

Cyflwynwyd yr ymateb hwn i ymchwiliad y [Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg i weithredu diwygiadau addysg](#)

This response was submitted to the [Children, Young People and Education Committee inquiry into Implementation of education reforms](#)

IER 25

Ymateb gan: Mudiad Meithrin

Response from: Mudiad Meithrin

Nodwch eich barn mewn perthynas â chylch gorchwyl yr ymchwiliad. | Record your views against the inquiry's terms of reference.

1. We must consider the relationship between the Curriculum for Wales and ECEC. Is the Welsh Government taking advantage of the opportunities to move towards a single policy system that benefits babies and children 0-5 years of age regardless of which part of the sector they receive their education and care experiences?
2. Is there adequate support available in terms of ALN for children who speak Welsh at home (or one of the home languages) or for children who speak another language (English or otherwise) but who receive their care and education through the medium of Welsh?
3. As you know, there are challenges in recruiting and retaining staff in the non-maintained sector as is the case in the statutory sector (and this is increasingly felt in the Welsh-medium sector). The Curriculum for Wales increases the pressure on the sector (in terms of adaptation, implementation and reform) and so that, in turn, supports the demand for wage increases. Without an injection of additional funding (revenue) these challenges will continue and increase.
4. If the Welsh Government receives additional funding as a result of the Westminster Government's Childcare policy announcements, would there be an opportunity to set aside funds to increase per head funding from the current £5 rate? There needs to be consistency regarding the support and procedures settings receive from Local Authorities when referring a child for additional support. There needs to be consistency across Wales



regarding the Professional Learning offered by Local Authorities and the referral and communication systems amongst stakeholders including umbrella organisations.

5. The content of the white paper on the Welsh Language Education Bill needs to be considered in terms of learning opportunities, infrastructure and the ability of schools along the language continuum to accomplish the ambitious targets as this will have to be a core element of the Curriculum. Mudiad Meithrin has many years of experience implementing the immersion approach and this expertise must be used to help non-maintained settings and category 1 schools who will face a challenge in trying to provide children with a baseline of Welsh hours each week. There is no need to re-invent the wheel. Instead, it is necessary to fund services that can work on this issue e.g. Clebran and Croesi'r Bont are two examples of Mudiad Meithrin's language plans.
6. On the whole, the new ALN system which places the child and its family at the heart of every decision has been welcomed. However, concerns are frequently raised about additional pressure on settings, eligibility issues, the support available for settings, the impact of the workforce recruitment crisis on the process of implementing the new system and a lack of funding to provide the support needed.

Eligibility

7. Our understanding of the new ALN Code is that eligibility for an Individual Development Plan (IDP) is very broad, and that the local authority's decision as to whether a child in a nursery setting has ALN is based on whether they require additional learning provision. However, from what we can see the current trend is that only the most acute cases are identified and become part of the new system. We heard from some Early Years ALN Lead Officers that this is because they do not want to label a child as having ALN early in their life, and that support is available to support the child.
8. But from a children's rights perspective, they do not have the statutory basis found in an IDP to protect them and ensure additional learning provision. We are aware of another



complaint that there is confusion between the One Page Profile and IDP among practitioners and parents, which has led to confusion that a child has been identified with ALN but in fact was then given a One Page Profile which is not a statutory document. The danger is that children of the Early Years age will not receive the support in the setting if they do not get an IDP and that the setting consequently gets the support to provide for that child.

Additional pressure on settings

9. In a questionnaire that Mudiad Meithrin sent to Cylchoedd Meithrin practitioners, 3/4 felt that the new system had increased the pressure on their settings. When we asked for feedback about the new system from practitioners, one Leader from Cylch Meithrin in the north-west stated: 'Feeling that it takes a great deal of my time to fill the IDP and implement the targets set by others, which nobody checks at the end'. This comment is confusing because it would not be a requirement for a Leader to write an IDP, but maybe they are referring to monitoring forms. While we agree that the best way of trying to meet the child's demands first is by targeting within the general provision, nursery settings need support and constant guidance regarding how to provide the best provision for the child. If there is no clear guidance and training, practitioners feel their time is swallowed up to one child's demands when they have a responsibility for every child in the setting. Another respondent said: 'What is sometimes unclear is who fills in certain sections. There is a lot involved in the process'.
10. As a national organisation, it has been challenging for us to try to provide support to move to the new system when each local authority follows a different procedure, and there is often variation in terms of the training and advice given to practitioners across Wales. We received a complaint last year from a setting that felt they had to organise and chair meetings that brought agencies, the local authority and the child and their family together; the case was successfully resolved as the Code does not make it a requirement



for practitioners to fulfil such a role, and settings are willing to support and attend meetings.

11. When practitioners were asked to describe what kind of support they have received to implement the new ALN system, we received the following responses:

12. Plenty of support, we can't do the work without the support we get.

13. We have referred 3 children in the last 2 years but unfortunately have not had any Extra Hands support.

14. We see the specialist assistant. Who is great but sometimes too long between visits from others to make sure we are providing the best support we can.

15. Good but takes a while as there is no consistent staff so this makes a difference as takes time to be seen

16. The nature and quality of the support offered is crucial for our practitioners in order to be able to offer appropriate provision for the child with ALN / a child who is being monitored. If the support is not received, it can lead to a lot of pressure in a context that is already under pressure from all directions, and this does not reflect the level of responsibility placed on early years settings according to the ALN Code. We strongly agree that nursery settings are crucial in order to respond to any needs early and offer intervention, but without expertise in the setting. We believe that local authorities need to conduct an assessment of the environment and the level of competence in the Cylch Meithrin when a child is being monitored, and be prepared to invest in improving facilities or staff training in order to strengthen the provision.

17. When practitioners were asked to state in what way does the new system lead to more work, one respondent said: 'This causes more pressure due to lack of time/ lack of staff due to financial reasons/ high expectations for the leaders of the cylch, and not enough time on cylch floor with the children.' We strongly agree with the principles of the new



ALN Code, but currently many practitioners feel that they are unable to carry out the work expected of them, and that they are failing to meet the requirements of all children in the setting; it is not fair or constructive for practitioners if the system makes them feel like they are failing and the added stress is leading to greater numbers leaving the workforce.

Lack of consistency across Wales

18. It has already been mentioned that there is a lack of consistency around Wales, particularly regarding eligibility.
19. Further information is needed regarding the funding of the Referral Schemes in order to understand whether children across Wales receive the same support for their additional needs taking into account the number of children receiving support, expenditure per head, and the provision per head as well as the less measurable support, namely the support for the Scheme's managers and Co-ordinators.
20. A number of counties combine funding sources to provide a range of services including Extra Hands support and complementary programmes. It would be useful to know if each county is making the most of the opportunities that come from identifying and combining sources.
21. It would be helpful for the Early Years ALN Lead Officers to establish a forum to discuss good practice across Wales and to make recommendations on how to improve ALN service and policies.

Workforce crisis

22. One of the issues that is bound to affect the functioning of the ALN system is the current workforce crisis in nursery settings. We recently heard from one Cylch Meithrin who were concerned that they wouldn't be able to appoint an ALN assistant after having been given Extra Hands funding from the county to support a child with ALN. When the Leader raised this with the local authority's ALN officer, the response given was that the setting would



have to accept the child anyway. The Leader's concern was for the child's safety and ensuring that he/she receives the best support and experiences at the cylch; without that 1-1 support, this wouldn't be possible. This again led to additional pressures being laid on practitioners' shoulders and was highly likely of leading to even greater workforce losses due to the stress.

ALN and the Welsh language

23. The ALN Code clearly states that the additional provision needs to be provided in the language that is best suited for the child. As previously mentioned, this can cause a problem for Welsh language provisions if the child's IDP states that the additional provision should be in English. We are also concerned that there is a lack of planning regarding how children will receive services or clinical care when these are needed through the medium of Welsh. We continue to hear about children being assessed through the medium of English for different conditions.

