



The new additional learning needs system:

Progress of schools and local authorities in supporting pupils with additional learning needs

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Publications Section

Estyn

Anchor Court

Keen Road

Cardiff

CF24 5JW or by email to publications@estyn.gov.wales

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This report is also available in Welsh.

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Executive summary

This is the first of at least two thematic reviews on the implementation of additional learning needs (ALN) reform in Wales. ALN reform is intended to ‘transform expectations, experiences and outcomes for children and young people with ALN’ (Welsh Government, 2020 p.2).

Without doubt, implementing ALN reform and curriculum reform during a period of un-precedented and significant challenge has been a tough and ambitious undertaking for all concerned. An additional challenge for local authorities and schools has been working to both special education needs (SEN) and ALN legislative frameworks.

The inspection team has been impressed with the commitment, resilience, dedication and honesty of both local authority officers and school staff. We fully recognise that the movement from one system to another takes time.

Overall, the number of pupils identified as having ALN or SEN has reduced. However, there has been an increase in the number of pupils whose ALP/SEP has been identified in a statutory plan, either through an IDP or a statement of SEN. The sensitive work between school ALNCoS and parents, particularly where pupils are considered not to have ALN where previously they would have had SEN, has generally resulted in parents being reassured that the provision made meets the needs of the pupil.

Participating schools had a generally secure understanding of the provision that they make for pupils and have normally adapted this well to meet the needs of pupils. However, the extent to which the provision is legally classed as additional learning provision (ALP) was unclear. It is likely therefore that schools are not applying the law consistently.

Additional learning needs co-ordinators (ALNCoS) that are members of the school senior leadership team used their positions well to champion ALN across all aspects of the school’s work. The development of cluster working has supported school-to-school working. Cluster leads have assisted in the sharing of practices and specialist resources.

Both local authorities and schools were united in their enthusiasm for person-centred practices and planning. As a result, relationships between schools and families have been enhanced. Person-centred practices align well with the overall direction for Curriculum for Wales which aims to be inclusive. The success of both ALN reform and Curriculum for Wales lie in improving the quality of teaching so that mainstream classrooms can better support the appropriate progress of individual pupils, regardless of their ALN. Overall, there has not been enough joined up thinking at either policy or practice level to emphasise the connection between Curriculum for Wales and ALN reform.

There was a lack of clarity and transparency regarding which individual development plans (IDPs) (other than those stated by Welsh Government) will be maintained by local authorities.

Local authorities are gradually improving ALN provision for pupils through the medium of Welsh. However, there is a lack of resources, assessments, staffing and sufficiency of provision.

There has been a year-on-year increase in ALN funding for several years, with an additional £77m of Welsh Government funding post pandemic. Overall approaches to evaluate the impact of funding on pupils with ALN were weak. School leaders stated that they do not have a clear enough understanding of how funding decisions are made by their local authorities.

Introduction

This thematic report is written in response to a request for advice from the Minister for Education and the Welsh Language in his remit letter to Estyn for 2022-2023. It is the first of at least two reports. The report provides an overview of how well the maintained primary and secondary schools that participated in the review are implementing key aspects of the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018 (ALNET) and the accompanying ALN Code. It also considers how well participating local authorities have supported schools.

The report draws on evidence from discussions with 29 providers including local authorities, primary schools, all-age schools and secondary schools. Of these, 12 were conducted through the medium of Welsh. Six of the schools, including two Welsh-medium schools, host local authority specialist class provision for pupils with ALN. Schools were selected based on their size, type, geographical location, and socio-economic context.

In our initial communication with both local authorities and schools we asked them not to prepare reports or presentations for us. We wanted to listen to them and understand their successes and challenges in implementing ALN reform thus far. We did build in time during our visits to consider any evidence that the providers made available for us.

We also drew on evidence from discussions between our local authority link inspectors and local authority officers. A list of these authorities can be found in the [methods and evidence base](#) section.

All discussions took place during the spring term 2023. Of these discussions, 20 were face-to-face and nine were conducted via three online focus groups. We held semi-structured interviews with local authority officers with responsibility for ALN and in schools we met with the school ALNCo and other senior leaders, including the headteacher.

During autumn term 2022 and spring term 2023, we had discussions with just under half of the local authorities on, the statutory roles and, information, advice and guidance provided to parents. We have used the information gathered on the role of the ALNCo in this thematic report and intend to consider the other statutory roles in our second thematic review.

During the week commencing 20th March 2023, we viewed the websites of the 29 providers, to evaluate the usefulness and accessibility of the information provided. This information is included in the relevant sections of this report. The providers are listed in the [methods and evidence section](#).

In addition, we met with the Third Sector Additional Learning Needs Alliance (TSANA). TSANA represents different groups of people with additional learning needs and their families.

Further details of the evidence base can be found in the [methods and evidence base](#) section of this report. Findings in this report relate to the sample of schools visited during the review.

The second stage of the review will build on our findings from this initial stage and will consider the other statutory roles namely, the early years additional learning needs lead officer and, the designated education clinical lead officer (DECLO). The second stage review will also consider the implementation of the Act in early years settings, pupil referral units and maintained special schools.

The intended audience for this report is the Welsh Government, headteachers and staff in schools, local authorities, and school improvement services. It is also of interest to parents and relevant partners. It is hoped that the report will contribute to professional discussions on both the strengths and areas for development identified.

Background

The Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018 (the ALNET Act) was passed by the National Assembly for Wales (now known as Senedd Cymru – the Welsh Parliament) in December 2017 and was enacted in January 2018.

Initially it was intended that the Act be implemented over a three-year period (2020-2023), following the publication of the ALN Code for Wales (Welsh Government, 2019). The appointment of three new statutory roles came into force in January 2021. The final ALN code was issued in March 2021 and came into force on 1st September 2021. Due to the impact of the pandemic, the process of identifying and confirming which children had an ALN was moved on a year to September 2021. In March 2023, a further year was added. This meant that implementation will now take place over four years and be concluded by August 2025.

The Welsh Government, in its document [Additional learning needs transformation programme](#) (2020, p.2) outlined the intention to ‘transform expectations, experiences and outcomes for children and young people with additional learning needs (ALN).’ It identifies that the transformed system will:

- ensure that all learners with ALN are supported to overcome barriers to learning and achieve their full potential
- improve the planning and delivery of support for learners from 0-25 with ALN, placing learners’ needs, views and wishes and feelings at the heart of the process
- focus on the importance of identifying needs early and putting in place timely and effective interventions which are monitored and adapted to ensure they deliver the desired outcomes. (Welsh Government, 2020, p.2)

The document describes how the ALN transformation programme will be delivered through five themes:

Legislation and statutory guidance	This included the Act and regulations and statutory guidance in the form of the ALN Code (p.3-4)
Workforce development	This consisted of (a) core skills development for all practitioners, including the development of person-centred practices (b) Advanced skills development – developing the role of the ALNCo (c) Specialist skills development, funding to support the training of specialist staff including educational psychologists and teachers of the visually or hearing impaired (p. 4)
Implementation and transition support	This consisted of (a) initial funding to support innovation between key partners including local authorities, schools, health, social care, further education, early years and the third sector (b) The creation of the ALN strategic implementation group (c) Readiness, compliance and impact monitoring (d) The appointment of five ALN transformation leads to provide advice, support and challenge to local authorities, schools, further education, and other delivery partners; except for the transformation lead for further education these roles came to end as reform moved to the implementation stage (e) ALN transformation grants that were used to support the regional and local plans for transition (f) The ALN implementation guide that explained the timescales for implementing the Act (p.5)
Awareness raising	This was partly achieved through the development of online e-learning materials that were targeted at a wide audience. (p.6)
Supporting policy	This aspect was concerned with ensuring that the current special educational needs (SEN) and learning difficulties and/or disabilities system continues to operate until ALNET is fully implemented. (p.6)

Source: Welsh Government (2020) Additional learning needs (ALN) transformation programme

The ALNET Act has 11 aims (Welsh Government (2018a) and we will cover aspects of these in this report:

1. The term additional learning needs replaces the term special educational needs and learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The [definition of additional learning needs](#) is “essentially” the same as the definition for special educational needs (Welsh Parliament, 2021, p.1), as is the definition for additional learning provision, that replaces special educational provision. The definitions can be found in the section of this report [Additional Learning Needs \(ALN\) and Additional Learning Provision \(ALP\)](#).
2. The Act replaces the two statutory systems that covered children and young people of compulsory school age with SEN and those young people in further education who had a learning difficulty and/or disability. As a result, there is one legislative system relating to the support given to children and young people between 0 to 25. However, this does not provide a right to education up to the age of 25.
3. The Act creates a single statutory plan, known as an individual development plan (IDP). This plan will, over time, replace the existing variety of statutory and non-statutory SEN or learning difficulty and/or disability plans for learners in schools and further education.
4. The Act requires that learners’ views should always be considered as part of the planning process, as well as the views of their parents and carers. The Welsh Government has for many years supported the use of person-centred planning approaches.
5. IDPs will focus on making provision that meets the needs of children and young people. IDPs should be aspirational and support children and young people in achieving their potential.
6. The process of producing and revising IDPs should be simpler than the previous system regarding statements of special educational needs.
7. The new system encourages improved collaboration and information sharing between agencies. The creation of the following, new, statutory roles should assist in this: additional learning needs co-ordinator for maintained settings (excluding special schools) and further education institutions, the early years additional learning needs officer and the designated education clinical lead officer.
8. The new system encourages that any disputes or disagreements should be considered and ideally resolved locally.
9. Where disputes, regarding the content of the IDP, cannot be resolved locally children and young people have the right to appeal to the [Education Tribunal for Wales / Dribiwnlys Addysg Cymru](#).
10. [The Additional Learning Needs Code 2021](#) includes statutory guidance on meeting the needs of children and young people with ALN.
11. The Act requires that services must consider whether a child or young person needs additional learning provision through Welsh. If they do, all reasonable steps must be taken to secure that provision.

In his [annual report 2021-2022](#), His Majesty’s Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales, noted that:

despite the pandemic nearly all providers continued to make steady progress in reforming their provision to meet the requirements of the ALN Code... Additional Learning Needs Co-ordinators (ALNCos) had a good understanding of the requirements and were positive about the changes. However, the embedding of

understanding of ALN reform across all staff within providers was more variable. In primary schools, ALNCoS were largely successful in disseminating guidance and training to other members of staff. This proved more problematic in secondary schools, as it is challenging to ensure that all teaching staff realise that provision for ALN is everyone's responsibility, particularly where teachers view themselves as subject specialists....Welsh-medium providers continued to express concerns around the availability of Welsh language resources to support ALN work...support from local authorities and regional consortia were generally useful...By July, nearly all providers had successfully begun to identify those learners who need additional learning provision (ALP) and mapped out the provision needs for other learners without ALN. (Estyn, 2023, p.15)

Main findings

Additional learning needs (ALN) and additional learning provision (ALP)

- 1 Many schools that participated in the review had a generally secure understanding of the definition of ALN. However, a few local authorities and schools stated that they were unclear of the legal definitions and what this meant in practice. These local authorities and schools admitted to using their own definitions and waiting for clarification from tribunal outcomes.
- 2 A very few schools advised that their local authority had not provided clear enough advice on the legal definitions, and that guidance has been limited. In addition, a few local authorities, and a few schools, stated that the ALN code does not provide clear enough practical guidance on how to apply the definitions.
- 3 ALNCoS generally, had a very clear understanding of the provision for pupils in their school. Over time, this provision has normally been adapted well to meet the changing needs of pupils.
- 4 Terms such as ‘universal’, ‘universal plus’, ‘targeted’, ‘specialist’ and, ‘specialist including multi-agency support’, are being increasingly used to categorise the support and provision made by schools. However, there is not always a common understanding of the terms or what constitutes provision under each of these categories. The extent to which provision in these categories is additional learning provision was not clear.
- 5 A few of the local authorities that we engaged with were not sufficiently aware of their statutory duty to keep additional learning provision under review.

Transitioning from SEN to ALN

- 6 Local authorities and schools are working with two different legislative frameworks at the same time until all pupils transition from the SEN system to the ALN system. This has created significant additional workload for both local authorities and schools. Both local authorities and schools welcomed and found the initial change in implementation timeframe helpful. They used the time meaningfully and continued to plan for implementation. However, most local authorities and schools included in this review were critical of the recent extension and its timing. They intend to keep to their original plans and conclude the implementation of ALN reform by August 2024.
- 7 Those ALNCoS that were members of senior leadership teams influenced strategic decisions and used their positions well to champion ALN across all aspects of the work of the school, including teaching, the curriculum and quality assurance. However, in a few cases, ALNCoS, who may not be members of the senior management team, did not always feel well supported by senior leaders and their influence at a whole-school level was limited.
- 8 The ALNCoS that took part in this review were enthusiastic and committed. They have seen considerable change to their role, not only in relation to increased workload but also

in relation to increased responsibility. It is not uncommon for ALNCoS to have other leadership and teaching roles in their school. This reduces the time that they can dedicate to overseeing the quality of provision including support for pupils with ALN.

- 9 Local authorities were not always clear on whether ALN features in school improvement plans or whether school improvement officers have discussions with schools in relation to ALN generally and plans for implementing ALN reforms more specifically.
- 10 The development of cluster working, led by cluster ALNCo, has helped to ensure that schools are well supported in implementing ALN reform through sharing practice and specialist resources. However, the sustainability of the co-ordinated approach to cluster working is unclear. In addition, many schools who participated in this review felt well supported by their local authority. However, a few secondary schools have not received support and advice from their local authorities in a timely enough manner.
- 11 Overall, local authority strategies for post-16 are at a very early stage of development. Those local authorities that have appointed dedicated post-16 officers report that they are developing stronger strategic partnerships with further education providers. The knowledge that local authorities have of independent specialist colleges is less secure, and consequently their engagement with them is more limited. As a result, local authorities are not able to make informed decisions about the full range of additional learning provision across the post-16 sector, when they know so little about the sector and what it provides.
- 12 The local authorities and schools who participated were united in their enthusiasm for person-centred practices (PCP) and planning. Overall, these schools have been creative in supporting pupils and parents well in developing their confidence to engage meaningfully in discussions. Relationships between schools and parents have been strengthened. However, the overall approach to quality assuring PCP, including the identification of practices that are most effective, is still too inconsistent. In addition, despite the clear advantages of the PCP approach, nearly all participating providers commented on the additional workload that this creates.
- 13 The success of both ALN reform and Curriculum for Wales lie in improving the quality of teaching so that mainstream classrooms can better support the appropriate progress of individual pupils, regardless of their ALN. Overall, there has not been enough joined up thinking at either policy or practice level to emphasise the connection between Curriculum for Wales and ALN reform.
- 14 Many schools were clear that local authorities will maintain IDPs for children that are looked after and those that are dually registered, for example pupils that attend pupil referral units. Beyond these groups there was a lack of clarity and transparency regarding which IDPs will be maintained by local authorities. In addition, there were clear inconsistencies in practice. For example, pupils that attend local authority specialist classes may have their IDP maintained either by the local authority or the school that they attend.
- 15 IDP champions and officers that support the development of IDPs have generally been used to good effect, and schools that have been part of cluster working have appreciated the opportunity to work with colleagues from other schools. These schools were generally

more confident in implementing ALN reform but, overall, only a minority of schools visited felt secure in developing and maintaining IDPs.

- 16 Both local authorities and schools advised that there are significant pressures in meeting the statutory timescales for issuing IDPs. Colleagues in other agencies, particularly health, have greatest difficulty in providing advice and information within the given timescales. In addition, the commitment that health authorities make to additional learning provision was too variable. However, there is limited information collected nationally about how well local authorities are performing in relation to meeting statutory timescales for issuing IDPs.
- 17 Most schools in the sample have relied heavily on their local authority and, where appropriate, their regional transformation led to provide information that is distilled and meaningful for them. Local authorities and schools who participated were generally critical of both the timeliness and usefulness of the information and guidance provided by the Welsh Government. A minority of schools advised that they have not used the ALN code and have relied on the guidance provided by their local authority. In addition, schools generally hoped that the ALN Code would provide exemplars of practice.
- 18 Nearly all local authorities who participated have uploaded relevant information on ALN reform to their council's website. In addition, a range of information leaflets aimed at parents and carers, and children and young people have also been produced. Those that have been produced by clusters of schools, or regionally, help to ensure a consistent message across a region. However, the quality and accessibility of information for parents on both council and school websites are too variable. It is reported, through third sector organisations, that some families are being incorrectly advised that the ALN system does not apply to their child.
- 19 Overall, most local authorities and schools in the sample reported that, because of strengthened working relationships with parents, challenge has been low. The sensitive work between school ALNCoS and parents, particularly where pupils are considered not to have ALN where previously they would have had SEN, has generally resulted in parents being reassured that the provision made meets the needs of the pupil. An exception to this has been in relation to challenge from parents regarding the lack of clarity about arrangements and future provision for post-16 learners. However, the majority of the appeals lodged with the Education Tribunal are either conceded by local authorities or withdrawn by the appellant, which suggests that there is still much work that needs to take place between local authorities, its schools, and parents in avoiding disputes at an earlier stage (Education Tribunal Wales, 2022).
- 20 Overall, improved collaboration and information sharing between agencies is too variable. Many schools were positive about the collaboration that exists between themselves and their local authorities. Local authorities have welcomed the DECLO role. However, the ability of health services to provide information and advice in a timely enough manner, and within statutory timeframes, is a concern.
- 21 Both local authorities and schools continued to note that accessing support from speech and language services, neurodevelopmental teams and child and adolescent mental health services remained a very pressing challenge. These difficulties are ongoing and not necessarily related to the introduction of ALNET.

- 22 Local authorities are gradually improving Welsh-medium specialist provision for pupils with additional learning needs. This is achieved largely through establishing local authority specialist classes in Welsh-medium mainstream schools. However, challenges remain in relation to meeting the needs of children and young people with ALN through the medium of Welsh. These challenges include a lack of Welsh-medium resources and assessments, staffing and sufficiency of provision.

Funding and resourcing

- 23 The funding for SEN/ALN has increased year-on-year for at least the past eight years (Welsh Government, 2022b). However, there is a lack of transparency, and understanding of senior leaders in schools in the sample, as to how local authorities determine their budgets for ALN, including those allocated to schools. Since the outbreak of the pandemic, the Welsh Government has allocated £67 million to support ALN reform (Welsh Government, 2022d, 2022c, f, h). Senior leaders in participating schools were generally unclear on how these additional funds have been used in their authority. Approaches to evaluate the impact that funding has had on supporting the implementation of ALN reform are variable and weak overall.

Professional development

- 24 The Welsh Government has produced very informative online e-learning materials but the extent to which these have been used and shared by local authorities and schools was too variable. As a result, professionals and parents were not as aware as they could be of the rationale and implications of ALN reform.
- 25 Mainstream schools can access comprehensive training programmes and support from their local authorities, including where such arrangements exist, support and guidance from special schools. Many participating schools spoke confidently about the positive impact that professional learning has had on both staff and pupils. However, the extent to which professional learning impacts on the quality of teaching for all pupils was less evident.
- 26 Much of the recent focus on professional development has been in relation to supporting the understanding of changes to the ALN system. Supporting the professional development of all school staff, including those entering the profession, in teaching and meeting the needs of pupils with ALN, was less well developed.

Effective practice

This report contains many features of effective practice including:

- the clarity, consistency and timeliness of advice, support and guidance provided by local authorities and regional transformation leads
- the development of cluster working
- the role of PCP and IDP champions
- the commitment and dedication of local authority officers and school ALNCoS

Recommendations

Schools should:

- R1 Improve the quality of information provided to, for example, parents, and clearly state what the school regards as additional learning provision
- R2 Ensure that ALNCOs have sufficient time and resource to carry out their duties
- R3 Ensure that the professional learning of school staff has a sufficient focus on high quality teaching for pupils with ALN

Local authorities should:

- R4 Ensure that all schools are aware of their duties under the ALNET Act
- R5 Provide clear, accurate and up-to-date information to stakeholders, in particular in relation to:
 - what constitutes additional learning provision in its schools
 - those IDPs that are to be maintained by the local authority and those to be maintained by schools
- R6 Continue to quality assure and review practice and additional learning provision to ensure funding and professional learning supports roll out effectively for:
 - person centred practices
 - individual development plans
 - Welsh-medium services, resources and provision
- R7 Develop and publish their strategy for post-16 learners with ALN

The Welsh Government should:

- R8 Ensure that all settings have a clear understanding of the legal definitions contained in the ALNET Act and the ALN Code and provide practical examples to aid understanding
- R9 Fully evaluate the impact of additional funding allocated to local authorities
- R10 Ensure that future guidance and funding is provided in a timely fashion to allow both local authorities and schools to plan sufficiently

Additional Learning Needs (ALN) and Additional Learning Provision (ALP)

Overview of chapter

This chapter considers the extent to which both local authorities and schools understand the legal definitions of ALN and ALP. It also draws attention to the classification of school-based provision, other than ALP and whether such practices are indeed ALP. Since the introduction of ALN reform there has been a reduction in the number of pupils with ALN provision; this chapter considers some of the reasons for that.

Additional Learning Needs and Additional Learning Provision: understanding the definitions

As noted by Senedd Research (2021) the definition for ALN is essentially the same as for SEN. This is:

- the learner has a significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of others of the same age (that can't be addressed solely through differentiated teaching); or
- the learner has a disability (for the purposes of the Equality Act 2010) which prevents or hinders them accessing education or training that's generally provided for others of the same age; and
- the learning difficulty or disability calls for Additional Learning Provision (ALP).

The definition of ALN is slightly broader than that of SEN in that it makes specific reference to learning difficulties or disability that arises due to a medical condition. The definition also includes a general reference to disability and the Equality Act 2010.

According to section 6 of the Equality Act 2010:

A person has a disability if a) the person has a physical or mental impairment, and b) the impairment has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on the person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. A reference to a disabled person is a reference to a person who has a disability.

The definition of additional learning provision forms part of the definition of ALN but is widened by reference to mainstream further education institutions because the ALNET Act applies to young people who are students in further education institutions. In addition, there has been a change to age as there is no formal education below the age of three.

<u>Definition of Additional Learning Needs</u>	<u>Definition of Special Educational Needs</u>
<p>(1) A person has additional learning needs if he or she has a learning difficulty or disability (whether the learning difficulty or disability arises from a medical condition or otherwise) which calls for additional learning provision.</p> <p>(2) A child of compulsory school age or person over that age has a learning difficulty or disability if he or she—</p> <p>(a) has a significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of others of the same age, or</p> <p>(b) has a disability for the purposes of the Equality Act 2010 which prevents or hinders him or her from making use of facilities for education or training of a kind generally provided for others of the same age in mainstream maintained schools or mainstream institutions in the further education sector.</p> <p>(3) A child under compulsory school age has a learning difficulty or disability if he or she is, or would be if no additional learning provision were made, likely to be within subsection (2) when of compulsory school age.</p> <p>(4) A person does not have a learning difficulty or disability solely because the language (or form of language) in which he or she is or will be taught is different from a language (or form of language) which is or has been used at home.</p>	<p>Children have special educational needs if they have a learning difficulty which calls for special educational provision to be made for them.</p> <p>Children have a learning difficulty if they:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) have a significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of children of the same age; or (b) have a disability which prevents or hinders them from making use of educational facilities of a kind generally provided for children of the same age in schools within the area of the local education authority (c) are under compulsory school age and fall within the definition at (a) or (b) above or would so do if special educational provision was not made for them.

<u>Definition of Additional Learning Provision</u>	<u>Definition of Special Education Provision</u>
<p>(1) “Additional learning provision” for a person aged three or over means educational or training provision that is additional to, or different from, that made generally for others of the same age in—</p> <p>(a) mainstream maintained schools in Wales,</p> <p>(b) mainstream institutions in the further education sector in Wales, or</p> <p>(c) places in Wales at which nursery education is provided.</p> <p>(2) “Additional learning provision” for a child aged under three means educational provision of any kind.</p> <p>(3) In subsection (1), “nursery education” means education suitable for a child who has attained the age of three but is under compulsory school age</p>	<p>Special educational provision means:</p> <p>(a) for children of two or over, educational provision which is additional to, or otherwise different from, the educational provision made generally for children of their age in schools maintained by the LEA, other than special schools, in the area</p> <p>(b) for children under two, educational provision of any kind</p> <p>See Section 312, Education Act 1996</p>

Overall, and largely because of the information and guidance provided by local authorities including regional transformation leads, many of the participating schools had a generally secure understanding of the definition of ALN. They understood that, for a child to have an ALN, they need additional learning provision (ALP), which is provision that is ‘additional to, or different from, that made generally for others of the same age, in maintained schools in Wales.’

The introduction of ALN reform has seen the emergence of terms that describe learning provision as: ‘universal’, ‘targeted’, ‘specialist’ and ‘additional’. It is only when provision is classed by local authorities and/or schools as ‘additional’, that pupils are considered as having an ALN. This is explored in more detail later in the report.

A few local authorities and schools stated that they were unclear of the legal definitions and what this meant in practice. These local authorities and schools admitted to using their own definitions and waiting for clarification from Education Tribunal for Wales outcomes when families appeal against local authority decisions. The extent to which schools were aware of what provision is ‘generally made for others of the same age, in maintained schools’ is gradually improving, particularly in those schools that have developed stronger cluster working. However, the extent to which local authorities and schools consistently interpret the definition of additional learning provision was too variable. This includes inconsistencies between sample schools in the same local authority and between local authorities in the same region.

A very few schools advised that their local authority has not provided clear enough advice, or that advice and guidance has been limited. In addition, a few local authorities and schools stated that the ALN code does not provide clear enough practical guidance on the interpretation of the definitions.

Schools that were included in this review that had recently received training on the Equality Act 2010, generally had a better understanding of their statutory duties to make reasonable adjustments for children who have a disability. It does not necessarily follow that a child in receipt of reasonable adjustments has an additional learning need, nor does it automatically mean that a child with a diagnosis of a condition or a disability automatically has an additional learning need. In addition, schools have been reminded that the absence of a medical diagnosis cannot be used as a reason to delay or not to make ALP or make reasonable adjustments. However, a very few ALNCoS incorrectly believe that a medical diagnosis is needed before appropriate ALP can be made.

However, as noted in the ALN Code 'there are some forms of disability where the nature of the disability means it is likely that the learner will have ALN' (Welsh Government, 2021e, p. 33). Children and young people that are sight or hearing impaired are 'more likely to have ALN by virtue of the fact the impairment is likely to prevent or hinder them from making use of educational or training facilities and is likely to call for ALP'. The Code also notes that 'a child or young person may be performing well across all areas of the curriculum but still have ALN because they have a disability that is preventing or hindering them from making full use of educational or training facilities, unless ALP is made for them' (2021e, p.33).

SEN and ALN registers

All schools are required to submit to the Welsh Government, on an annual basis, a range of data relating to their schools. The pupil level annual school census (PLASC) captures information that includes the type of school, staffing, pupil characteristics including the number of pupils on the school's ALN register, and the ALNs of its pupils.

Since the phased introduction of the ALNET Act, there has been a reduction in the number of pupils, of statutory school age, identified as having ALN. Around 13% have ALN in 2023 compared to just under 21% of pupils that were included on the SEN register in 2020. Historically around 22% of pupils were included on SEN registers in schools.

New provisional data for 2023 shows that there are 34,450 fewer pupils receiving ALP in maintained schools since the introduction of the ALNET Act in 2020, amounting to a 35% decline.

Most of the reduction has come from learners on the SEN provisions of School Action and School Action Plus. With a reduction of 28,170 learners representing a 56% decline among those previously on School Action, and a reduction of 15,375 learners signifying a 46% decrease among learners previously on School Action Plus from 2020.

Over the period 2020-2023 there was a 67% increase in the number of statutory plans, including statements of SEN and including IDPs, issued. The combined number of IDPs

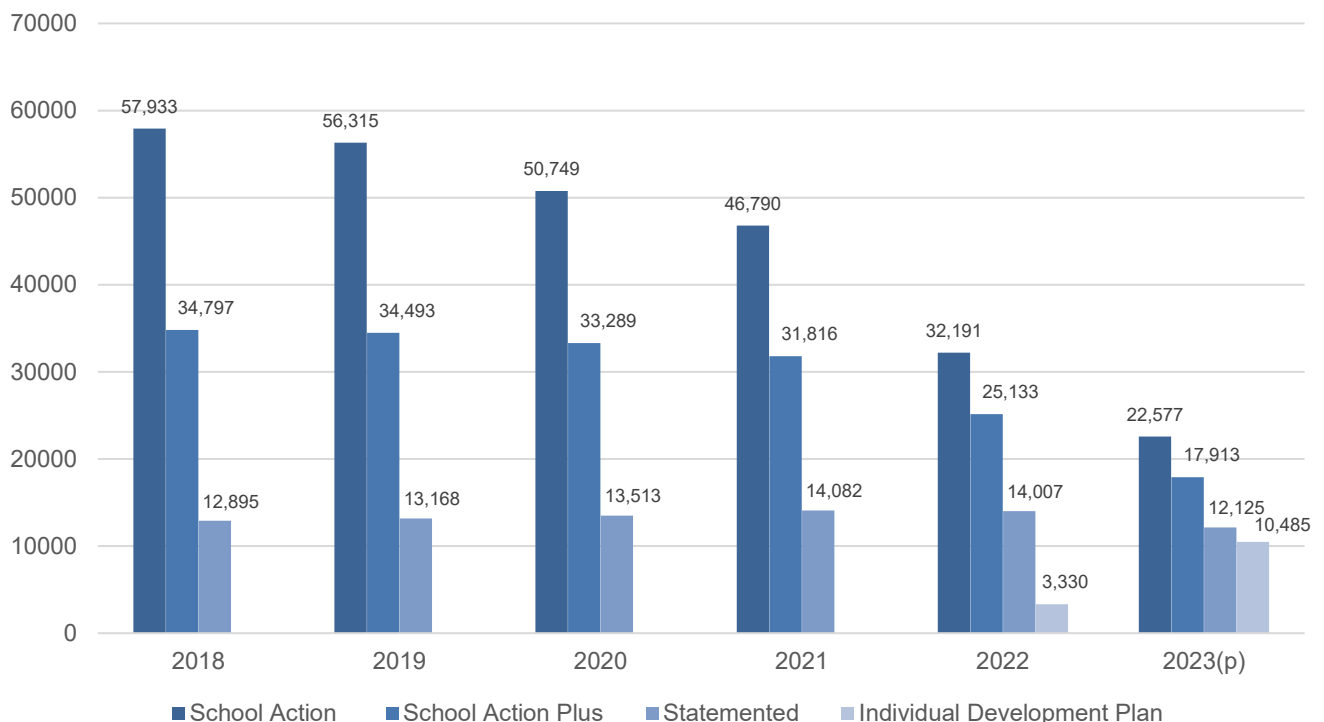
and statements issued in 2023, at 22,610, was greater than the number of statements issued for, at least, each of the past five years.

Furthermore, it is important to highlight that the data also shows that children are being moved to the new ALN system with a total of 10,485 learners on IDPs as of January 2023 (StatsWales, 2018-2023).

A few local authorities and a minority of schools (particularly secondary) in the sample were not sufficiently aware of changes to the ALN registers of schools. This raises questions around the quality assurance of data entered by schools. They did not have detailed enough information on, for example, which groups of learners were now not included on the register. As a result, they cannot assure themselves well enough that the needs of pupils are being met and local authorities are not able to challenge the changes.

Further detail on the changes in SEN/ALN registers by local authority and grouped by region, 2020 to 2023 can be found in [Appendix 4](#).

Number of pupils with SEN/ALN, in maintained schools by provision, 2018 to 2023(p)



(p) This data is provisional and may be subject to change

Source: StatsWales (2018-2023)

There are many factors that are likely to have contributed to an overall reduction in the number of children on school’s ALN registers.

The Graduated Response. Under the SEN system, pupils are entered on the SEN register at ‘school action’, ‘school action plus’ and those in receipt of a statement of special educational needs. School action refers to provision that the school can make to meet pupils’ needs without the support of external specialists. School action plus

indicates that the school is in receipt of external advice. This may be from an educational psychologist, specialist advisory teacher or health professional. Statements of special educational needs are usually for pupils with the most complex needs. The statement of SEN places a legal duty on the local authority to make the provision, as outlined in the document. This three-stage approach is commonly known as the graduated response.

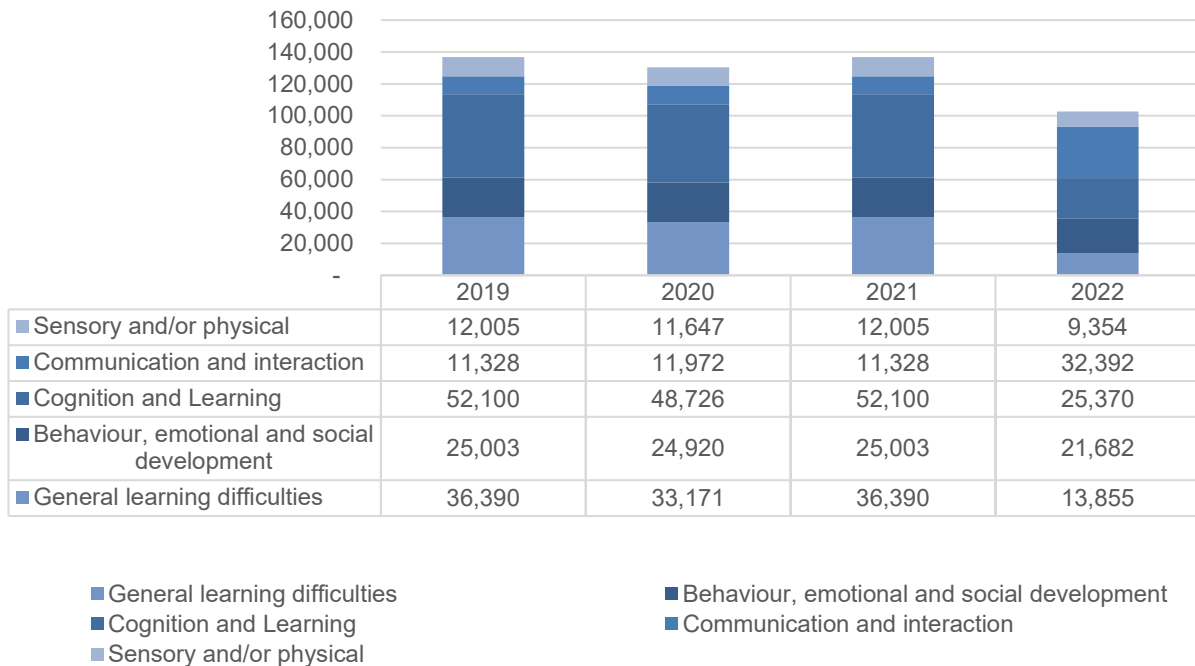
Under the ALN system, schools are still expected to provide a graduated response. However, pupils either do or do not have ALN. Other than for pupils in receipt of an IDP, schools are no longer required to capture the provision they make for pupils on their ALN register.

Schools are required to record on their ALN register the type of SEN/ALN a pupil has from the following list:

Communication and interaction	Cognition and Learning		Sensory and/or physical	Behaviour, emotional and social development
	Learning	Specific Learning Difficulties		
#Autism Speech, language and communication	Moderate learning difficulties Severe learning difficulties Profound and multiple learning difficulties	Dyslexia Dyscalculia Dyspraxia Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder	Hearing impairment Visual impairment Multi-sensory impairment Physical and medical difficulties	Behavioural, emotional and social difficulties

General Learning Difficulties. Until 2022, the term general learning difficulties was also included under the category of cognition and learning. This was defined as ‘pupils with learning difficulties, which may be of moderate severity, will not yet have been assessed as having MLD’ (Welsh Government, 2013, p.8). It was not uncommon that pupils who received short-term catch-up interventions for literacy and/or numeracy were categorised as having a general learning difficulty and entered on the school’s SEN register as school action.

Number of reports of ALN or SEN in maintained schools by type of need, 2019 to 2022



Source: StatsWales (2018-2023)

Since January 2017 maintained schools were allowed to report as many special educational needs for a pupil as required. The chart above shows the number of times each type of need was reported in each year. The chart clearly shows that there has been a significant increase in the recording of pupils with communication and interaction needs. This chart contains data from the latest published School Census at the time of writing.

The ALN Code attempts to clarify the situation regarding pupils who are in receipt of catch-up interventions:

One aspect of the definition of ALN involves the child or young person having (or in the case of a child under compulsory school age, being likely to have when of compulsory school age) a “significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of others of the same age” (section 2(2) (a) and (3) of the Act). If a child or young person has (or is likely to have) a greater difficulty in learning than the majority of others of the same age, whether it is (or is likely to be) a significantly greater difficulty in learning compared to those others depends upon the extent of the educational or training provision called for by it (or that will be called for by the likely difficulty). If it calls for (or the likely difficulty will call for) educational or training provision generally made available in mainstream maintained schools or FEIs (for example, measures such as catch-up provision or differentiated teaching strategies more generally), it would not amount to a significantly greater difficulty in learning. But if the educational or training provision the difficulty calls for (or likely difficulty will call for) is ALP, it is (or will be) a significantly greater difficulty in learning. (Welsh Government, 2021e, p.32)

Essentially, gaps in learning that can be addressed through catch-up interventions or differentiated teaching approaches do not amount to a ‘significantly greater difficulty in learning’ (Welsh Government, 2021, p.32). As a result, such approaches are not considered as ALP and pupils receiving catch-up interventions would not be considered as having ALN.

Oversight of SEN register and funding. The oversight of SEN registers at both a school and local authority level has not been strong. As a result, pupils may have remained on SEN registers for many years. This, in part, may be due to perverse funding incentives where schools received funding based on the number of pupils on the SEN register. As a result of the ALN reforms, many schools have reviewed which pupils are on their SEN/ALN registers, which has led to some changes. The local authorities that took part in this thematic are reviewing the funding for ALN in their schools.

LA Advice. More recently many local authorities have provided advice to schools on their ALN registers, including whether provision is recorded as ALP. A very few schools who participated in this survey advised that they have challenged their local authority on its advice and interpretation of the definition of additional learning provision. As a result, the schools have kept more pupils on their ALN register than suggested by the local authority.

Increase in need. Despite a reduction in the number of pupils being included on ALN registers, schools in the sample reported that pupils’ needs are becoming increasingly complex with more pupils being anxious, having difficulty in regulating their emotions and emotional responses both to themselves and others, and an increase in pupils with delayed communication skills. In addition, a few local authorities reported that there has been an increase in the proportion of looked after children who may have an additional learning need. A few local authorities also advised that requests for ALN assessments from early years providers have also increased.

In responding to queries from the Chair of the Children, Young People and Education Committee, [the Minister for Education and Welsh Language](#) noted that:

We have not moved away from my predecessor’s statement that ‘having ALN is the same as having SEN.’ It still holds true that ‘if a child or young person has SEN, they are also likely to have ALN. All pupils who were appropriately placed on the SEN register should be provided with an IDP under the ALN system if they still require ALP (and in the case of a young person, that they consent to having an IDP) (Welsh Government, 2022b, p.3).

This statement provided clarity on Welsh Government’s expectations.

Keeping ALP under review

All local authorities have a statutory duty to keep under review the ALP they make, and the ALP made by the governing bodies of their maintained schools. The local authority must consider the extent to which arrangements are sufficient to meet the ALN of children and young people. If a local authority considers that arrangements are not sufficient, it must take all reasonable steps to remedy the matter. Despite there being much activity in keeping ALP under review, a few of the local authorities that we engaged

with were not sufficiently aware of this duty and the oversight that local authorities have on the breadth of additional learning provision was too variable.

Chapter 5 of the draft ALN Code (Welsh Government 2018) provided very useful guidance to local authorities in exercising this duty. However, this has been reduced to a single paragraph in the final ALN Code (Welsh Government, 2021) and points to activity that local authorities might include in keeping ALP under review. Further guidance is likely to be beneficial particularly for those authorities that aren't sufficiently aware of the duty.

Many local authorities have taken the opportunity to review the sufficiency of provision in specialist classes and special schools and plan changes. For the period September 2022 to 23rd June 2023 we received 15 school re-organisation proposals. A third of these aim to either establish new, or extend existing, ALN provision. Two local authorities, Rhondda Cynon Taf and Blaenau Gwent, plan significant changes in more than one setting. In relation to all proposals that refer to changes to ALN provision, we continue to identify a few common weaknesses such as: a lack of information on staff recruitment and specialist training when new facilities are opened, or existing provision expanded, and a lack of consideration of how any new or expanded provision in mainstream schools may affect the mainstream setting.

Between September 2021 and July 2023, we carried out nine inspections of local government education services. In each of these inspections we considered how well the local authority supported pupils with ALN. In each we found that relationships between local authority officers and schools were strong and that the local authorities provide useful and valued advice, support, and guidance. Areas for improvement related to a lack of clear strategy and leadership of ALN; inconsistencies in evaluating services and provision and provision for pupils through the medium of Welsh. As part of this thematic review we noted that where “strategic ALN planning” groups do exist, representation tends to be limited to local authority officers and doesn't routinely include, for example, the DECLO or colleagues from the third sector (Estyn, 2023a, b, c).

Improving the evaluation, planning and co-ordination of provision for learners with special educational needs (SEN) and other pupils who may require extra support

During our monitoring visit of Local Government Education Services in [Powys](#) in 2021 we noted that the council had restructured its ALN services and that officers had developed good working relationships with schools. Officers had responded well to the views of headteachers and ALNCoS as they put new systems and processes in place. As a result, senior leaders in school felt well supported by the local authority.

Schools in the sample were generally unaware of how the local authority keeps additional learning provision under review. Those schools that host local authority specialist classes, for example, advised that they are consulted when their provision is to be expanded or when there is a material change in the needs of pupils. Overall, the approach of local authorities in monitoring the quality of these provisions was too variable.

Many schools, as part of the ALN reform agenda, have recently strengthened their arrangements for keeping additional provision under review. Under the guidance of the regional transformation lead and/or local authorities, most schools in the sample have audited and categorised the provision that they make. As a result, ALNCoS generally had a very clear understanding of the provision for pupils in their school. Over time, this provision has normally been adapted well to meet the changing needs of pupils.

Many schools have created 'monitoring registers'. These are used to track the progress of pupils who do not currently receive additional learning provision but may in the future. Overall, monitoring registers are not routinely part of school's management information systems. A very few local authorities who participated in the review have invested in electronic provision maps for all their schools, which supports their ongoing monitoring. This means that schools are able to track the progress that pupils in the interventions that they receive.

Individualised and tailored curriculum offers to remove barriers to learning and enable all pupils to achieve

In order to more effectively support pupils [Rhyl High School](#) identified three main areas of need and developed its provision accordingly. We noted in our recent inspection that Hafan is a programme of intervention that supports pupils whose behaviour is a barrier to engagement. Achieve – supports pupils with ALN and Wellbeing – supports pupils with emotional including mental health needs.

An integrated approach to specialist provision

[Monmouth Comprehensive School](#) hosts a local authority specialist class for pupils with ALN. A senior leadership post was created to develop and implement a shared vision across the school. In our recent inspection we noted that the school continually reviews and refines the provision. A central feature of the provision is the inclusion, where appropriate, of pupils from the specialist class in mainstream activities alongside their mainstream peers.

Inclusive curriculum practice and provision or ALP?

In his [letter to the chair of the Children, Young People and Education Committee](#) the Minister for Education and Welsh Language noted that:

we expect more learners who were previously at the SEN school action level to be supported as part of differentiated teaching and inclusive education practice (Welsh Parliament, 2023, p.3).

The concept and practice of having a graduated response to meet the needs of pupils with ALN is still a requirement and in place in all the schools visited.

The ALN Code is clear and states that:

maintained schools, FEIs [further education colleges] and local authorities **should** adopt a graduated response in relation to children and young people with ALN,

making use of a wide range of strategies. This means that ALP made should be at the lowest level necessary to meet the child or young person's identified needs. (Welsh Government, 2021e, p.231)

The Welsh Government use the terms graduated response and graduated approach interchangeably. The assumption is that they refer to the same process.

Crucially, the Welsh Government's [The additional learning needs transformation programme: frequently asked questions](#) is clear in that:

a graduated approach under the ALN system is different to the graduated approach under the SEN system...under the SEN system not all levels of the graduated approach were put in a statutory plan (a statement)...under the ALN system, all levels of the graduated approach will be put in a statutory plan (an IDP). (Welsh Government, 2022a, S20)

Unfortunately, the crispness and clarity provided in the FAQs, in this regard, is not replicated in the ALN Code.

Provision for pupils with ALN

[Ysgol Gyfun Llangefnï](#) is a bilingual secondary school. In our recent inspection, we highlighted that support for pupils was outcome focussed and that teaching strategies highlighted the needs of pupils with ALN. In addition, we noted that there was effective practice in preparing staff, including governors, for ALN reform.

Local authorities and schools that took part in this thematic had been advised and supported in considering and classifying the curriculum and support and, by implication, the graduated response, that they make for pupils. As a result, terms such as universal, universal plus, targeted, specialist and, specialist including multi-agency provision are increasingly understood by local authorities and used by schools. It should be noted, however, that these terms do not necessarily appear in the ALN Code. The ALN Code suggests that:

the graduated response **may**, for example, be called a) school-based provision [ALP is delivered by staff working in the school] b) targeted provision [ALP delivered by specialist staff such as speech and language therapists] and c) specific provision [such as a placement in a special school] (2021, S20).

It would appear therefore that local authorities and schools are entitled to classify their provision and graduated response as they see fit.

However, this has led to widespread confusion [as supported in the examples provided in [Appendix 3](#)]. For example, provision beyond that at the universal level may be referred to by local authorities and schools as "targeted" but not be considered as ALP. The suggested use of the term "targeted" in the ALN Code refers to provision that is ALP.

Overall, therefore, despite local authorities and schools being generally clear about the provision that they make for pupils, the extent to which such provision is classed as ALP

varies. This is significant as only when provision is deemed to be ALP will a child or young person be considered as having ALN and in need of an IDP.

Those schools that have been supported well by their local authority or regional transformation lead generally had a clearer, shared understanding of provision across schools in their cluster. However, even in local authorities in the same region, there was not always a common understanding of the terms universal, targeted or specialist, or what constitutes provision under each of these categories. This impacts directly on whether a pupil is considered to have an additional learning need or not.

Individual ALNCOs were very clear on what they considered to be universal, universal plus, targeted, specialist and additional learning provision in their school. However, this information is not always shared more widely with staff and very few schools share this information publicly.

In general, staff in primary schools visited had a more secure understanding of what the school considers to be universal, targeted, specialist and, additional learning provision than staff in secondary schools. A few secondary schools in the sample advised that they have identified ALN representatives in departments. In addition, ALNCOs were working with heads of department or areas of learning to determine what universal, targeted and additional learning provision looks like in their department. This is an interesting development, but it is too early to judge the impact.

Despite schools' confidence in the systems of support that they are offering, it may be argued that provision, categorised by schools as universal plus, targeted, specialist or specialist including multi agency support is indeed ALP. In such cases, pupils accessing such provision would be considered as having an ALN and they would be entitled to an IDP.

Overall, ALNCOs were more confident in using provision maps that capture the full range of provision in the school. Provision maps vary from those that are stored on standalone spreadsheets, on the ALNCO's laptop, to software that is integrated into the school or local authority's management information system. The more sophisticated provision maps capture information on type and frequency of intervention. They are used to identify pupils' targets, track the progress that pupils make and come to judgements on the effectiveness of the provision made.

Strategic support for provision maps in schools

Newport authority has supported the development of provision maps across its schools. The authority uses dashboard functions to check on the quality of, for example, one-page profiles, individual development plans and timelines for holding reviews on pupil progress. This authority can be reasonably confident that it has provided its schools with an appropriate and efficient way to determine whether a pupil has ALN and to monitor the progress of pupils.

Regional guidance on the rationale for school provision maps

Local authorities in the central south region benefit from [clear guidance](#) on the rationale for using provision maps in their schools.

Reassuringly, all schools visited recognised the importance of high-quality teaching for all pupils as part of universal provision. In those schools where the ALNCO is a member of the senior leadership team, or where there is highly effective and well-established working between the ALNCO and the senior leadership team, the concept of high-quality teaching for pupils with ALN is successfully built into strategic planning for the curriculum, professional learning, and quality assurance arrangements. Although the role of the ALNCO in quality assuring the teaching of pupils with ALN is not explicitly set out in the ALN Code, a few schools are providing valuable opportunities for their ALNCO to monitor this aspect of provision as part of the role of their role. [The online national professional learning programme \(Intermediate level\)](#) recognises that:

ALNCOs will have a central role in supporting mainstream practitioners to meet the needs of learners with ALN...As a specialist in high quality teaching and learning for learners with ALN, the ALNCO will be well placed to mentor practitioners (Welsh Government, 2022e Ch14 p.13).

Department ALN representatives in a secondary school

Ysgol Gyfun Gymraeg Rhydywaun in Rhondda Cynon Taf has established an ALN representative from each of its departments. These colleagues attend meetings and discuss the progress and well-being of pupils with ALN. There are clear expectations on the role of all teachers in meeting the needs of pupils with ALN. As a result, the ethos of responsibility and accountability for the progress of learners with ALN is gradually increasing in the school.

In summary – Overall there has been a reduction in the number of pupils of statutory school age on ALN registers in schools. These changes vary between and within the regions. Despite a reduction in the number of pupils with a statement of SEN, just over 9,000 more pupils are in receipt of either a statement of SEN or a statutory IDP. ALNCOs generally had a very clear understanding of provision in their schools, and this has normally been adapted well to meet the changing needs of pupils. Many schools have audited and categorised their provision. However, the extent to which provision can be considered as ALP is unclear. A few local authorities and schools were unclear of the legal definitions and what this meant in practice.

Transitioning from SEN to ALN

Overview of chapter

This chapter considers the changes to the implementation timeframe of ALN reform and how both local authorities and schools have responded to them. We also consider the role of the school ALNCo. We highlight increased collaborative working between schools and the emergence of the role of the cluster ALNCo. Whilst we didn't consider the impact on ALN reform on post 16 in great detail we do highlight that local authority strategies for this aspect of reform were at an early stage of development.

The development of person-centred practices has been adopted enthusiastically by schools. They report that relationships with parents have been strengthened and that parents were generally confident in the provision that schools make for pupils, including when arrangements are not additional learning provision. All children with ALN will have an IDP. There are interesting practices to quality assure these. However, we note that parents and schools are not always clear on those IDPs that are to be maintained by local authorities.

We note also that schools have relied on information and guidance from their local authorities, including regional ALN transformation lead and haven't always accessed Welsh Government guidance including training materials. Overall, guidance and information contained on local authority and school websites is too variable in quality and not always easy to locate.

One of the ambitions of the ALN Act and reform is improved collaboration and information sharing between agencies. This thematic report identifies that this is too variable.

Overall, local authorities are improving Welsh-medium specialist provision for pupils with ALN. However, challenges remain in recruiting staff with the relevant specialist skills. In addition, it is not uncommon for Welsh-medium settings to translate resources including assessment materials.

Implementation timeframe

Originally, the ALNET act was due to be implemented over the three-year period 2020-2023. Due to the impact of the pandemic, the implementation timeframe was moved on a year to September 2021- August 2024. In March 2023, a further year was added. This means that implementation will now take place over four years and be concluded by August 2025.

During the implementation period both the SEN and ALN legislation applies. As a result, local authorities and schools are working to two different legislative frameworks. This has created significant additional workload for both local authorities and schools.

Overall, both local authorities and schools visited welcomed and found the initial change in implementation timeframe helpful. Both used the time meaningfully and continued to

plan for implementation. Enhancements were made to organisational structures, guidance materials were updated and ALNCoS continued to audit school provision and, where such arrangements existed, work more closely with other ALNCoS to develop understanding of, for example, good quality IDPs.

As a result of concerns raised by directors of education, headteachers and other stakeholders, the Minister for Education and Welsh Language, in March 2023, announced that the implementation timeframe would be extended by a year. In his announcement, the [Minister commented](#) ‘it is vital for our learners with ALN that we implement this legislation in an effective way’ (Welsh Government, 2023d). The announcement was accompanied with a statement on additional funding.

However, most providers included in this review were critical of the extension and its timing. They intend to keep to their original plans and conclude the implementation by August 2024.

The Senedd Research paper, [Government decides more time needed to make Additional Learning Needs changes \(2023\)](#) provides a very useful overview of the scheduled transfer of learners to the ALN system. As a result of the announcement, it highlights what changes and what doesn’t change.

What doesn’t change	What changes
Newly identified learners with ALN will be supported under the new system, as has been the case since September 2021	The year groups who were set to transfer at some point between September 2023 and August 2024 will now transfer between September 2023 and August 2025.
Learners in year groups scheduled to move to the new system by August 2023 will continue to do so.	
The “flow through” approach for post-16 learners entering sixth form or further education from September 2023, who will have already transferred to the ALN system	

Source: Senedd Research (2023)

Additional Learning Needs Co-ordinators (ALNCoS)

As already noted, schools’ ALNCoS have seen considerable change to their role, not only in relation to workload but also in relation to responsibility. Local authorities too report on the increased workload and responsibility of ALNCo. The ALN Code notes clearly that: ‘it is vital that ALNCo have sufficient time and resource to undertake their responsibilities effectively, including dedicated time away from teaching’ (Welsh Government, 2021, para 8.5 p. 71). Many ALNCoS have other leadership and/or teaching roles in their school. This reduces the time that they can devote to overseeing the quality of provision

including support for pupils with ALN. Many participating ALNCOs felt that they do not have sufficient time to carry out their role as effectively as they would like.

The ALNCOs that took part in this survey were enthusiastic and committed. A significant feature of our discussions with them was their desire to improve the teaching of pupils with ALN. Those ALNCOs that were members of senior leadership teams influenced strategic decisions and used their positions well to champion for ALN across all aspects of the work of the school, including teaching, the curriculum and quality assurance. However, in a few cases ALNCOs who were not members of the senior leadership team did not always feel well supported by senior leaders and their influence at a whole-school level was limited. Again, the ALN Code is clear:

the ALNCO is the individual, who at a strategic level ensures the needs of all learners with ALN within the education setting are met...the role is a strategic one. (Welsh Government, 2021, para 8.7 p. 71)

In its [report](#), The Independent Welsh Pay Review Body (2021, p.xviii) noted that the role of the ALNCO is 'more strategic in nature and is recommended by the Welsh Government to be part of the leadership team'. It went on to recommend that 'work is undertaken, alongside the implementation of the ALNET (Wales) Act, to determine how ALNCO should be remunerated'.

In a few schools in the sample the changes to the ALN system have coincided with the recent appointment of highly experienced and confident ALNCO. They have very quickly developed a secure understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement in their schools.

ALNCOs have generally planned well for the implementation of ALN reform and appropriate priorities have been captured in departmental development plans. In the better examples, there are clear links between departmental plans and whole-school priorities, including an appropriate inclusion of ALN in the quality of teaching, curriculum planning and professional learning. However, a very few schools were unable to articulate clearly enough what quality assurance arrangements were in place, or what the role of the ALNCO was in supporting these. In addition, a few local authorities were not clear on whether ALN features in school improvement plans or whether school improvement officers have discussions with schools in relation to ALN generally and plans for implementing ALN more specifically. It is difficult for them to determine, therefore, the extent to which schools are prepared and whether additional support is required.

Integrated planning by senior leaders

Senior leaders of Pen Y Dre High School in Merthyr Tydfil and The John Frost School in Newport have worked collaboratively to ensure that improving the outcomes and provision of pupils with ALN is at the heart of their planning for the curriculum, provision and professional learning of all staff. There is a robust emphasis on developing staff skills effectively to meet the diverse needs of all pupils, ensuring inclusivity.

The National Academy of Education Leadership (NAEL, 2023) conducted a survey of school leaders and asked them a series of questions related to their preparedness for ALN reform. Of the 730 respondents, the majority (62%) identified as having an ALNCO responsibility and just under half were the ALNCO for the school (p. 8). Just over a quarter of respondents (26%) felt that they were very prepared to deliver on the requirements of the Act, with the majority (64%) stating that their setting was 'fairly prepared' (p. 15). The survey also revealed that many (78%) special educational needs co-ordinators (SENCOs) had transferred to the role of ALNCO.

The development of cluster working, led by cluster ALNCOs, has helped to ensure that schools are well supported in implementing ALN reform. This approach has been received very positively by schools in the sample. They appreciate the advice and guidance provided by cluster leads and the opportunities to work with colleagues in their school cluster. However, the longer-term funding of the co-ordinated approach to cluster working is unclear and this threatens the sustainability of this approach.

Many school-based respondents in our thematic review felt well supported by their local authority. Local authorities generally have a well-established ALNCO forum. These are used to good effect to keep ALNCOs abreast of national and local policy and to provide valuable opportunities for ALNCOs to share experiences and practices. However, a few secondary schools in the sample have not received support and advice from their local authorities in a timely enough manner. In addition, officers that support school improvement do not always have a secure enough understanding of the sector or ALN. As a result, a few secondary schools have established their own ALNCO forum where they share information and practices with one another.

The development of cluster leads/advocates in local authorities in North Wales, South-East Wales and Central South Wales

Over the ALN transformation period, the ALN grant was used to develop the role of ALN cluster leads / advocates. Cluster leads supported the delivery of aspects of the regional ALN implementation plan and cluster plans. They focused on supporting schools in auditing provision and sharing information on ALN provision in their cluster, thereby developing greater understanding and consistency of approach. They established networks for ALNCO to share ideas and practices including supporting the development of regional IDP templates. In addition, they worked with schools to quality assure IDPs.

Overall, the role of the cluster lead/advocate has been highly valued by schools.

Post-16

This thematic review does not consider the issue of post-16 in great detail. We did however ask local authorities to outline their strategy for post-16 provision. Overall, strategies to support this aspect of ALN reform were at a very early stage of development.

Learners beyond statutory school age and with ALN may receive their education in either: maintained schools with sixth forms, maintained special schools with sixth forms,

further education colleges, or independent specialist post sixteen institutions (ISPSIs), otherwise known as independent specialist colleges. They may also pursue other options such as apprenticeships or employment. The last two examples fall outside the scope of the ALNET Act. As such these young people would no longer be considered as being in receipt of ALP. They would therefore not have ALN or be supported by an IDP.

In his written statement (March 2022), the Minister for Education and Welsh Language announced that learners (currently in Year 10 and below) that already had an IDP would:

flow through into further education with that plan. This arrangement would alleviate pressures on both local authorities and further education colleges brought about because of the ...pandemic and wider education reform.

In effect, learners that were in Year 10 at the time of the announcement would be entering post-16 education in September 2023.

The announcement also clarified the position regarding the responsibility for securing and funding provision for learners with the most complex needs that attend independent specialist colleges. Local authorities became responsible for those learners that moved to the ALN system from 2022-2023 but the funding for placements, agreed before the end of 2024-2025, will remain available until learners complete their study and be funded by the Welsh Government. Welsh Government are currently engaged in discussions with local authorities.

In our 2022 thematic report with regards to the role that Careers Wales plays in supporting the transition of pupils with ALN, we noted that:

Welsh Government have not yet identified how Careers Wales will work with local authorities to provide (this) support under the reformed ALN system. (Estyn, 2022, p.1).

Subsequent to the publishing of this report, Careers Wales have outlined their Service Offer for 2022-2023 ([Appendix 2](#)). This includes:

- one to one support for young people with ALN, i.e. those in receipt of a statement of SEN or an IDP
- attending reviews, where invited, for pupils in Years 10 and 11 with statements of SEN
- prioritising support for the transition planning for Year 11 pupils who have complex needs

In addition, Careers Wales will continue to collate and submit applications for specialist college funding. In time, careers advisers will focus on young people in special schools and resource bases.

Those local authorities that had appointed dedicated post-16 officers reported that they were developing stronger strategic partnerships with further education providers. It is becoming increasingly common for ALNCoS from mainstream further education colleges to attend reviews of pupils that are likely to transfer to college. However, the knowledge that local authorities have of and consequently their engagement with independent specialist colleges is less secure, and consequently their engagement with them is more

limited. As a result, local authorities are not able to make informed decisions about the full range of additional learning provision across the post-16 sector, when they know so little about the sector and, what it provides.

A few local authorities referred to developing transition protocols between themselves, schools, and further education providers. A few schools advised that such arrangements were already in place between schools and mainstream further education colleges, and they were unclear about the detail of newly developed transition protocols. No local authority was able to provide definitive information on how the process of securing IDPs would work.

A shared ALN Lead Officer

Building on its “Starting Well” strategy Cardiff Council and Cardiff and Vale College have a shared additional learning needs lead officer for 14–25-year-olds. The ALN lead officer works collaboratively with a range of agencies, including schools, the college and health to support the effective transition and placement of learners with ALN.

Person-centred practices (PCP)

Local authorities and schools who participated were united in their enthusiasm for PCP and planning.

Over time, and based on their experiences, many schools have refined their approaches to meet the needs of pupils, their families, and other professionals more effectively. For example, through pre-meeting sessions, school staff have supported pupils in developing their confidence to communicate and express their views in ways that are meaningful to them. However, securing the views of very young children and those with complex ALN is challenging. School staff have also used pre-meetings to explain to parents how meetings will run, their purpose and to provide parents with opportunities to ask questions about both process and suggested provision. Schools have provided parents with opportunities to share sensitive information or express any concerns they may have outside of the formal meeting. In a very few schools, the presence of local authority officers in PCP meetings has been unhelpful. Officers are generally not known to families and their presence has meant that families have not contributed as openly as schools had expected.

Developing person-centred practices across an all-age school

Staff at Ysgol Llanhari have worked with parents and pupils to create appropriate and effective “about me” profiles. These capture invaluable information about pupils and have been used to adapt provision and support. For example, they have been used in supporting improved attendance of individual pupils by responding to the circumstances that caused them anxiety. The school has also used information provided by pupils to influence curriculum decisions, for example by providing appropriate training for staff to improve the use of outdoor learning experiences.

Building effective links with parents to support equity in learning

During the inspection of [Borthyn VC Primary School](#), we noted that the ALNCo works effectively with staff to ensure that there is effective support for every child. One-page profiles are discussed and agreed with parents and reviewed termly. The school signposts parents towards other agencies that can offer support, including the school's family link worker.

Where parents or other professionals are unable to attend in person, many schools have accommodated this by including participants in virtual or hybrid meetings. Approaches such as these, and parents being more included in discussions and decisions that affect their child more generally, have strengthened relationships between schools and families.

Welsh Government funding has been used to train staff in PCP for many years. Local authorities that have invested in 'train the trainer' models are able to sustain both training and support for schools. In general, it is local authority staff from ALN services, school ALNCo and relevant support staff that have benefited from PCP training.

Where PCP practitioners who champion the use of PCP exist, they have been used to provide training, support and guidance to schools and increasingly have been quality assuring practices, including the sharing of information between for example, primary and secondary schools. However, the overall approach to quality assuring PCP, across Wales, including the identification of practices that are most effective, is inconsistent.

Despite the clear advantages of the PCP approach, nearly all providers in the sample commented on the additional workload that this creates. Schools report that it can take between 3½ to 5 hours per pupil. This includes running the meeting and the administration activities associated with this. In one all-age school, with a large cohort of pupils with complex additional learning needs, around eight hours are devoted to each pupil. Annually it takes around 12 weeks to complete the process for all pupils. This, the school believes, is not sustainable.

One-page profiles are part of the PCP arrangements. They 'describe a learner's character, gifts and talents; what is important to them; and the best way to support them' (Welsh Government, 2015, p.15). In addition to pupils with ALN, one-page profiles are generally in place for learners that do not have an additional learning need but receive targeted support at school.

All participating local authorities and schools clearly understand the importance of the voice of the child. Many schools can provide secure examples of how pupils' voice contributes to school life and decision-making. It is not uncommon for schools to focus on relevant articles of the [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child](#). However, neither schools nor local authorities are aware of local strategies that support the development and implementation of the [children and young people's national participation standards](#).

Individual Development Plans (IDPs)

IDPs are provided for pupils that are identified as having an additional learning need. They replace statements of special educational needs and non-statutory plans such as individual education or behaviour plans.

Many schools were clear that local authorities will maintain the IDPs for children that are looked after and those that are dually registered, for example pupils that attend pupil referral units. However, beyond these groups there was a lack of clarity and transparency regarding those IDPs that will be maintained by local authorities. In addition, there are clear inconsistencies in practice. Pupils that attend local authority specialist classes may have their IDP maintained either by the local authority or the school that they attend.

In general, schools that have received strong support from their local authorities and regional transformation leads have engaged in discussions and have co-produced the IDP template. In some parts of Wales, these have been agreed on a regional basis and are used across local authorities and their schools. A very few schools have not been included in such arrangements and they were not necessarily satisfied with the template provided by their local authority. They argued that the document does not capture sufficient information on the pupil. In a few cases, where schools have not valued the guidance and support from their own local authority, they have secured templates and other documentation from neighbouring authorities and have elected to use them instead of those issued by their local authority.

As reported in the NAEL survey (2023), only a minority of schools felt secure in developing and maintaining IDPs. The majority reported that this was either developing or emerging practice.

Most schools appreciated fully that IDPs are more personalised than statements of SEN and are a better reflection of both pupils' strengths and support needs and how the school will address those needs. However, it is also noted that IDPs can be time consuming to write and review and place additional workload on ALNCOs.

IDP champions and officers that support the development of IDPs have generally been used to good effect. They support schools in developing the quality of IDPs, including ensuring that the identified additional learning provision is explicit, supported by appropriate strategies, and that expected pupil outcomes are appropriate and relevant. Local authorities that have relatively high numbers of statements of SEN have particular challenges in managing the volume of work of, and where appropriate, transferring statements of SEN to IDPs.

Decision-making flowchart

In the EAS region, schools were provided with a decision-making flowchart. This assisted them greatly in ensuring that the process that they were undertaking was correct and in line with ALNET. The flowchart very usefully outlines the steps that the schools need to take in determining whether a pupil has ALN and in confirming the ALP in the individual development plan.

A very few schools advised that parents have been asked to agree to local authority maintained IDPs that outline future further education provision. However, neither the pupil, parent or further education college had been engaged in identifying or agreeing to the provision. This practice raises concerns and has the potential to impact negatively on future provision for pupils.

Overall, there is often unnecessary bureaucracy particularly in relation to looked after children. ALNCoS may be required to attend care and support plan meetings, personal education plan meetings and separate PCP and IDP meetings for pupils.

Both local authorities and schools advised that there are significant pressures in meeting the statutory timescales for issuing IDPs. Local authorities advised that colleagues in other agencies, particularly health, have greatest difficulty in providing advice and information within the given timescales. In addition, the commitment that health authorities make to additional learning provision is too variable. In a very few schools, IDPs maintained by the local authority have not been issued in a timely enough manner. Nationally, there is limited data collected to indicate how well local authorities meet statutory timescales for issuing IDPs.

Information and advice

The Welsh Government has uploaded a range of documents to its [website](#). These are contained in two sections: guidance and services and, policy and background. In general information is primarily aimed at professionals. Those resources aimed at parents are not easy to find and links to the very useful [online e-learning materials](#) and other relevant information hosted on Hwb, Wales' national digital learning platform, are not provided.

Documents that relate to the most recent announcement regarding the extension of the implementation timeframe have not been updated.

Without doubt, implementing the Act during a period of significant challenge, because of the pandemic, has been a tough and ambitious undertaking for all concerned. However, both local authorities and schools were generally critical of both the timeliness and usefulness of the guidance, information and advice provided by the Welsh Government.

Most schools have relied heavily on their local authority and, where appropriate, their regional transformation lead, to provide information that is distilled and meaningful for them. A minority of schools in the sample advised that they have not used the ALN code. Schools have relied on the guidance provided by their local authorities and had hoped that the ALN Code would provide exemplars of practice.

A shared ALN and Inclusion Quality Team in Anglesey and Gwynedd

The shared service was established in 2017 and has supported schools as they prepared to implement ALN reform. For example, officers have:

- supported schools in evaluating and monitoring their provision map, providing advice to headteachers and ALNCo
- supported schools and other agencies, in developing effective relationships with parents

- quality assured IDPs
- contributed to the work of the regional school improvement service to ensure the colleagues are suitably appraised of developments in the local authorities and schools

More generally, school colleagues speak very favourably of the support these two authorities have provided in relation to ALN.

Nearly all local authorities in the sample have uploaded relevant information on ALN reform to their Council's website. In addition, a range of information leaflets aimed at parents and carers, children and young people have also been produced. Those that have been produced by clusters of schools, or regionally, help to ensure a consistent message across regions.

In addition to providing written information, local authorities have provided very useful updates on ALN reform at parent/carer forums and bespoke information events. At times, these events have been co-facilitated with third sector organisations that have strong links with families who have children with additional needs.

However, overall, information provided does not routinely include guidance for parents of children that are electively home educated or those in independent settings. In addition, information on case friends and advocates is less apparent.

Those local authorities that have dedicated officers that provide valuable advice, support and guidance to parents provide an effective link between families and schools. In addition, ALNCo have also assisted parents in understanding the changes brought about by ALN reform.

Overall, parents' main concerns are in relation to understanding the new system generally and more specifically ensuring that the needs of their child are being met. As mentioned earlier in this report, terms such as universal, targeted, and additional provision are being increasingly used by both local authorities and schools. Parents are not necessarily familiar with these terms and need to be reassured that the provision made is sufficient and suitable in meeting the needs of their child. In addition, third sector organisations report that a minority of families are being incorrectly advised that the ALN system does not apply to their child.

During the week commencing 20th March 2023, we viewed the websites of the 29 providers, to evaluate the usefulness and accessibility of the information provided. Please refer to the [Methods and Evidence Base section](#) for a list of the criteria applied during the website review.

In most cases, local authorities in the sample strongly encouraged schools to include updated information on ALN on their websites. However, the quality and accessibility of information on both council and school websites across Wales was too variable. The provision of information in relation to case friends, advocacy and dispute resolution services was weak overall. As a result, parents may not be as aware as they should be on their rights.

Local authority website review

Nearly all local authorities in the sample included the definition of ALN, the majority included the definition of ALP on their websites, and around half provided a link to the Welsh Government's ALN homepage. Information provided by the Welsh Government was generally more up to date than that provided by local authorities and schools.

The majority of local authorities provided a clear timeframe for ALN implementation and also included information on which groups of pupils will transfer from the SEN to the ALN system.

No local authority website in the sample considered provided information on when IDPs will be prepared and maintained by the local authority and those to be prepared and maintained by schools and only a minority of local authorities referred to universal learning provision clearly.

The majority of local authorities provided information about parents' and pupils' rights to have decisions reconsidered by the local authority and many included information and contact details for organisations that provide independent advocacy services. In addition, many included information about the Education Tribunal Wales and how to access it.

All local authorities have bilingual websites and in a minority of cases these have additional functionality, which allows access to a range of languages other than English and Welsh.

School website review

Overall, school websites did not provide sufficient information on ALN reform or what this means for parents and pupils in that school. Information provided by primary schools in the sample was marginally better than that provided by secondary and all-age schools.

A minority of primary schools but no secondary or all-age schools in the sample referred to ALN reform on their home page. On average, it took fewer clicks to access the correct page on the website of secondary schools.

Many schools did not provide a definition of ALN on their websites, and most do not provide a definition of ALP. As a result, parents may not be as clear as they need to be that for their child to be recognised as having ALN they need to be identified as requiring ALP.

Very few schools provided clear information on what it regards as universal, targeted, or additional learning provision.

Overall, schools did not provide an update on which year groups will move across to the ALN system, neither did they advise parents on the right to ask that their child be moved onto the ALN system outside of the mandated year groups.

A few secondary schools in the sample provided links to additional support and guidance provided by Careers Wales.

A minority of schools reviewed provided information for parents through the medium of English and Welsh and a minority provided information in other languages.

A minority of primary schools provided parents with information on how to seek independent advice and advocacy, including information on the role of the Education Tribunal Wales. However, only a very few primary schools provided information on the rights of parents and children to challenge decisions about ALN and ALP. Secondary school websites in the sample did not provide such information.

Only a few schools reviewed provided information on ALN reform that is specific to the context of their school. In such cases this usually related to the provision of local authority specialist but not provision for pupils with ALN more generally.

Only a minority of schools named a person for parents to contact should they wish to.

Dealing with disputes

Local authorities have a statutory duty to:

make arrangements with a view both to avoiding and to resolving disagreements between (a) education bodies, and (b) children or young people for whom the authority is responsible, or in the case of such children, their parents (Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act (2018) S.68 (1)).

Overall, most local authorities and schools who participated reported that, because of strengthened working relationships with parents, challenge has been low. Local authorities have officers available to support and advise both schools and parents. The sensitive work between the school ALNCo and parents, particularly where pupils are considered not to have ALN where previously they would have had SEN, has generally resulted in parents being reassured that the provision made meets the needs of the pupil. An exception to this has been in relation to challenge from parents regarding the lack of clarity about arrangements and future provision for post-16 learners.

A very few schools have not found their local authorities to be particularly supportive. At such times they turn to other schools for guidance in dealing with challenge or disputes.

Avoiding and resolving disagreements for children and young people with ALN in the Central South region

A handbook aimed at educational practitioners who work with children, their parents and carers and young people who have ALN has been developed by the authorities in the Central South region.

The document outlines the legislative base and provides helpful tips on, for example, engaging with and supporting parents to participate, the importance of listening and taking into account the views of parents, the need for clear protocols or procedures, and engaging with children and young people.

As noted in the previous sections, the extent to which local authority and school websites provide information on independent advice and advocacy, including information on the

role of the Education Tribunal Wales, was too variable. The [Education Tribunal Wales website](#) has been updated and includes very useful information on its role and procedures that need to be followed. In addition, it provides useful easy read and child friendly versions of documents. Tribunal decisions in relation to ALN are not available on the website. This limits the ability of local authorities and other stakeholders to learn from decisions.

At a recent national ALN steering group meeting the president of the Tribunal relayed a very clear message. The Tribunal will assess the application of the law and not a local authority's interpretation, and that local authorities are ultimately responsible and cannot delegate their responsibilities fully.

It is interesting to note that the annual report of the Education Tribunal Wales also shows that the total number of appeals received, by authorities, reduced from 139 to 90 (2020-2022) (2022, p.10) and that the majority (60%) of appeals in 2021-22 were either conceded by local authorities (28%) or withdrawn by the appellant (31%) (2022, p.21). This suggests that there is still much work that needs to take place between local authorities, its schools and parents in dealing with disputes at an earlier stage.

Working with others

One of the ambitions of the Act and as captured in the [Welsh Government's Additional Learning Needs \(ALN\) transformation programme](#) is:

improved collaboration and information sharing between agencies, which are essential to ensuring that needs are identified early, and the right support is put in place to enable children and young people to achieve positive outcomes (Welsh Government, 2020, p.3)

Overall, collaboration and information sharing between agencies is too variable.

Many schools in the sample were positive about the collaboration that exists between themselves and their local authorities. However, a minority of schools held a less complimentary view regarding the contribution of educational psychology services in supporting the ALN reform agenda. A few local authorities also commented on the need to adapt their services to better reflect the ambitions of the ALNET Act, particularly in providing services for pre-school children and those post-16 and, the changing needs of pupils within schools.

The schools involved in this review appreciated the support that they receive from special schools. Where such arrangements exist, mainstream colleagues are supported well in developing their understanding of additional learning needs and therefore building their capacity and capability.

Local authorities and primary schools who participated told us that there was now greater collaboration between the local authority and early years providers including primary schools and support programmes such as Flying Start. The role of the early years additional learning needs officer has been key to these developments. We intend to consider this role and its impact in year two of this review.

The ability of health services to provide information and advice in a timely enough manner, and within statutory timeframes, was a concern. Also, an ongoing concern is the commitment that health colleagues make to ALP and what constitutes ALP. Overall, there is continuing uncertainty about the services, provided by health, that are deemed to be ALP.

Both local authorities and schools in the sample continue to note that accessing support from speech and language services, neurodevelopmental teams and child and adolescent mental health services remains a very pressing challenge. These are ongoing and not necessarily related to the introduction of the ALNET Act.

The introduction of the designated education clinical lead officer has been warmly received by local authorities. Local authority officers appreciated the single point of contact. However, it is still unclear how much this role will help to remove some of the identified barriers in accessing health services for diagnosis and support. Overall, most schools engaged with were unclear about the role and unable to comment on its advantages, or how it has affected pupils in their setting.

In our executive summary we noted that implementing ALN reform and curriculum reform during a period of un-precedented and significant challenge has been a tough and ambitious undertaking for all concerned and that we fully recognise that the movement from one system to another takes time.

In its communication with us and, specifically in relation to health, the Welsh Government health colleagues are keen to point out that:

we have the posts and mechanisms in place to identify, anticipate and solve problems as we go along, with a clear awareness of the child or young person at the centre of the process...the point of a new system is that it has to have time to embed.

We will consider the role of the DECLO in future work.

Local authorities' social services departments have a vital role to play in supporting the needs of children that are looked after. However, it is not clear that colleagues in children's services have a secure enough understanding of ALNET and more specifically the provision that schools make and whether it is ALP or not.

In its 2021 report, Care Inspectorate for Wales (CIW) highlighted the need for different professionals and organisations to work together in partnership with families to ensure that children have access to and receive the right support at the right time (p.4). It highlighted effective practice across Wales including the advantages of professional disciplines working together. In Carmarthenshire for example, an educational psychologist is part of the 0-25 disability team (p.33).

Welsh-medium provision

One of the principles that underpins the ALN system is developing a bilingual system, one where all reasonable steps are taken to deliver additional learning provision in Welsh for children and young people who require support through the medium of Welsh, with scope for increasing the delivery of Welsh over time (Welsh Government, 202e, p.37).

Local authorities are required to consider the ‘sufficiency of additional learning provision in in Welsh’ through their duty to keep additional learning provision under review (Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act (2018) S.63).

In their joint report, [The Welsh Language in the Additional Learning Needs System](#), the Children’s Commissioner for Wales, and the Welsh Language Commissioner noted that ‘currently the ALN system in Wales does not reflect the needs of a bilingual nation’ (2023, p3). They provided a comprehensive analysis of local authorities Welsh in Education Strategic Plans (WESP).

They commented that:

in general, examples of where the WESPs provide a clear a detailed overview of ALN provision through the medium of Welsh are few are far between...several local authorities readily admit that they do not have a full understanding of the need for Welsh medium ALN provision, and thus cannot determine if these are being met (Children’s Commissioner for Wales; Welsh Language Commissioner, 2023, p. 3).

The report goes on to state that:

several local authorities admit that ALN provision through the medium of Welsh does not meet the needs of learners...either Welsh medium learners must receive support through the medium of English, do not receive the support required, or, as in the case of some learners with more complex needs, choose English medium education from the outset, as they are already aware of the lack of Welsh medium provision. (2023, p.3)

Very gradually, local authorities are improving Welsh-medium specialist provision for pupils with additional learning needs. This is achieved largely through establishing local authority specialist classes in Welsh-medium mainstream schools.

Of the 15 school reorganisation proposals received by us (September 2022 to June 2023), two local authorities plan to increase provision for pupils with ALN through the medium of Welsh. One authority will establish two primary phase local authority specialist classes for pupils with “significant” ALN. The other is seeking to establish a local authority specialist class for pupils with autism.

The development of Welsh Language resources

In our recent inspection of local government education services in Gwynedd, we recognised the endeavours of the local authority in developing Welsh language resources for pupils with ALN and their families.

The following four paragraphs align strongly with the findings of the Children’s Commissioner for Wales and the Welsh Language Commissioner.

Local authorities advised that recruiting staff with the relevant specialist skills and securing support from Welsh-speaking colleagues in other agencies and services, for example language and play or allied health professionals, is an ongoing challenge.

The extent to which local authorities can provide ALN specialist services through the medium of Welsh was variable overall but generally less of an issue in authorities where Welsh is the predominant language. Where local authorities have used grant funding to second colleagues from Welsh-medium settings, to support the implementation of the Act, the sustainability of these roles is unclear. This undermines the ability of local authorities and partners, including schools, to adequately meet the requirements of the Act.

Professional learning and training for both local authority officers, trainee specialists and school staff was mostly through the medium of English.

Assessment materials and interventions were generally provided through the medium of English, even for pupils that attend Welsh or bilingual settings. It was not uncommon for these schools to translate materials to use with pupils. The Welsh Government is considering issues in relation to Welsh medium provision as part of a five-year review.

The report of the Children's Commissioner and the Welsh Language Commissioner does also advise on the 'numerous examples of good practice' (2023, p.3). These include, for example, plans for the professional development of staff to upskill the workforce both in the Welsh-medium and bilingual sectors. In addition, some local authorities work in collaboration on a regional basis to support the needs of ALN pupils through the medium of Welsh. However, 'these examples are limited' (2023, p.3).

Funding and resourcing

Overview of chapter

In this chapter we consider the funding and resourcing that has been devoted to ALN over several years and more specifically post pandemic funding to support the roll out of ALN reform. In general, senior leaders in schools did not have a clear enough understanding of ALN funding decisions in their authority, or how local authorities have used Welsh Government ALN grants. School leaders were clear that ALN reform has resulted in additional costs to their school.

Funding of ALN

Local authority budgeted expenditure on SEN					WG ALN Innovation Grant	WG ALN Transformation Grant	WG Post Pandemic Funding
£m							
2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	2016/17-2017/18	2018-2020	2021-2023
381	408	433	457	494	2.1	20	77

Sources: Welsh Government Budgeted Expenditure on SEN (Welsh Government 2018c, 2019a, 2021b, 2022c); WG ALN Transformation Grant (Welsh Government 2017b); Post Pandemic Funding (Welsh Government 2021 f, 2022 d, e, g, h, - as listed in section below on funding)

Local authority expenditure on special educational needs has increased year-on-year since 2015 and is currently £494 million. This represents a 30% increase since 2018-2019 and an increase of £36.6 million on the previous year (2021-2022). The percentage increase in funding ranges from 2.7% in the Isle of Anglesey to 15.2% in Flintshire (Welsh Government (2022c).

Approximately 70% of total budgeted expenditure is delegated to schools with the remainder held centrally by local authorities. Just under a fifth is delegated to secondary schools, just under a quarter to primary schools and just over a quarter is delegated to special schools.

Funding and resourcing

The costs of implementing the new ALN system and comparisons with the SEN system have been complex, challenging and challenged by groups such as the association of directors of education Wales (ADEW). The Welsh Government, in its [Explanatory Memorandum](#) to the ALNET Act (2017, p.134) recognised that costs identified in its regulatory impact assessment should be considered as 'best estimates'. Complex funding mechanisms including the lack of disaggregated information meant that it was not possible to fully assess the costs and benefits of implementing the ALN system (Welsh Government, 2017, p.181).

Overall, sample schools reported that retaining high quality support staff is becoming increasingly difficult, particularly as terms and conditions of employment are more favourable in other sectors of employment. Schools also advise that recruiting support staff is more challenging. This situation creates additional pressure and workload for ALNCoS and their support staff.

Realigning services and building capacity

As part of their preparations for implementing ALN reform, most local authorities who participated took appropriate steps to build capacity and realign services in their teams. For example, early years services are generally more closely aligned to the work of education services and in some authorities the line management of early years now sits within education. In addition, local authorities have secured additional staff to allow them to both maintain the current SEN system and plan for the introduction of the ALN system. The sustainability of positions, particularly those that are grant funded, is unclear.

Most participating local authorities identified the introduction of the ALN reforms as a corporate risk and took appropriate steps, including securing additional funding from their councils, to mitigate against these risks.

Transparency and timeliness of funding

Overall, however, there is a lack of transparency in the funding of ALN. Nearly all school leaders in the sample reported that they were unclear how local authorities determine budgets for ALN. School leaders did not fully understand the implications of changes to the ALN register on their budgets and this impacts on their ability to plan as effectively as they wish. Across Wales, local authorities do not communicate clearly enough the rationale behind ALN funding formulas for headteachers and other school staff to have a consistent understanding of how their ALN funding is determined to support future planning.

Our findings on funding generally aligns with those found in the NAEL survey (2023) where just under two-thirds (60%) of school leaders did not understand the funding formula used by their local authority (p. 31) with a similar proportion (68%) of school leaders who thought that they did not have the necessary funding to fulfil the requirements of ALNET (p. 31).

In addition, the terms and conditions and distribution of the Welsh Government grants to support both the transformation of ALN and, more recently, the implementation of ALN were also unclear to school leaders.

The timeliness of local authorities in confirming school budgets and national announcements of additional grant funding is problematic also. Generally, additional grant funding arrives too late and places considerable additional pressure on both local authorities and schools to spend within given timescales. Additionally, short-term grant funding does not allow local authorities or schools to plan strategically as they are not guaranteed the funding in the future. This creates considerable uncertainty.

All local authorities and nearly all schools in the sample reported that there have been significant additional costs in implementing ALN reform, which are more than the

additional grant funding they have received. This includes the appointment of staff and extending provision to meet the needs of pupils.

Welsh Government funding to support ALN reform

Innovation Fund – In 2016, the Welsh Government established the two-year £2.1m ALN Innovation Fund. The fund supported the development of multi-agency projects that focussed on a broad range of activity including early identification of needs, transition planning, monitoring, supporting interventions, capacity of special educational needs / additional learning needs co-ordinators and capacity of post-16 provision for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The funding concluded in March 2018 and a learning event was held where practitioners presented their projects, shared their learning, and broadened their understanding of different ways of working. Developments such as work on regional collaborative working, dispute resolution, and ALN cluster working have been evidenced in this report. A summary of the projects can be found in [Appendix 1](#).

Transformation Fund – On conclusion of the innovation funded projects and, in theory, building on the identified successes of the ALN innovation projects, the Welsh Government committed £20m to support local authorities, health, further education and schools in preparing for ALN reform. Transformation leads were appointed with the task of providing advice, support and challenge to local authorities, further education colleges and other partners in both preparing for and managing transition to the new ALN system. Regional implementation plans were developed with partners. These plans focused on the actions needed to prepare for implementing the Act and were supported by ALN transformation grants. In addition, partners used readiness assessments to evaluate the extent to which they were planning for the change to the ALN system. Some of the effective practices identified in this report, for example cluster ALNCoS, PCP/IDP champions and professional learning opportunities, were funded through the ALN transformation grant (Welsh Government 2017b).

Post-pandemic funding

Since the pandemic, the Welsh Government has committed an additional £77 million to support the implementation of ALN.

The additional funding has been generally welcomed by both local authorities and schools. However it is uncertain if such funding will be guaranteed in the future. The sustainability of the funding is critical, especially considering that schools face deficit funding in the upcoming year, potentially putting provision at risk.

In March 2023, the Minister for Education and Welsh Language announced that the ALN implementation period would be extended by a year and conclude in August 2025. This announcement was accompanied by an injection of an additional £24m over the two years 2023-2025. In addition, special schools would be reimbursed by £1m (Welsh Government, 2023d).

In February 2021, the Welsh Government committed £9.8m to support learners with ALN. The funding was to allow local authorities to clear backlogs for assessments and to support the costs of implementing blended learning, including one-to-one support and

costs of specialist software (Welsh Government, 2021f).

In January 2022, £10m was made available to provide extra support for children and young people with ALN that had been affected by the pandemic. The Welsh Government recognised the negative impact the pandemic had on learners' mental health and, in some cases, their ability to access education and other support. The funding allowed local authorities and schools to provide extra resources and tailored support. An additional £8m was allocated to support nurseries, local authorities and pupil referral units, as children and young people moved from the special educational needs system onto the ALN system (Welsh Government 2022g).

In March 2022, £4m was allocated directly to special schools and specialist units to help provide extra support for children and young people with ALN. A further £0.5m was awarded to Children in Wales. This funding was distributed to third sector organisations to help them in promoting the new ALN system and its benefits for children, parents and carers and young people (Welsh Government, 2022d).

In October 2022, £20m was allocated to local authorities to support mainstream or special schools, including pupil referral units to 'improve, or create inclusive learning spaces and facilities to support learners with additional learning needs'. The announcement was supported by examples from schools, across Wales, that had adapted their provision to better meet the needs of pupils with additional learning needs (Welsh Government, 2022h).

Ongoing funding pressures within the NHS mean that there continue to be pressures on services. Through this work, we note with concern the poor collaboration between ALN provisions and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS). It is not clear whether sufficient importance and priority is given to key NHS services such as CAMHS which can have a positive impact on how well pupils with ALN are able to access education. The lack of coordination between the education and CAMHS has the potential to result in compromised support for children and adolescents with additional learning needs who also require mental health assistance, potentially leading to negative consequences. The potential loss of posts could lead to reduced attendance rates and higher exclusion rates among pupils, which contradicts the Welsh Government's current priorities of promoting inclusivity and reducing educational disparities. Furthermore, our 2023 report ["Equity of curriculum experiences for pupils who are educated other than at school"](#) reveals a concerning increase in the number of pupils in PRUs since the pandemic. These pupils are now less likely to return to mainstream education, creating an unexpected diversion of resources from mainstream education planning. This situation poses challenges for the allocation of resources and may necessitate adjustments to accommodate the increased demands placed on the education system. Overall, these issues highlight the need for greater coordination, support, and planning within the education and mental health sectors to effectively address the needs of vulnerable pupils and maintain a balanced and inclusive educational environment.

Overall approaches to evaluate the impact that funding, particularly post-pandemic funding, has had by Welsh Government and local authorities on supporting the implementation of ALN reform are variable but weak.

Professional development

Overview of chapter

This chapter outlines the various materials that have been produced to assist practitioners and parents understanding of ALN reform. Overall, the extent to which materials have been shared by local authorities and schools is too variable. We note that schools have access to comprehensive training programmes, including where such arrangements exist, support and guidance from special schools. Based on discussion with ALNCoS that were included in this thematic, we noted that some had completed post-graduate qualifications in SEN/ALN, including other specialist qualifications. They used their knowledge and skills effectively in their schools. We highlight the introduction of the MA Education (Wales) programme. Much of the recent focus on professional development has been in relation to supporting the understanding of changes to the ALN system. Supporting the professional developments of all school staff, in teaching and meeting the needs of pupils with ALN, is less well developed.

Workforce development and awareness raising

As noted in the background section of this report, the transformation of ALN was supported by five broad themes. This section draws on aspects that relate to theme two: workforce development and theme four: awareness raising.

The Welsh Government produced very informative [online e-learning materials](#). These were primarily aimed at professionals working with children or young people but were equally accessible to other interested parties. The materials provided a clear overview of ALN reform and consisted of a series of interactive modules that contained videos, quizzes and exercises.

The extent to which these materials have been used and shared by local authorities and schools is too variable. As a result, professionals and parents are not as aware as they could be of the rationale and implications of ALN reform.

In addition, the online national professional learning programme aimed at ALNCoS and aspiring ALNCoS provides comprehensive and very useful information on a wide range of relevant themes including leadership, evidence informed practices and resources that may be of use to the ALNCo. The programme is organised according to three levels; [core](#), [intermediate](#) and [advanced](#). Published in October 2021, September 2022 and April 2023, the materials have been viewed 8928, 1000 and 800 times respectively.

Ensuring that colleagues access training materials

At West Monmouth High School in Torfaen, the ALNCo encouraged all staff, including governors, to complete the online e-learning materials. A record has been kept of those that have completed the training with appropriate follow-up for those hadn't. As a result, staff and governors have a generally secure understanding of the aims of ALN reform and what it means for pupils, parents, and staff.

Earlier in the report, we commented on the enthusiasm and commitment of ALNCoS. In relation to their professional development, some had already completed post-graduate qualifications in SEN/ALN, including attaining specialist qualifications. The knowledge and skills gained by ALNCoS are used effectively to support pupils and staff in their schools.

The Welsh Government was clear that ALNCo would be supported in their leadership development and the ALN Code states that ALNCo 'should actively undertake training to support their continuing professional development' (Welsh Government, 2021, para 8.3 p.71). The national MA Education (Wales) programme is available in seven universities across Wales, with 500 funded places. In addition to following a core programme, it is possible for candidates to follow specialist modules on leadership and management of ALN, inclusive classroom practice, equity and diversity and additional learning needs, and excellence in practice. Successful completion of the course leads to the award of MA Education (Wales) Additional Learning Needs. Overall, the extent to which ALNCo are aware of this programme and the support available for them to enrol on the programme is too variable.

Regional transformation leads, local authority officers and ALNCoS have played a pivotal role in ensuring that the aims and objectives of ALNET are understood by a range of stakeholders, including elected members, senior officers, headteachers, and school staff.

In addition to disseminating information from the Welsh Government, local authority and school staff have been supported in developing their understanding of, for example, managing change, resolving disputes, and supporting individual pupils through differentiated teaching. These training sessions have been received well by both local authorities and schools with delegates commenting on their usefulness.

Overall, schools can access comprehensive training programmes and support from their local authorities and support services that cover a broad range of ALN and well-being related themes. These provide staff with invaluable insights into topics such as autism, the communication needs of pupils, trauma, child development and training in interventions that support pupils with specific needs. In general, schools in the sample were positive of the support and training that staff receive. Many schools spoke confidently about the positive impact that professional learning had on both staff and pupils. However, schools were less confident in describing the extent to which professional learning impacts on the quality of teaching for all pupils.

Knight et al (2022) surveyed 253 teachers, in Wales, on their perceptions of inclusive education. It was found that teachers broadly had a positive understanding of the idea of inclusion. However, it also suggested limitations in terms of teachers' attitudes and practices. These included managing pupil behaviour, physical and financial constraints and training and preparedness.

In relation to training and preparedness, teachers commented that they either lacked or had inadequate training:

many respondents felt that it was beyond their ability and expectations, as a teacher, to accommodate more severe [undefined] cases of ALN...they felt that the complexities of ALN were difficult to meet alongside teaching mainstream pupils

and that grouping children with different needs and abilities into one class would be detrimental to their learning as a whole...Other limitations relate to the time taken to carefully plan for pupils with ALN. It was also suggested that initial teacher education and training had a key role to play in equipping teachers with the required knowledge and skills (Knight et al, 2022, p.11-15).

Conn and Hutt (2021) fundamentally query what is transformative in education reform for learners with ALN. They note that the emphasis has been on changes to ALN *systems*, rather than on pedagogical practices. They question whether curriculum reform will lead to 'more effective pedagogy, higher expectations, and improved outcomes for learners with ALN if (teaching) practices are not significantly changed' (2021, p.15-16).

Allied to this are the findings of Knight and Crick (2022) who set out very clearly the paradox that exists between the national ambition for pupils, and the respective legislation for the curriculum and ALN. They note that the curriculum for Wales is inclusive in its aims. They highlight that the curriculum 'must be implemented in a way that:

- a) enables each pupil to develop in the ways described in the four purposes
- b) secures teaching and learning that offers appropriate progression for each pupil
- c) is suitable for each pupil's age, ability and aptitude
- d) takes account of each pupil's ALN and
- e) secures broad and balanced teaching and learning for each pupil.' (2022, p.10)

If all the above conditions are in place, there should be no need for additional learning provision or to disapply the curriculum, which legislation allows for. In addition, Knight and Crick implicitly question the deficit-based definitions of ALN and ALP. Overall, their assessment could be viewed as highlighting a policy schism between the development of the curriculum for Wales and ALN reform.

In conclusion, much of the recent focus on professional development has been in relation to supporting the understanding of changes to the ALN system. Supporting the professional development of all school staff, including those entering the profession, in teaching and meeting the needs of pupils with ALN, is less well developed. The success of both ALN reform and Curriculum for Wales lie in improving the quality of teaching so that mainstream classrooms can better support the appropriate progress of individual pupils, regardless of their ALN. Overall, there has not been enough joined up thinking at either policy or practice level to emphasise the connection between Curriculum for Wales and ALN reform.

Effective practice

Overview of chapter

There are many examples of emerging effective practice. This chapter highlights some of those. These range from the clarity, consistency and timeliness of advice provided by local authorities and regional transformation leads, the development of cluster ALNCoS, including LA officers that have supported the roll out of PCP and IDPs and the restructures undertaking in both local authorities and schools in preparation for implementing the reform.

Throughout this report, we have highlighted effective practice where relevant. Based on our discussions with local authorities, schools and other organisations, the following is a summary of the main features of effective practice which staff across the system can use to reflect on their progress in delivering the ALN system.

- The clarity, consistency, accuracy and timeliness of advice, support and guidance provided by regional transformation leads and local authorities to their schools
 - Specialist support from local authorities, support services and special schools
 - Improved communication and information between agencies
- The creation of additional capacity by local authorities and schools to implement ALN reform alongside existing SEN duties
 - Schools directly employing specialist staff including speech and language therapists, qualified teachers for hearing and visually impaired and training for staff to become British sign language interpreters
- The creation of ALN cluster leads/advocates with champions for PCP and IDP development, including quality assurance
 - Cluster working for ALNCoS including the development of cluster plans, information sharing and beneficial mutual support
 - Greater confidence in the use of provision maps by ALNCoS
 - The provision and use of decision-making flowcharts to guide ALNCoS
 - The development of PCP practices with sensitive support for parents and pupils to engage meaningfully in the process
- The restructuring or re-aligning of school leadership roles
 - ALNCoS that have sufficient time to undertake the role
 - Well qualified, experienced, committed, and enthusiastic ALNCo
 - ALNCoS that work collaboratively with other senior leaders to:
 - create a shared and whole school vision and ethos for inclusion
 - plan the curriculum
 - plan and support the professional development of all staff
 - quality assure teaching and learning
 - reviewing and evaluate provision
 - Recognition that pupils with ALN require high quality teaching
 - The creation of an ALN representative in each secondary school department

Appendix 1: Summary of ALN Innovation Projects

Focus	Early Years			IDPs		
Project	Improving multi agency assessments and interventions	Children's assessment and teaching tool (CHAT)	Language and communication pathway	Regional collaborative working	Developing consistent IDPs	Early help offer for families
Partners	Denbighshire CBC	Hywel Dda Health Board and Carmarthenshire CBC	Aneurin Bevan Health Board and Torfaen CBC	Caerphilly and South East Wales Region	Vale of Glamorgan	Pembrokeshire CBC
Focus	Post 16			Training		
Project	Review of specialist college systems	Transition for post 16		Capacity of special schools to act as specialist support to mainstream schools	Building capacity for ALN transformation in Carmarthenshire	Practice and arrangements for resolving disagreements and avoiding disputes
Partners	National Association of Special Education Colleges (NATSPEC)	City and County of Cardiff		Rhondda Cynon Taff CBC	Carmarthenshire CBC	Merthyr Tydfil
Focus	Transfer and Transition			ALNCo		
Project	Transition for vulnerable learners – developing outreach support	Transition for 0-3	Improving multi agency assessments and interventions	Supporting the role of the ALNCo in Pembrokeshire	ALN Bill ready ALNCo	ALN cluster and co-ordination pilot



Partners	Ceredigion and Neath Port Talbot CBC	City and County of Cardiff	Denbighshire	Hywel Dda and Pembrokeshire CBC	Monmouthshire CBC	Gwynedd
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Source: Welsh Government (2018a)



Appendix 2: Careers Wales Service Offer



Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal Act Implementation

Careers Wales Service Offer

All young people in maintained settings are entitled to access careers information, advice and guidance from Careers Wales, delivered via face to face, telephone, video or digital means.

Year 11 learners in maintained settings and the home educated are part of an adviser caseload.

Our **Brighter Futures** strategy outlines our graduated service offer for year 11 learners:

- Universal support for those young people who will self-help through our digital and social media platforms and attend group sessions.
- Career Check support - one to one support for those young people identified as in need of guidance and coaching support.
- Targeted support for those young people whose characteristics can lead to them being under-represented in Education, Employment or Training in post compulsory education.
- Additional Learning Needs Support - one to one support for those young people identified as having additional learning needs (ALN). Our current definition is based on those young people with statements or equivalent needs.

Offer for 2022-23

Attending Transition Reviews

As young people in year 9,12,13 and 14 retain their statements we will aim to provide guidance support and attend the annual review as outlined in the SEN Code of Practice

Whilst young people in years 10 and 11 with statements move over to IDPs during the academic year we will maintain our level of support and attend reviews, where invited, to support young people and their families with their transition plans, prioritising those who will be leaving school at the end of year 11 and those who are staying on but have complex needs that require early Careers Adviser support.

For those on School Action Plus who move over to IDPs we will aim to attend reviews, where invited, for year 11s leaving school to enter the labour market.

Learning and Skills Plans

Careers Advisers will continue to write Learning and Skills Plans for young people in years 12-14 who are leaving school to enter further or higher education or Jobs Growth Wales + provision.

Funding applications

For young people who are leaving years 12-14 and require a specialist college placement Careers Advisers will continue to collate and submit applications for specialist college funding.

For year 11 leavers we will provide guidance and support to the young person, their families and, where requested, LA/school staff as the LA will be deciding if a specialist placement is needed and making the application for funding.

Future Plans

As the implementation of ALNET progresses we will move to a model across Wales where our ALN advisers will focus on young people in special schools and resource bases and our mainstream advisers will support those with ALN accessing mainstream provision.



Gyrfa Cymru
Careers Wales

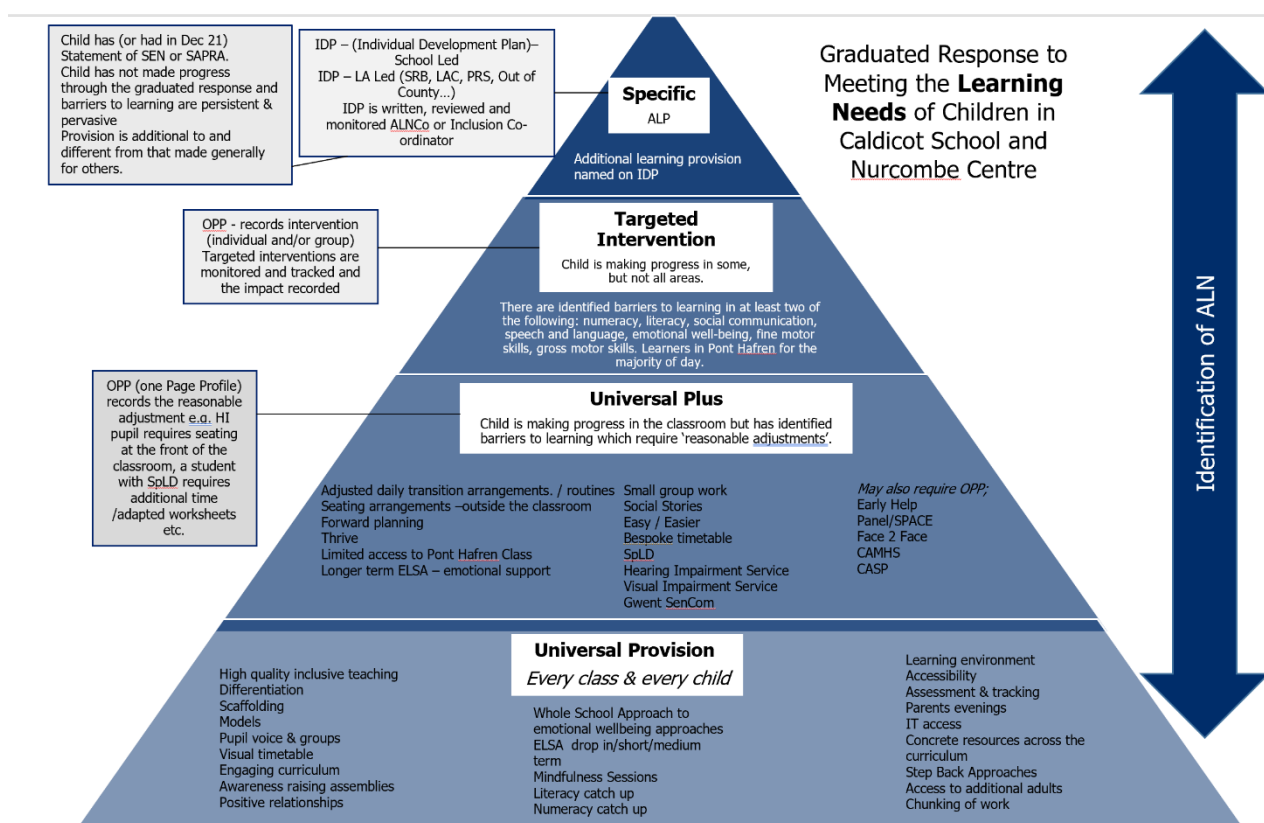


Outline provided by Careers Wales to schools and PRUs to outline changes to services as a result of the additional learning needs reform. The latest information on Careers Wales's services can be found on their website – [My Future | Careers Wales \(gov.wales\)](https://www.gov.wales/myfuture).

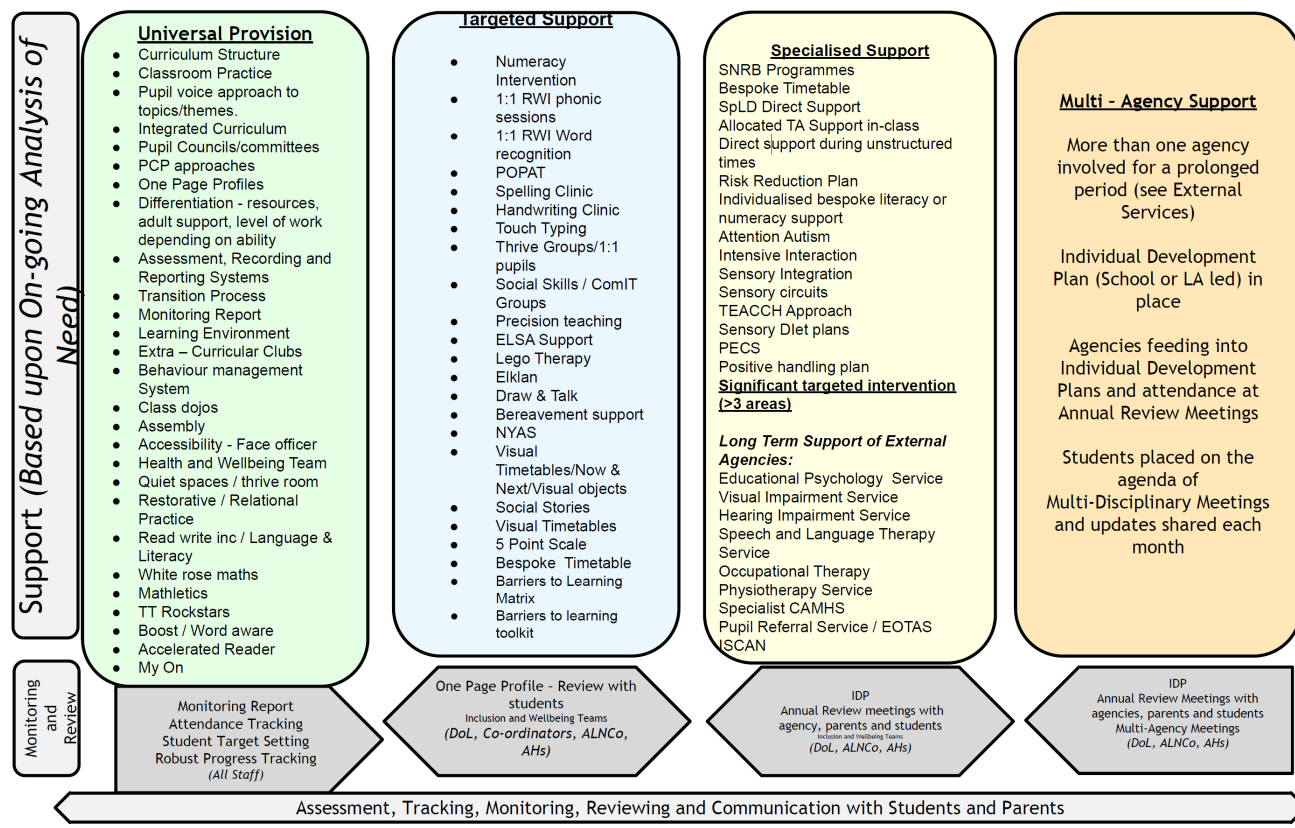
Appendix 3: Examples of school curriculum provision and support and the graduated response

The following images have been provided by schools and are presented in the language received, as examples that may help going forward.

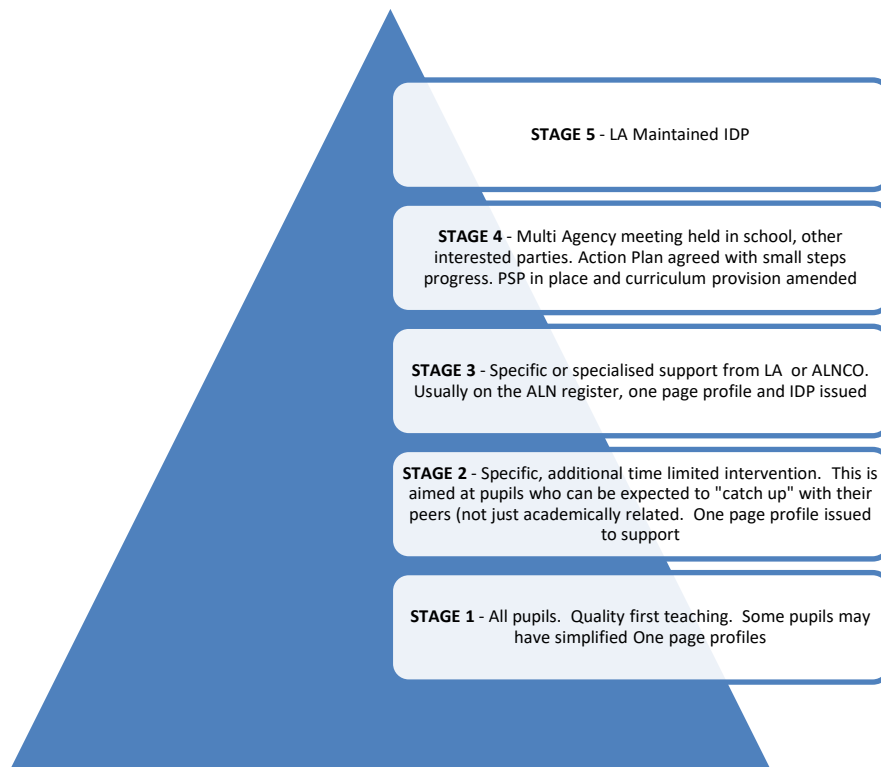
Example 1



Example 2



Example 3



Appendix 4: Changes in SEN/ALN registers by local authority and grouped by region, 2020 to 2023(p)

	School Action 2020	School Action 2023(p)	% Change	School Action Plus 2020	School Action Plus 2023(p)	% Change	Statemented 2020	Statemented 2023(p)	% Change	Individual Development Plan 2023(p)	Total Number of pupils with ALN/SEN 2020	Total Number of pupils with ALN/SEN 2023(p)	% Change
North Wales	9,520	4,654	-51%	7,774	4,054	-48%	2,934	2,367	-19%	2,698	20,228	13,773	-32%
Isle of Anglesey	1,034	589	-43%	697	317	-55%	311	97	-69%	632	2,042	1,635	-20%
Gwynedd	1,468	774	-47%	1,537	791	-49%	484	302	-38%	955	3,489	2,822	-19%
Conwy	1,470	627	-57%	1,636	940	-43%	326	337	3%	350	3,432	2,254	-34%
Denbighshire	1,358	711	-48%	1,631	799	-51%	448	377	-16%	180	3,437	2,067	-40%
Flintshire	2,526	1,117	-56%	1,165	706	-39%	669	632	-6%	320	4,360	2,775	-36%
Wrexham	1,664	836	-50%	1,108	501	-55%	696	622	-11%	261	3,468	2,220	-36%
South East Wales	8,573	4,694	-45%	6,771	4,578	-32%	2,218	2,166	-2%	1,003	17,562	12,441	-29%
Caerphilly	2,848	1,120	-61%	1,892	1,318	-30%	681	614	-10%	184	5,421	3,236	-40%
Blaenau Gwent	826	511	-38%	723	439	-39%	246	204	-17%	142	1,795	1,296	-28%
Torfaen	1,538	873	-43%	1,397	1,059	-24%	211	194	-8%	248	3,146	2,374	-25%
Monmouthshire	825	831	1%	801	618	-23%	249	203	-18%	136	1,875	1,788	-5%
Newport	2,536	1,359	-46%	1,958	1,144	-42%	831	951	14%	293	5,325	3,747	-30%
South Wales	14,995	2,981	-80%	8,851	3,085	-65%	4,176	3,605	-14%	4,157	28,022	13,828	-51%
Bridgend	2,184	403	-82%	1,300	511	-61%	394	308	-22%	721	3,878	1,943	-50%
The Vale of Glamorgan	1,728	902	-48%	1,153	580	-50%	403	405	0%	962	3,284	2,849	-13%
Rhondda Cynon Taf	4,686	529	-89%	2,354	584	-75%	1,187	1,059	-11%	679	8,227	2,851	-65%
Merthyr Tydfil	1,269	290	-77%	731	628	-14%	264	214	-19%	181	2,264	1,313	-42%

The new additional learning needs system: Progress of schools and local authorities in supporting pupils with additional learning needs

Cardiff	5,128	857	-83%	3,313	782	-76%	1,928	1,619	-16%	1,614	10,369	4,872	-53%
South West Mid Wales	17,661	10,248	-42%	9,893	6,196	-37%	4,185	3,987	-5%	2,627	31,739	23,058	-27%
Neath Port Talbot	2,513	932	-63%	1,546	852	-45%	1,005	1,107	10%	412	5,064	3,303	-35%
Powys	2,010	1,981	-1%	1,100	712	-35%	415	370	-11%	505	3,525	3,568	1%
Ceredigion	1,788	549	-69%	717	361	-50%	112	95	-15%	305	2,617	1,310	-50%
Pembrokeshire	2,526	1,423	-44%	1,374	912	-34%	385	322	-16%	257	4,285	2,914	-32%
Carmarthenshire	4,245	2,942	-31%	2,474	1,679	-32%	740	629	-15%	530	7,459	5,780	-23%
Swansea	4,579	2,421	-47%	2,682	1680	-37%	1,528	1,464	-4%	618	8,789	6,183	-30%
Total	50,749	22,577	-56%	33,289	17,913	-46%	13,513	12,125	-10%	10,485	97,551	63,100	-35%

	Statemented and IDP 2020	Statemented and IDP 2023(p)	% Change
North Wales	2,934	5,065	73%
Isle of Anglesey	311	729	134%
Gwynedd	484	1,257	160%
Conwy	326	687	111%
Denbighshire	448	557	24%
Flintshire	669	952	42%
Wrexham	696	883	27%
South East Wales	2,218	3,169	43%
Caerphilly	681	798	17%
Blaenau Gwent	246	346	41%
Torfaen	211	442	109%
Monmouthshire	249	339	36%
Newport	831	1,244	50%

South Wales	4,176	7,762	86%
Bridgend	394	1,029	161%
The Vale of Glamorgan	403	1,367	239%
Rhondda Cynon Taf	1,187	1,738	46%
Merthyr Tydfil	264	395	50%
Cardiff	1,928	3,233	68%
South West Mid Wales	4,185	6,614	58%
Neath Port Talbot	1,005	1,519	51%
Powys	415	875	111%
Ceredigion	112	400	257%
Pembrokeshire	385	579	50%
Carmarthenshire	740	1,159	57%
Swansea	1,528	2,082	36%
Total	13,513	22,610	67%

(p) This data is provisional and may be subject to change.

Methods and evidence base

The report draws on evidence from discussions with 29 providers. This consisted of four local authorities, 15 primary schools, eight secondary schools and two all-age schools. Of these, 12 were conducted through the medium of Welsh. Six of the schools, including two Welsh-medium schools, host local authority specialist class provision for pupils with additional learning needs. Schools were selected based on their size, type, geographical location, and socio-economic context. All discussions took place during the spring term 2023. Of these 20 were face-to-face and nine were conducted via three online meetings.

During autumn term 2022 and spring term 2023 we had discussions with just under half of the local authorities on, the statutory roles and, information, advice and guidance provided to parents. We have used the information gathered on the role of the ALNCo in this thematic report and intend to consider the other statutory roles in our second thematic review.

During the week commencing 20th March 2023, we viewed the websites of the 29 providers, to evaluate the usefulness and accessibility of the information provided. The following criteria were applied during the review:

ALN link or statement on home page?	Number of clicks to ALN (0 if on home page)?
Includes definition of ALN?	Includes definition of ALP?
Includes information on universal provision?	Link to ALNET on wales.gov?
Links to ALN Parents' Guide?	Are WG links up to date?
Links to local authority?	Is there information on ALN Careers Guidance?
Information SEN/ALN register change?	Is website available bilingually?
Is information available in other languages than Cy/En?	Is there information about the right to challenge LA?
Is there information about tribunals?	Is the information contextualised for the school?
Is the information shared relevant and specific to the school?	Is there information about whether information is universal, targeted or specialist?

Does the website explain what will happen to IDPs when provision is universal?	Is it clear when an IDP will be maintained by the school or LA?
Is the timeframe for implementation included?	Does the information include which year groups will transition to IDPs and when?
Does the school refer to person-centred practice?	Does the school explain what PCP is?
Is there a link to independent advice?	Is there information about independent advocacy?
Are there links to UNCRC?	Is there a link to contact someone at the school for more information?
How does the school contextualise information?	How are schools keeping parents involved?

This information is included in [this section](#) of the report. The providers are listed below.

In addition, we met with the Third Sector Additional Learning Needs Alliance (TSANA). TSANA represents different groups of people with additional learning needs and their families.

The second stage of the review will build on our findings for post-16 and the role of the ALNCo. We will also consider the other statutory roles namely, the early years additional learning needs lead officer and the designated education clinical lead officer (DECLO). The second stage review will also consider the implementation of the Act in early years settings, pupil referral units and maintained special schools.

Estyn would like to thank the following for their participation in this thematic inspection:

School	Phase	Local Authority
Cwmnedd Primary	Primary	Neath Port Talbot
Greenhill Primary	Primary	Caerphilly
Hirwaun Primary School	Primary	Rhondda Cynon Taff
Llantrisant Primary	Primary	Rhondda Cynon Taff
Saint Nicholas Primary	Primary	Vale of Glamorgan
Ysgol Bethel	Primary	Gwynedd
Ysgol Dôlafon	Primary	Powys
Ysgol Pen Barras	Primary	Denbighshire
Ysgol Pum Heol	Primary	Carmarthenshire
Ysgol Porth Y Felin	Primary	Conwy
Ysgol Tanygrisiau	Primary	Gwynedd
Ysgol Tremeirchion	Primary	Denbighshire
Ysgol Y Graig	Primary	Anglesey
Ysgol Y Mynydd	Primary	Powys
Ysgol Bae Baglan	All age	Neath Port Talbot

Ysgol Llanhari	All age	Rhondda Cynon Taff
Caldicot Comprehensive	Secondary	Monmouthshire
Pen Y Dre Comprehensive	Secondary	Merthyr Tydfil
Porthcawl Comprehensive	Secondary	Bridgend
The John Frost School	Secondary	Newport
West Monmouth Comprehensive	Secondary	Torfaen
Ysgol Dyffryn Aman	Secondary	Carmarthenshire
Ysgol Y Moelwyn	Secondary	Gwynedd
Ysgol Rhydywaun	Secondary	Rhondda Cynon Taff
Local authorities visited as part of the thematic		
Anglesey		
Bridgend		
Cardiff		
Newport		
Local authority discussions with Estyn Link Inspectors		
Caerphilly		
Cardiff		
Carmarthenshire		
Ceredigion		
Denbighshire		
Flintshire		
Merthyr Tydfil		
Neath Port Talbot		
Swansea		
Wrexham		

Glossary

ADEW	Association of Directors of Education Wales
ALN	Additional learning needs
ALNET	Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018
ALNCo	Additional learning needs co-ordinator
ALP	Additional learning provision
CIW	Care Inspectorate Wales
DECLO	Designated education clinical lead officer
GLD	General learning difficulty
IDP	Individual development plan
ISPSIs	Independent specialist post-sixteen institutions
PCP	Person-centred practice
PLASC	Pupil Level Annual School Census
SEN	Special educational needs
SENCo	Special education needs co-ordinator
SEP	Special educational provision
TSANA	Third Sector Additional Learning Needs Alliance
WESP	Welsh in Education Strategic Plan

Numbers – quantities and proportions

nearly all =	with very few exceptions
most =	90% or more
many =	70% or more
a majority =	over 60%
half =	50%
around half =	close to 50%
a minority =	below 40%
few =	below 20%
very few =	less than 10%

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