



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

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Progress of schools, settings and local authorities in supporting pupils with additional learning needs: government reponse

What we plan to do in response to Estyn's report and recommendations.

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Report details

The report is written in response to a request for advice from the Welsh Government in the Cabinet Secretary for Education's annual remit letter to Estyn 2023 to 2024. The report considers how well the funded non-maintained settings, maintained primary, secondary and all-age schools that participated in the review are implementing and embedding aspects of the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018 (ALNET) and the accompanying Additional Learning Needs (ALN) Code. It also considers how well local authorities have supported schools.

The report builds on findings from the first thematic and identifies effective practice to support inclusive education, develop strategies to support pupils with ALN, enhance Welsh-medium support and strengthen professional learning, quality assurance and the roles of the Additional Learning Needs Co-ordinator (ALNCo) and Early Years Additional Learning Needs Officer (EYALNLO).

Summary of main findings

- The inspection team consistently noted the strong commitment and resilience demonstrated by staff in local authorities, schools and settings
- Overall, the requirements of ALN reform were starting to ensure improvements in provision for pupils with ALN across the country. As a result, where ALN reform had been implemented successfully, many pupils made suitable progress from their initial starting points. However, the implementation of ALN reform was not consistent and, as a result, pupils' additional learning needs were not always supported well enough
- The majority of schools and local authorities in the sample had begun to strengthen the quality assurance of ALN processes and provision. Many leaders, however, expressed concerns about their ability to continue to

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deliver the necessary ALN services, once additional funding comes to an end.

- The findings show that leaders and staff at many schools and settings had started to develop inclusive culture and practice. These schools and settings focused well on the learning and well-being of all pupils. However, in a minority of cases, inclusive vision and purposeful teaching and learning aimed at meeting the needs of all pupils were not effective enough.
- The report found that following discussions with school leaders, local authority guidance for improving the quality of inclusive teaching and learning was variable across Wales. Even in the most effective cases, schools acknowledged that this support and guidance was at an early stage of development.
- Overall, the number of pupils identified with ALN or special educational needs (SEN) on schools' registers had continued to reduce. However, the number of pupils whose additional learning provision (ALP) / special educational provision (SEP) was identified in a statutory plan, either through an individual development plan (IDP) or a statement of SEN, had continued to increase.
- In addition, there was a significant increase in the number of individual development plans (IDPs) that were maintained by schools. Across local authorities, inconsistencies remained in the interpretation of the ALN Code and in the subsequent approaches to school maintained and local authority maintained IDPs.
- Overall, participating schools and settings had a secure understanding of the provision that they make for pupils with ALN. However, it remained the case that the extent to which the provision is classed as ALP was unclear. Most schools and local authorities agreed that it would be beneficial for ALP to be clarified at a national level.
- Where the role of the ALNCo was most effective, they were part of the senior leadership team, and they made a significant contribution to the provision for and outcomes of pupils with ALN. However, in a minority of schools, ALNCoS were not fully involved in influencing the strategic direction and

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decision-making of the school.

- This is the first time that Estyn have reviewed the progress of funded non-maintained settings and the role of the Early Years Additional Learning Needs Officer (EYALNLO) in relation to ALN reform. Findings show that many of the funded non-maintained settings provided effective learning experiences for children with ALN. Further, the role of the EY ALNLO was well established across Wales.
- The extent to which local authorities, schools and settings planned and provided equitable support for Welsh-medium ALN provision remained underdeveloped. This has been recognised by the Welsh Government and local authorities, but significant challenges remained in relation to Welsh-medium recruitment and retention as well as the provision of Welsh-medium standardised assessments and resources.

Recommendations

The report makes 7 recommendations. There are 2 recommendations for schools and settings, 2 recommendations for local authorities and recommendations for Welsh Government.

Welsh Government agrees with all the recommendations.

High quality teaching and learning

Recommendation 1

Schools and settings should ensure that high quality teaching and learning meets the needs of all pupils and supports inclusive education.

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Recommendation 3

Local authorities should work with schools and settings to promote inclusive education, targeting support where needed and strengthening the co-ordination of support services to ensure high quality teaching for all pupils.

Welsh Government response

Local authorities, schools and settings have important duties to plan, coordinate and deliver high quality teaching and learning for all learners. Welsh Government is committed to raising standards for every child.

The importance of high-quality teaching is central to our school improvement agenda that underpins both curriculum and ALN reform. We expect most learners' educational needs, including those of disabled children, to be met in mainstream settings through realisation of the Curriculum for Wales, good quality teaching practice and a whole school approach to wellbeing. Enabling learning forms part of the Curriculum for Wales guidance and has been developed to support practitioners in the planning, designing and implementing of a pedagogically appropriate inclusive curriculum for all learners. Enabling learning was developed to support practitioners working with learners who are in the period of learning leading to progression step 1. The Welsh Government is currently consulting on changes to the Curriculum for Wales guidance. This includes extending Enabling learning guidance to support all learners across the learning continuum.

An ALN effective practice event in February 2025 will share effective practice and improve collaboration with local authority partners.

The National Professional Learning and Leadership Support Body will have a key role in developing and delivering professional learning across a wide range

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of areas that will support improvement in teaching and learning.

ALNCo's

Recommendation 2

Schools should ensure that ALNCo's are fully involved in influencing the strategic direction and decision making of the school.

Welsh Government response

The ALNCo is a critical role to the success of ALN Reform, and Estyn finds that where the role of the ALNCo was most effective, they were part of the senior leadership team, and they made a significant contribution to the provision for and outcomes of pupils with ALN.

The Cabinet Secretary for Education accepted in principle, recommendations 2 to 11 of the fifth report of the Independent Welsh Pay Review (IWPRB) regarding ALNCOs being members of the senior management team/senior leadership team, with access and appropriate time to undertake professional learning.

Further detailed work will shortly begin to review and implement any necessary changes to The School Teachers' Pay and Conditions (Wales) Document 2024 and the ALN Code in consultation with the sector.

Meanwhile, as announced in the Cabinet Secretary for Education's Written Statement of 7 October, an additional £5m has been awarded in 2024 to 2025 to supplement current funding for schools and settings to ensure appropriate capacity to deliver whole school/setting planning, and promote collaborative

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learning for consistent ALN implementation, and support schools on their journey to ensure ALNCoS are part of the strategic leadership team, at the associated pay scale.

Equitable Welsh medium ALN provision

Recommendation 4

Local authorities should continue to develop the workforce, services, professional learning and provision for pupils through the medium of Welsh.

Recommendation 6

Welsh Government should continue to develop workforce planning, resources and professional learning to ensure equitable Welsh-medium ALN provision.

Welsh Government response

Driving equity in education for Welsh language ALN learners is critical. Welsh Government accepts recommendation 6 and we are working with our partners to improve Welsh-medium provision, so that all learners in Wales can have the same opportunity to learn and develop and reach their full potential.

An ALN National Implementation Lead (Welsh language) is working collaboratively with local authorities to plan the workforce, improve provision and identify opportunities for regional collaboration. Furthermore, a national stakeholder group is co-ordinating and prioritising the development of Welsh-medium resources and professional learning, alongside the work taking place at a local level through the Welsh Education Strategic Plans (WESPS).

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Additionally, researchers at Cardiff Metropolitan University, funded by Welsh Government are developing a new set of tests to improve the identification of literacy difficulties in Welsh medium secondary school pupils.

Each local authority's progress on its Welsh in Education Strategic Plan is monitored through their annual review report, which also tracks actions taken based on the Plan.

Additional learning provision

Recommendation 5

Welsh Government should work with all local authorities to ensure that they have a common and secure understanding of the definition of additional learning provision and that local authorities and their schools apply this consistently.

Recommendation 7

Welsh Government should evaluate the impact of implementation and the demand for additional and specialist provision for pupils with ALN; this evaluation should guide future funding arrangements, ensuring that resources meet identified needs.

Welsh Government response

Welsh Government accept the recommendations. The Cabinet Secretary for Education has emphasised her priority to ensuring the ALN framework is clearly understood and has strong legislative foundations. We recognise the feedback indicating that some parts of the legislation are complex and unclear. Therefore,

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we are closely examining the legislative framework with our delivery partners, to inform next steps, ensuring clarity, accessibility and consistent delivery.

Additionally, we have already strengthened monitoring and support for implementation to understand delivery challenges, improve consistency of implementation, and to co-produce solutions with delivery partners. This includes individual termly meetings with local authorities.

The Welsh Government has commissioned Arad Research to undertake a formative evaluation of the Additional Learning Needs System. This will include assessing the effectiveness of the implementation of the system, identifying any barriers or facilitators to implementation and interventions that could be put in place to support implementation.

Arad will undertake several area studies to explore with the sector the assumptions around the impact of resources, including implementation funding provided to support implementation of the ALN system.

Publication details

The report will be published on or after 11 December and may be accessed on the Estyn website.

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