

# Implementation of Educational Reforms

Children, Young People and Education Committee

Summary Note

## Background

The Children, Young People and Education Committee are conducting a Senedd long inquiry to monitor the implementation of two educational reforms in Wales, the Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Act 2021 and the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018.

As part of the second 'check in' with staff working closely with the reforms, the Citizen Engagement Team proposed a qualitative approach to the engagement.

The Committee wanted to hear from Additional Learning Needs Coordinators, Curriculum Leaders and Headteachers.

## Methodology

Three virtual focus groups and one one-to-one interview were conducted. One written contribution was received from a participant who was unable to attend a focus group.

Using the discussion guide as a framework (see Annex 1) the facilitator explored the reasoning around what participants were saying by asking non-leading questions. Verbatim quotes were collected to add context to the main themes.

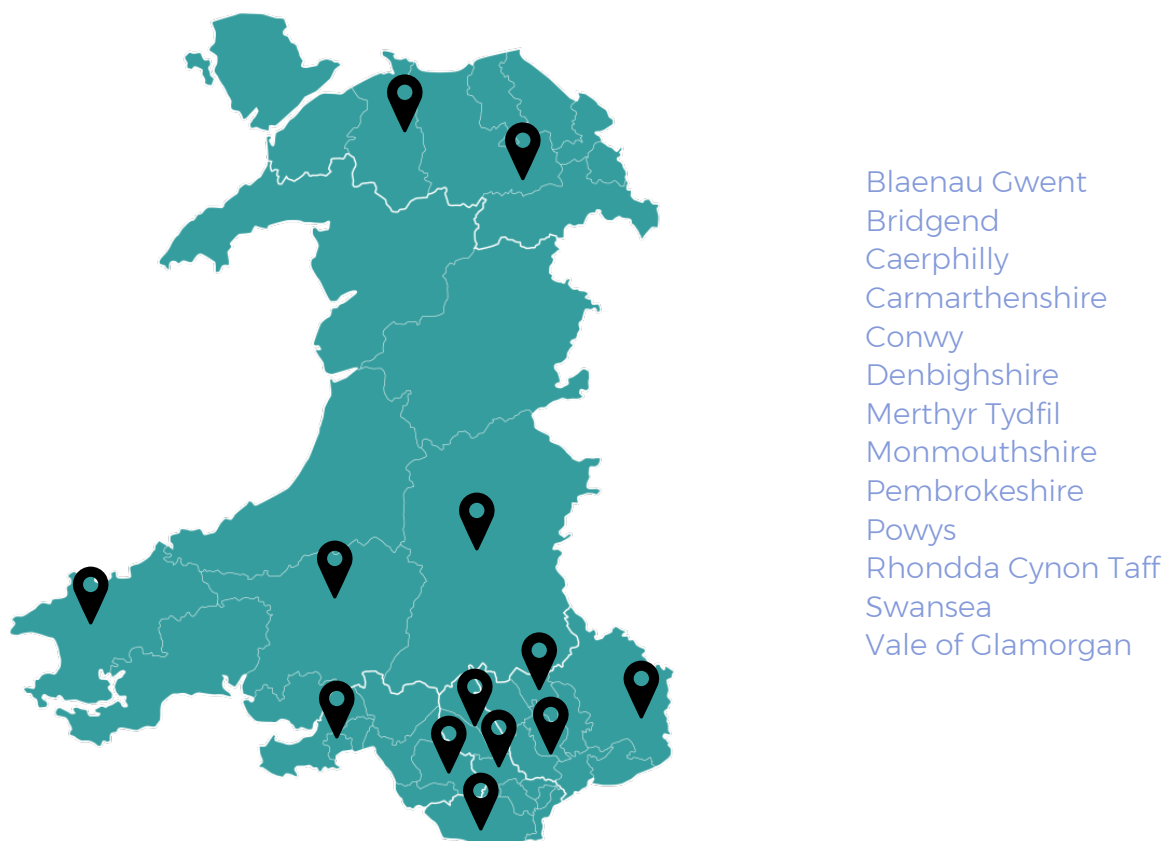
## Sample

Drawing on a list of secondary schools that had decided to roll out the new curriculum to their year 7 students during the 2022/23 academic year, 65 schools were invited to take part. Participants were self-selecting.

**20** schools took part and **24** participants contributed.

The schools were based in rural (6), suburban (7) and urban (7) areas and were located in one of the 13 following local authority areas;





## Key Findings

The data collected at each focus group or interview has been analysed and the key findings illustrated below. Key themes were identified as the most prevalent themes emerging from the data. Verbatim quotes are highlighted in grey boxes.

### 1. Resources

#### Time

Participants were appreciative of the extra inset days, however they felt it was “inadequate” compared to the task in hand, the reform of the whole school curriculum.

*We've got to invest in the profession, in terms of recruitment, but also with what we've got within the building as well. We are pinching and hour here and there to get real time to form ideas.*

*We're all pleased about the fact that there's an extra inset day, but it's one extra day to design a whole years' worth of work. It's not necessarily equitable.*

*The extra day is for three years, but we need that for longer going forward.*

Concerns were raised about the resource heavy task of transferring Special Educational Needs (SEN here after) students to the new Additional Learning Needs (ALN here after) system. Several schools we spoke to had either employed someone to do the Individual

Development Plans (IDP here after) or many schools had taken the Additional Learning Needs Coordinator (ALNCo here after) off teaching time for the next few months just to complete the July Deadline.

*The common denominator with the curriculum and ALN reform is a lack of resources and time and while the extra year... has been good, I've had to take the teaching time off my ALNCo because of the level of bureaucracy involved and the PCP meetings. To get all those people in a room takes more time and is very resource heavy, so it's the right thing to do, but we need to resource it properly and I don't think it has been. It's costing me a fortune.*

### The Human Resource

An added strain on resources has occurred due to staff recruitment, retention and Newly Qualified Teachers (NQT's here after) with little to no experience of actually being in a classroom given the past covid restrictions:

*Post COVID, we have struggled with recruitment and retention. We're putting so much training into a lot of staff who are not staying with us because there are better, more higher paid beneficial jobs elsewhere.*

*They're (NQT's) not the quality they used to be because they haven't got all of those strategies that you pick up by observing other people and by being observed. We are a few years behind in terms of our skill set and now we haven't got the opportunities for further training and development because there aren't opportunities, we can't release people to improve those standards.*

### Funding

Concerns were raised about funding and transparency issues in the future:

*Far more of the statements to be converted, are suddenly becoming school held IDP's as opposed to authority held IDPs and I have funding concerns that link to that.*

*If the local authorities hold the control on the IDP's but they don't hold all of the information how will they calculate how much money to allocate.*

*As a head teacher, I'm concerned about the future in regards to how the funding model is being rolled out and what that means....there's never enough money for ALN.*

The risk of not receiving adequate funding has created a nervousness to ask for too much on IDP's in case they aren't able to get the funding to offer these requirements, leaving schools in a difficult position because they can't self-fund this resource if the local authority deem it to be unnecessary:

*Resources has a massive implication on what we write in our IDP's whereas before you would specify a number of TA hours we are having to move away from that and suggest "classes with additional adults", we have to be creative so we can't be held up in a tribunal.*

*I'm really mindful of how I write my IDPs and they're not as specific as maybe I would like them to be, for fear that I'm going to have staff absences, I can't recruit or I haven't got enough money.*

One school believed they may not be getting certain funding because the local authority (occasionally referred to by participants as "LA" within this report) thinks they've had enough resources, rather than looking at the IDP's on a case by case basis.

## 2. Support

### General Support

There were mixed feelings about the local consortia support. There was a shared feeling of "we are giving them the ideas rather than them supporting and offering us guidance." Some had received too much information that has been generic on occasions and therefore not immediately useful or relatable.

*It feels as if they're coming in to ask us what we're doing and taking what we're doing away with them rather than coming in and giving us guidance and advice.*

*It felt at the beginning relatively generic, just some meetings to go through basic elements of the new curriculum. But now they've created something a lot more dynamic, a lot more responsive.*

*The answer that we're getting aren't providing us with a very clear vision.*

*We've had too much from the regional consortia and that has been quite difficult sometimes to find your way through it.*

*Our Consortia has provided the thinking space, the opportunity to share ideas, philosophy, purpose, etcetera and that has been particularly useful.*

### Training

Some felt that the consortia training to enable better working with the cluster was really valuable. However it was repeatedly highlighted that access to training was an issue across the sector. Participants felt it's not designed with teacher availability in mind and it's inaccessible because of a lack of cover:

*They did run very valuable professional learning sessions that our staff got a lot out of. But then they ran sessions within school time and we couldn't release*

*staff because we were short staffed. So they then move it to after school and then the staff couldn't attend because of family commitments.*

ALNCo's said training was either offered at the start of the reform but stopped at the very point support was needed or there was just no time to attend. It was considered "impossible" to train a number of ALNCo's at the same time.

*The early conferences were good and the leaders were in place but just as it was implemented this role was taken away.*

ALNCo's are members of the senior leadership team within schools. However the training offered to them was consider middle leadership level.

*Generally the offer from consortia, was training. It felt like CPD, it didn't feel strategic. We're expected to be SLT level, which is a wonderful move forward for the profession but the training didn't match that. They were offering middle leadership training when we were already senior leaders.*

Within the ALN focus group participants said a lack of sharing of best practice or peer supporting has resulted in a lack of self-confidence for some:

*I have this anxiety and worry, because it's only me that's doing this role, and it's a legal document that I'm writing.*

*Trying to work all of those different systems is challenging and frustrating. You feel like you're on a huge roller coaster because one minute you think, oh, I've got it. And the next minute, you're on your knees in the office thinking, what am I doing?*

*Low moments have definitely been when surrounded by writing the IDPs. I have found it a really lonely process. We aren't use to writing IDP's either so quality assurance plays on my mind.*

### **Access to services**

Support from health services and the local authority to complete IDP's wasn't considered as timely enough. Health professionals were described as "silent", to the extent that IDP's have had to be left blank where these professionals should have input:

*There has been no correspondence with health. The section from health is very, very, rarely filled with anything .... To get health professionals to attend reviews has been a real challenge... the support from health is missing.*

*We're a very large school with a range of very complex needs, a specialist resource base and a satellite class. A member of the health team has not attended even one meeting.*

*IDP's are very much being bounced back to schools. Local authority IDP's are not being held in great numbers...we really need the support of professionals to help to move those forward so young people can meet those targets.*

*It's taken nearly a year to get a local authority IDP from one council which as we know is completely oppose to the guidance.*

### Cluster work

Participants felt that some of the benefits around the new curriculum and ALN reform have been stronger connections and support within clusters;

*Our cluster communication is so much better through this process.*

*Working together and sharing good practice, not only as a cluster but as an alliance, has been very valuable as we plan our curriculum.*

*When we all started writing IDP's, no one knew what a good IDP looked like. No one knew what a good one page profile was actually going to be. So having those opportunities to quality assure and moderate across different schools at a cluster level, but then at a local authority level has been helpful.*

### 3. Additional Learning Needs

#### System and Structures

Participants described how the systems, structures, and the layout of IDP's are "fundamentally" different across different local authorities creating more work for staff:

*The biggest frustration has been a lack of a consistent approach between local authorities, it is not even anywhere close. It is completely different.*

*I'm actually on the edge of two county councils so I've seen it from two perspectives, which for me has been extremely difficult and also very frustrating because the processes are so different from county to county.*

*I spend a lot of my time not fully sure whether I've done things correctly because of the differences.*

*If everyone was on the same system, it would be a way forward for every school in Wales.*

When comparing local authorities, there appeared to be different sets of criteria for different participants to follow when deciding who should be responsible for writing and holding the IDP's, should it be the school or the local authority? This varied in different areas fuelling frustration but also creating a lack of trust for some of the local authorities.

*I have a local authority maintained care provision based on my school grounds. It's a unit for children with ASD. I was under the impression that because we have no control as to who enters this provision, this is because it's a local authority specialist provision that is housed on our site, it made absolute sense that they'd be local authority IDPs. I didn't question it and then I was corrected by the local authority who said, no, they're not local authority IDPs, they are school IDPs. I know an ALNCo in another county who works in a similar setting and pupils all have LA IDPs there. There is clear inconsistency across LA's.*

There was some confusion as to why local authorities have the final say so on school held IDPs when the ALNCo's are the experts. It has caused friction with some parents who have an expectation they will get the support the ALNCo believes they require:

*We have several children, and I think they need one-to-one support...but what I think they need and what the county thinks don't always match up.*

*Our local authority want the schools to convert the statements to IDP. The difficulty with that from a school's point of view is if I put what I think the provision the child needs onto the IDP, the local authority can still turn around and say no.*

*I feel that there are several children that would absolutely benefit from an IDP and should have an IDP. But I'm told by the local authority that they don't need one. And then there are other children that I don't feel need one because good classroom differentiation would meet their needs, but we're told by the local authority to create one. That's hugely frustrating.*

### **Transfer deadline**

Participants described the extension of the transfer deadline of students to move on to the new system as “not actually helpful”, participants felt “it came too late”

*We don't feel it's helped schools. It may have helped local authorities but it's been quite disruptive, quite unhelpful and quite confusing for schools, for our cluster and for parents.*

They also felt the delay caused a bottle neck with their workload. They surmised the decision makers who were managing the timescales were ‘out of touch’ and looked to the staff for answers rather than providing them with help and guidance. The request to work in this way made participants feel under appreciated.

*Timescales have definitely been an issue, but also changing the timescales have not helped, because I sent out the conversion letters to all of my pupils... now I feel obliged to carry on with it because it's so important to manage the parents expectations all the time.*

*The extra year has come too late, if we'd known we would have been prioritizing our work differently.*

*We will meet the deadline, but at what cost?*

*We don't have time to sit doing paperwork all day every day because we're people facing all the time and so the decisions are being made by people who don't have that experience of having 20 children sat outside the door because they need your support. That's really frustrating.*

## Data

Of the schools we spoke to, the number of students who have IDP's or identify as ALN appears to have dropped. Participants mainly attributed this decrease to the way the new system collects data:

*Around 50% of our pupils remain on the new ALN system and our other pupils are within a targeted register. And the difficulty is that this doesn't reflect our school...We are not able to report particularly well on those targeted pupils.*

*In terms of the numbers of young people with ALN I think we remain similar, but the way we're reporting doesn't reflect that. So we've got young people who have an IDP, but we've got young people who are having targeted interventions, but that won't reflect because they may not necessarily have an IDP, but do have a level of need.*

*We had the data and it looked like our the percentage of ALN children was really, really low. But when you look at the level of need across the school, it's incredibly high, much higher than it's ever been.*

*Before the reform we were at about 330+ students on school action and school action plus register, including statements and now I'm only back up to 86.*

*We draft a one page profile with targets and then there's a matrix that the local authority run it through to see if the pupil meets the targets. That's very cold I feel. It's a system that says if they meet the criteria for an IDP. And there has been a reduction of students needing an IDP.*

## Communication

Support for the children and young people who don't have an IDP isn't as well communicated with the new system. This is causing issues with ALNCo's ensuring that those students that require classroom support are getting everything that they need:



*There doesn't seem to be a graduated response anymore. You're either on the list or you're off it.*

*Our ALN percentages have gone down quite considerably, but I'm really concerned about the children that don't meet the criteria for an IDP. Staff do need to be aware of their needs and we do need to make classroom differentiation and adjustments. As a school, we've decided to create this extra band of children who need that extra support.*

Participants described how a plan to educate parents and organisations more widely is integral going forward as “parents get attached to the “statement” term.”

*We need to educate a wider system of people. Advocacy services are brilliant people, brilliant services, but there's misinformation out there.*

They felt that there's a risk with a reforming system and people not understanding the new system, that untrustworthy organisations will offer families support that they may not require to obtain their rights.

*You've got parents going to private people paying people. There are sharks out there that are circling at this time which could make things really, really difficult for parents.*

This was also true of schools being targeted by organisations offering schools expensive systems that may not be helpful in preparing them for this reform.

*Within the curriculum design aspect of a RNR, a gaping hole was left and others will try and fill it. There's a cottage industry that's trying to do that and I think that's exposing schools, professionals, parents, pupils to something that could actually undermine the full principle behind this new curriculum...that's the causes of sleepless nights.*

#### 4. Assessments

All the participants agreed that they felt it was too early to identify if the assessment structures that they have begun to embed are going to be effective. The majority of participants feel unclear if they are heading in the right direction with effective assessment strategies as they have received little to no steer from the consortia, ESTYN or other supportive bodies.

They described feeling “uneasy” and needing to “have faith” in their decisions. They felt due to the lack of guidance for assessments, this is making it “impossible to unpick” the levels for their learners.

*“Assessment” is the word that really scares all teachers.*

*We have basically just been left to entirely work it out ourselves.*

*The assessment, recording and reporting is, in my opinion, creating a bit of a gaping hole in the curriculum.*

*The subjective nature of the progression steps is more of a hindrance than it is a help.*

*We've got a system in place for assessment which we're quite happy with ourselves and we think it works for us... I suppose the problem that we've got is we've absolutely no idea whether it's right or wrong.*

## **5. Education inequality**

Situations described by participants working in the ALN sector, demonstrated the possibility of education inequality, which could undermine the fundamentals of the reforms. There is no discrepancy for ALN pupils on the periphery and the system “isn't designed for them”, this could lead to education inequality in the future.

Some learners who need IDP's teachers described as “we can't even get the pupil into the school. Everything's been tried”

*The specialist placement request in our authority requires a child has to have an IDP and this presents a particular challenge when you've got pupils that aren't attending school. We've got some that we've been trying to get back in since COVID and it's just not successful. It's almost encouraging me to write a very vague IDP just to go through the process. It feels uncomfortable for me because that's not what the system is about.*

*We have to have an IDP to apply for any specialist provision. And I've found myself writing some IDPs for pupils I've only ever met over teams...The local authority are expecting me to write this legally binding document for a pupil that I've never actually met in person.*

*In some cases, it has cause us to move away from it being pupil centre to just a bureaucratic exercise. It's so far removed from the whole idea of the new legislation.*

Also, concerns were raised about how the system seems to be more successful for the parents who are quite educated and not so fair on those students who've got parents who perhaps have learning difficulties themselves and they need the additional support as much as their children do.

## **6. Renewed staff and school focus**

Many schools said they have been readying for the curriculum for years and described the process as “evolution not revolution.”

Participants all shared the opinion that they and their colleagues were glad to be embarking on this pupil centred reform:

*It's been challenging, but great. There have been a lot of rewards along the way.*

*The shift is monumental. But it's the right thing to do because it places pupils at the centre of it.*

*Having the opportunity and flexibility to develop a curriculum that serves the needs of our young people was a huge but extremely exciting responsibility.*

The process has enabled them to create a school vision that's coproduced with local involvement and strengthens links with other schools to enable good sharing of ideas and renewed staff focus:

*This new curriculum is really encouraging each school to be very, very clear on why you're doing what you're doing for the pupils in front of you.*

## Annex 1

The Big Questions:	In-depth Questions:
<b>The New Curriculum</b>	
<p><b>How has the implementation of the Curriculum for Wales gone for your school so far, since September 2022?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explain the benefits and challenges of the process of <b>designing</b> the school's own curriculum (based on the national framework provided)</li> <li>• Explain the benefits and challenges of the process of <b>implementing</b> the school's curriculum among Year 7</li> <li>• Outline whether any aspects of the new curriculum have been particularly difficult or challenging for your school, for example Relationships and Sexuality Education; Religion, Values and Ethics; and Welsh Language.</li> </ul>
<p><b>What support have you received from the local authority and the regional consortia?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What has been the nature of this support and what has it consisted of (e.g. professional learning and training?)</li> <li>• Has it been useful and has there been enough?</li> <li>• To what extent do you feel that there has been a common approach in the local area, for example has your school worked with other schools nearby and how similar do you believe your curriculum is to other schools?</li> </ul>

<p>To what extent do you feel that the new curriculum is contributing to national, strategic objectives?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is the new curriculum helping or hindering the school in improving standards? If so, please explain how is it achieving this? If not, please explain what you think could be done to improve the situation.</li> <li>• Is it helping tackle attainment gaps (for example between eFSM pupils and their peers, between pupils with SEN/ALN and their peers, and between Looked After Children and their peers)?</li> <li>• How confident are you that you can assess pupils under the new Curriculum for Wales? For example, do you believe it is clear enough how pupils should make progress and how this should be assessed?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Additional Learning Needs Reform</b></p>	
<p>How has the first two years of implementing the new ALN system and transferring pupils from the SEN system gone?</p>	
<p>Roughly what proportion of the pupils on School Action and School Action Plus have you moved to the new system within the mandated year groups for 2021/22 and 2022/23?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do you think you will reach the July 2023 deadline for transferring pupils in the mandated year groups over to the new system?</li> </ul>
<p>Do you welcome the additional year that the Welsh Government is now allowing for transferring the second tranche of learners (the second tranche of mandated year groups) from the current SEN system to the ALN system?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To what extent is this much needed?</li> </ul>
<p>In comparison, have you found transferring <b>students with statements</b> more or less difficult or complicated than transferring <b>students on School Action or School Action Plus</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do you have any suggestions to help to improve this task?</li> <li>• Have you had any difficulty securing specialist services and / or interventions for your pupils where they have needed them, for example health services?</li> </ul>
<p>When applying the definition of ALN,</p>	<p>When applying the definition of ALN,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are all of the pupils at your school who had SEN under the previous system judged to have ALN and receiving an</li> </ul>

	<p>IDP, where they are in the year groups who have moved to the new system?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are you applying the definition of ALN in the same way as the previous definition of SEN?</li> <li>• How do your numbers of ALN and SEN pupils compare with recent years?</li> <li>• Have they gone up or down?</li> <li>• Do resource issues have any bearing on decisions you take about deciding if pupils have ALN and qualify for an IDP?</li> <li>• Is the approach of the new curriculum a factor in how you decide if pupils need Additional Learning Provision?</li> </ul>
<p><b>What support have you received from the local authority and the regional consortia?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What has been the nature of this support and what has it consisted of (e.g. professional learning and training?)</li> <li>• Has it been useful and has there been enough?</li> <li>• What support have you had from the regional and national implementation leads?</li> </ul>