)

The ALNCo will need to ensure that all children with an ALN have a statutory support plan called an 'Individual Development Plan' (IDP) (Welsh Government, 2019).

It is thought that this will eliminate current contentious and artificial divide (Dauncey, 2018). The United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (2010) aims to encourage the human rights of disabled people Human rights acknowledge that everyone is of equal value, and should be treated with dignity, fairness, and respect. Having an IDP should support this right as it will include the child's views, provide continuity and all people with additional learning needs from 0-25 will be entitled to one.

Professionals will need to convert existing learners from the SEN system to the ALN system this will involve extra work due to the need to convert the existing IEP plan or a statement into an IDP. Once the IDP is in place the existing SEN plan will end (Welsh Government 2018 B).

SENCo ALNCo

The role of the SENCo is not a statutory role (Welsh Government, 2017). The ALNCo will be a statutory role and will require the ALNCo to be a master on ALN by expanding specialist skills and knowledge in addition to delivering support to all staff to assist them to identify ALN early, assess and plan for pupils with ALN (Provision Map, no date). Whilst this will enhance practitioners Continuous Professional Development which is designed to strengthen staff skills (Crutchley, 2017). It could be an issue due to the cost of training; staff cover and extra work. The Welsh Government has developed an ALN transformation programme. Its aim is to enable practitioners to deliver, effectively implement and support transition to the new system effective support (Welsh Government, 2021 A).

The existing SEN system will continue to operate alongside the new ALN system while this new system is being implemented (Welsh Government, 2018 B). Therefore, practitioners will need to follow 2 systems which could be confusing and time-consuming.

Conclusion

The new ALN system requires planning to be flexible and responsive. This will require practitioners to be skilled and confident in identifying needs (Welsh Government, 2018 A; Dauncey, 2018). Although the new act brings big change there is a lot of support in place, such as the ALN code, the ALN transformation programme and local authorities will have a designated early years ALN lead officer to co-ordinate the authority's operations (Dauncey, 2018). The new ALN system could provide opportunities to people with ALN if everyone works together.