

Change is on the Horizon!

Impending changes in Wales.

Introduction to impending changes!

'What' 'Why' and 'How'

The Additional Learning Needs (ALN) and Tribunal Wales Act 2018 was passed by the National Assembly for Wales in 2017. The transformation reform is sought to make significant changes in experiences, outcomes and to the lives of children and young people aged 0-25 in Wales with ALN (WG, no date). The reform is a direct result of consultations on the current Special Educational Needs framework (SEN), which according to The National Assembly for Wales (2015) is outdated and not fit for purpose. In-deed requiring a modern-day approach. The impending changes in Wales have been through rigorous amounts of consultations and planning proposals in order to address implications and concerns on the outcomes of children with ALN. With a rise in children and young people with ALN being educated in mainstream settings and recent data showing their overall academic attainment lower than that of their peers. Dauncey (2018) stated the new focus is to ensure the needs of children with ALN are identified and addressed quickly to reduce the gaps in attainment and ensure children with ALN are supported to reach full potential.

The new Act aims to unify the current SEN system, by ensuring a simpler and less adverse system through increased collaboration from multi-agencies, families and children (WG, no date). The Act aligns to the goals within the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 (WG, 2015) and underpins the UNCRC (UNICEF, no date). Furthermore, enable easier access to specialist support, information and advice for families. In-addition, according to Snap Cymru (no date) The transformation will also focus on development of skills for practitioners in education, this is to ensure they can deliver effective support to learners with ALN in a classroom. However, stakeholders, practitioners and families have raised concerns on how effective the system will be. For example, how it will be, delivered, monitored and assessed. Questioning the impact and implications it will have on children with ALN, practitioners and the settings (WG, 2014). The transformation is based upon three overarching objectives and underpinned by 11 core aims, to ensure the new ALN legislation becomes a unified framework, through integrated and collaborative working and is developed as a fair and transparent system. The poster contains a summary of research, focusing on three core elements of impending change and potential implications (WG, 2021b).

SENCo to ALNCo:

The Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator's (SENCo) role title is changing to the Additional learning Needs Co-ordinator (ALNCo). Although, the roles remain somewhat similar in duties, the main change of the role is now to oversee and manage the effectiveness of the setting and the practitioners in planning, managing and implementing additional learning provision for children with ALN (WG,2021: WG, 2017). Rather than, isolating the role and responsibility, it is being shared across to all professionals. That said, The ALNCo role is now seen as at strategic level, this is to ensure the needs of all learners with ALN within the education setting are met and that the ALN code is being followed and implemented appropriately. Therefore, Welsh Government (2021b) emphasises that the ALNCO is to undertake more of a leadership and management role to provide quality support and training for practitioners in identifying and meeting the needs of children and young people with ALN. Rather than undertake intervention themselves.

Implications on practitioners within the new role.

- Combination of roles. Under the duties of the ALNCo, the responsibilities have increased. If the ALNCo role is combined other teaching duties, compatibility of both roles should be considered to ensure duties of both roles will be managed appropriately and undertaken effectively. There are high expectations of the practitioners within the ALNCo role, this is to ensure quality provision is in place (WG,2014). However, due to the time frame of implementation, some of the new duties and responsibilities placed upon the ALNCo will not take effect or be performed until the whole ALN system comes into force (WG, 2021). Therefore, as the roll out is on a phased bases, the role can be adapted and developed gradually as and when new guidance of duties is published.
- Qualifications, training and expertise. Due to the strategic level of the role, welsh government have directed training towards ALNCo's only. This is to ensure they meet the requirement for the role, underpin the legislation and deliver the functions effectively as prescribed by law (WG,2018a: Estyn, 2018a). However, due to the directed training, concerns have been raised for other teaching practitioner, who have gained extended responsibilities to identify and support children who have ALN whilst teaching day to day in the classroom (WG,2014). According to Estyn (2018a) teachers' knowledge and understanding of SEN and the specific needs of pupils they teach is variable. Therefore, training should be directed to all practitioners to enhance confidence and professional development skills to ensure consistent support for children with ALN. Sylva et al. (no date) stated to ensure practitioners are confident and understand complex needs, high quality training is key in delivering quality services. With such invaluable training, the impact on children with ALN is positive and successful.

The new ALN Act has emphasised teaching and non-teaching practitioner's will need to perform further responsibilities and duties for children with ALN on top of their teaching duties and within the day-to-day classroom environment. However, the extra workload, responsibilities and pressures required of them within the new ALN Act and 'code' in educational settings, have raised concern on the health and well-being of staff, as well staff confidence to undertake the role (WG,2014). In response to these findings, The Welsh government have included that sufficient time should be given to ALNCo and practitioners to complete duties required under the new role and responsibilities (WG, 2021).

Implementation of Individual Development Plan (IDP):

The statutory IDP is a single, legally binding document developed using a person-centred planning approach (WG, 2020). IDP's will replace the variety of existing statutory and non-statutory SEN practices, such as, statements, the current Individual Education plans, school action and school action plus documentation. The aim of a single IDP is to allow for more of an easily adaptable and flexible approach to recording information such as strengths, needs and the full details of targeted support required for children with ALN (WG, 2018a) Furthermore, to allow for continuous planning and monitoring with the inclusion of families and relevant agencies having access. The new requirements emphasis the contributions from children, families and multi-agencies play a key part in developing a quality IDP, with appropriate targets and provision that are in the best interest of a child with ALN (Snap Cymru, no date). The same single IDP's documentation will be implemented for all children and young people under the age of 25 with ALN regardless of their severity. (WG,2021). However, during the testing phase of IDP's concerns were highlighted on the effectiveness of having and using the same one single documentation, for children with different levels of severity and complex needs. Stakeholders, practitioners, and families alike disagreed. Emphasising that the need for one child differs from another and that one size fits all is unacceptable in providing sufficient support (WG, 2014). Furthermore, some practitioners suggested the IDP's were insufficient for continuous individual planning and monitoring as often other systems of recording information are needed alongside (The National Strategies Early Years, 2009).

Implications for practitioners in implementing IDP's.

- Time constraints. Depending on the need severity of a child with ALN, IDP could potentially be a lengthy process. The balance between teaching and preparing and maintaining these raises concerns on how they will completed effectively due to other commitments.
- Phased roll out of the IDP's. Welsh Government (2018c) stated that both systems SEN and ALN will run side by side and continue to use both documentation required in each system until full implementation of the ALN Act in September 2023. Placing extra pressure on Staff to oversee and continue to follow and implement duties placed upon them by the Education Act 1996 within two different legislative frameworks.
- Documentation. No official documentation has developed by Welsh Government, this oversight, develops inconsistencies and the potential variety of IDP's being developed within different areas in Wales (WG, 2014) However, the ALN 'code' has provided guidance on information required within the documents to ensure same information is recorded regardless of design (WG, 2018).

To conclude.

The transformation in to the new ALN and Tribunal Act (2018), has highlighted the significance of modern day working, of promoting inclusion, fairness and equality for all children with ALN to achieve success, underpinning different policies to support the change. However, the research into the impending changes have highlighted uncertainties, such as the time frame of roll out, and the delay in certain aspects of the new system resulting ineffectiveness of the new system on how it will be delivered, monitored and assessed. Furthermore, evidence emphasis a clear link towards the need for intensive and effective training of all practitioners.

Increased Collaborative working:

The ALN Act and draft 'code' places a duty on the wider agencies and services that benefit children and families with ALN to work together more flexible and collaborative, this is to improve weakness and inconsistencies within the current system. Ensuring commitment and consistency of well-co-ordinated support that encourages the achievement of positive developmental outcomes (WG, no date). However, with such a range of persons and professional involved, the risk of conflict between them on best practice and support increases as different agencies and services have their own professional way of working (Carroll et al. 2017). Indeed, Garvey (2017) believes healthy conflict, allows the growth in knowledge and understanding and also in professional development, although any such conflict needs to be dealt with immediately. According to Aubrey, (2007) communication and collaboration are key elements to overcoming challenges and barriers that can impact on effective team working. Furthermore, included in the term increased collaboration, are the children themselves. Although, due to lack of understanding and complexity of needs in some children with ALN concerns have been raised on the level of input children can provide. Consequently, questioning if some children have the ability to participate and contribute effectively to the planning of provision that suited own needs (WG,2014).

Implications on school practitioner of Collaborative working

- Parents and other agencies can disagree with the targets, decisions, information within the plan, and also can potential disagree with implementing a plan itself. Increasing the risk of potential conflict (WG, 2015). Where disagreements lead to the lack of communication therefore impact on the forward planning and sufficient provision.
- The lack of commitment from other partnerships. According to WG (2014) It was highlighted how other agencies had poor time management and failed to commit to schedules. Impacting on the progress of next steps as well as on the roles of others involved.

However, an advantage to working with families and professional agencies and services involved with children with ALN, allows each profession to see the bigger picture as each agencies has significant information and advice regarding the support and needs of children with ALN (Gillen, 2011). In-addition, it allows professionals to gain deeper knowledge and understanding of other professional roles and insight to how other work (Sheridan et al. 2008).

Further Reading

* Welsh Government. (2019) 'The Additional Learning Needs (ALN) Transformation Programme: Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) <https://gwpeddill.gov.wales/docs/dcells/publications/180124-aln-qa-en.pdf> (Accessed: 5th June 2021).

* Snap Cymru (no date) ALN/SEN Reform. Available at: <https://www.snapcymru.org/help-for-families/aln-reform/> (Accessed: 5th June 2021).