

IER 34

Ymateb gan: Llywodraeth Cymru

Response from: Welsh Government

Additional Learning Needs (ALN) Implementation

1. Introduction

1.1. Achieving excellence, equity and well-being for all children and young people is a core purpose of education reforms in Wales. At midway through the second year of implementation, a range of evidence and monitoring activities are underway to understand progress of implementation of the ALN system (the ALN Act and ALN Code and associated regulations) on the needs of learners and their families.

1.2. The Welsh Government continues to work closely with stakeholders and commission a range of evidence sources to monitor implementation of the ALN system. These include, the ALN Reform National Steering Group, Estyn in its role as education and training inspectorate for Wales, the Interim ALN National Implementation Lead, Post-16 ALN Implementation Lead, the National Academy of Educational Leadership Wales, SNAP Cymru and the Teacher Recruitment and Retention Board (TRRAB). This is in addition to insights coming through the Curriculum for Wales (CfW) [“early insights” report published](#) on 27 April. This paper draws on engagement, feedback and evidence from these stakeholders.

1.3. We have commissioned Arad Research to undertake a formative evaluation of the ALN system. The four-year research contract started in January 2023 and will assess implementation of the ALN system and the realisation of policy objectives. The research will also explore the cost implications of implementing the reforms and identify any emerging impacts. This iterative process will provide key review milestones that will enable the Welsh Government and key partners to respond appropriately to the emerging evidence on the implementation of the ALN system.

2. Progress on ALN Implementation

Overview

2.1. The [national mission: high standards and aspirations for all](#) sets out our roadmap to realign our vision for an inclusive education system. Breaking down barriers so that excellent education opportunities and outcomes can be achieved by all learners, at all ages, in classrooms, online, and in work - through early identification, support and targeted actions.

- 2.2. Together, the CfW and the ALN Act seek to transform the expectations, learning experiences and outcomes for children and young people. Both emphasise an inclusive education system which balances equity of access to the curriculum for all learners with addressing the needs of individual learners. The CfW is designed to raise aspiration for all learners, with Additional Learning Provision (ALP) planned and set out in an Individual Development Plan (IDP) to support learners whose needs cannot be met without additional support.
- 2.3. Implementation of the 2018 Act commenced on 1 September 2021 with the ALN system being phased in over a period of 4 years up until August 2025. Children move over to the ALN system in groups over the 4 years.
- 2.4. The education sector has made considerable progress to prepare and implement the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act alongside rollout of the CfW.
- 2.5. Estyn's summary annual report 2021-22 found that, overall, providers have maintained steady progress towards implementing additional learning needs reform and have welcomed many aspects to the changes in approach. Positive progress is being reported, in both embedding whole school inclusive practice, planning to meet the needs of all learners, and enhancing involvement and engagement with children and their families. Importantly there are early signs that there is a systematic shift in practice around meeting the needs of learners through quality, differentiated routine teaching.

Movement of children who have ALN that calls for ALP under the ALN Act

- 2.6. On March 20, the Minister for Education and Welsh Language announced an extension to the implementation of the ALN Act from three years to four years, to respond to workload pressures, to create more flexibility, and protect quality of practice, plans, and provision that meets the needs of learners. This was in response to feedback over the last six months from Additional Learning Needs Coordinators (ALNCo), local authorities, head teachers, Unions and third sector providers who have told us that more time is needed to move learners from SEN to ALN and embed effective change.
- 2.7. Extending implementation means that children who were due to move to the ALN system between September 2023 and August 2024, will now move to the ALN system between September 2023 and August 2025. The rights for children, and their parents, to request a child moves to the ALN system is unaffected – meaning that children who want to move to the ALN system can still ask to do so.
- 2.8. The National Implementation Lead reports that extensive adaptations have been made by all LAs to accommodate the new way of working. Nearly all have made good use of the additional Welsh Government funding expanded the workforce in anticipation of the forecasted increased demands of delivering the new way of

working, increased administrative aspects of establishing new processes and systems, whilst running both the ALN and SEN systems concurrently. However, most LAs have needed to secure additional core funding as the changes necessary are seen as long-term and not exclusively related to implementation.

- 2.9. Nearly all LAs are confident in their ability to manage the moving of the mandated year groups during year 2, however identified concerns over managing the 3rd year demands to both review the IDPs created this year and move the remaining cohort from the SEN to the ALN system.
- 2.10. LA's report that completing the IDP process within the prescribed timescale is frequently challenging and many LAs report that they miss completion deadlines. All LAs are prioritising quality over meeting deadlines and giving appropriate attention to creating meaningful and genuinely person-centred plans where learners and their parents have a say in all aspects of decision making.

Parallel curriculum and additional learning needs (ALN) reform

- 2.11. An inclusive education system is one where learners' needs are listened to and learners are supported to participate fully in education with a whole setting approach is taken to meeting the needs of all learners. A school's curriculum should raise the aspirations for all learners and respond to individual needs, and it should therefore support the identification, planning and progression for learners with ALN.
- 2.12. The CfW provides flexibility for schools and teachers to design their own curriculum. Schools should be aware of the needs and circumstances of all their learners when designing their own curriculum, considering equity of opportunity when putting into place support and interventions or making reasonable adjustments.
- 2.13. An IDP sets out provision that delivers tangible additional learning provision that contributes in a meaningful way to the child or young person's achievement of their full potential. Learners with ALN will receive an IDP when they require ALP.
- 2.14. In relation to progression and assessment, the new arrangements require schools to understand whether different groups of learners are making expected progress, including those with ALN.
- 2.15. Last year, Estyn's annual report¹ found that by July 2022, nearly all providers had successfully begun to identify those learners who need ALN intervention and mapped out the universal provision needs for other learners. Nearly all providers continue to make steady progress in reforming their provision to meet the requirements of the ALN Code.

¹ [The Chief Inspector's Annual Report 2021-2022 | Estyn \(gov.wales\)](#)

- 2.16. Early insights on CfW implementation, reports feedback from senior primary school leaders on the advantages of the CfW. It is allowing them to promote and focus on inclusivity for ALN and vulnerable learners more than the previous curriculum has done, at a time when this is vital. They are finding that learners who were often previously withdrawn, are able to remain in class, and have their needs met with classroom support.
- 2.17. Moreover, early insights point to wider improvements to learner centred practice. Senior leaders felt that they were now more learner-centred in their approach to curriculum design, with the flexibility to tailor support according to learners' needs. An increased focus on learner voice activity which was now considered to be more central to curriculum design, and more individualised approaches to monitoring learner progress was felt to support a learner-centred and inclusive education. The ALN Evaluation will explore the early insights in more detail.

Early Years

- 2.18. The code requires that every local authority designate an Early Years ALN Lead Officer (EY ALNLO) to have responsibility for coordinating the local authority's functions under the Act in relation to children under compulsory school age who are not attending maintained schools. They have a pivotal role in facilitating early identification of needs, ensuring the right provision is identified earlier, and ALN prevented from developing or escalating.
- 2.19. Estyn report that the role of the EY ALNLO has enabled nearly all local authorities to make progress in implementing the ALN Act. Anecdotal evidence from EY ALNLOs has highlighted families have more confidence in the system as their views are considered and they are involved in decisions including through person centred meetings. Any frustrations have primarily been around miscommunication of information about the new ALN system, with most cases being swiftly resolved.
- 2.20. Local authorities have reported an increase of learners presenting with complex needs. This has been identified across all age groups, but this has been of particular concern in the early years in relation to speech, language and communication (SLC), and particularly social communication.
- 2.21. The Welsh Government's 'Talk with Me' (TWM) [delivery plan](#) prioritises evidence based support for SLC at universal, population and targeted levels. By getting early identification and support right, we can reduce the demand for specialist services and free up capacity to support learners with more specialist needs, including ALN.
- 2.22. Objective 4 of the TWM plan is to 'upskill the childcare, health and social care workforce to address SLC needs. The All Wales SLC 0-5s training pathway tool has been rolled out in order to address this commitment. Settings across Wales can access a range of SLC training options and we are in the process of making these available in Welsh. We have a dedicated Talk with Me [practitioner page](#)

which provides a wide range of resources to support practitioners in giving evidence-based support.

- 2.23. Childcare Wales Learning and Working Mutually (Cwlwm) continues to support the Welsh Government to implement and evaluate the ALN Act, ensuring the sector has up-to-date resources, information and advice to enable effective implementation. Issues have been raised in relation to the need for appropriate and ongoing training for all settings, including childminders. Some good practice has been noted, with childminders using one-page profiles to support the children they care for, to keep families involved and to support transition to other settings.

Post 16 implementation

- 2.24. ALN implementation for post-16 learners will begin in September 2023, young people will flow through to the ALN system over the next two academic years. Those currently in Year 11 will move to post-16 education and training with their IDPs in place in September this year. Any young person not yet in the ALN system at the end of academic year 2024 to 25 will move to the ALN system at that point.
- 2.25. The Post-16 National Implementation Lead reports that FEIs are continuing to make significant progress in preparing for the ALN Act. Principals and governing bodies, while voicing concerns over workforce capacity, recognise the positive impact that the ALN Act can have and support its introduction. There has been a significant increase in focus within the sector as the implementation for post-16 draws near.
- 2.26. Partnership working between LAs and FEIs continues to strengthen across Wales, but work remains necessary to develop a shared vision between LAs, FEIs and health delivery partners to best meet the needs of post 16 learners with ALN. This is being facilitated through workshops and focused task and finish groups.
- 2.27. The Welsh Government has invested £700k in 2023- 24 to FEIs and an additional £225k for LAs to develop joint working and partnership projects to prepare for transition and to improve additional learning provision locally.
- 2.28. While FEIs can meet the needs of the vast majority of young people with ALN, in rare cases, young people who have very complex ALN, may need to attend independent special post-16 institutions ('ISPis') to receive their further education and training. Under the Learning and Skills Act 2000, the Welsh Government is responsible for securing and funding specialist provision. Under the ALN Act, this responsibility will transfer to LAs.
- 2.29. The budget for ISPI placements will be transferred to local authorities in 2025-26. Options for transferring the budget are currently subject to consultation with LAs. Initial discussions recognise the difficulty of the decision required but LAs welcome the early indication and clear strategic direction to increase local mainstream

provision for young people with ALN. There is also recognition of the work that many LAs already do to secure and develop that provision locally.

- 2.30. Interim arrangements have been put in place for 2023-25 which will enable LAs to make decisions on specialist provision for young people who will move to the ALN system during this period. The Welsh Government will reimburse the costs of these placements via the Local Authority Education Grant.
- 2.31. The Welsh Government will continue to make decisions and fund placements for those currently in year 12 and above until 31 August 2025. Any funding commitments made by the Welsh Government will remain available until the agreed programme of study is completed.
- 2.32. The establishment of Commission for Tertiary Education and Research (CTER) provides additional opportunities to secure and fund facilities for further education and training, and secure general, proper, and reasonable facilities for learners with ALN.

Participation of children and young people

- 2.33. The Act requires that learners' views should always be considered as part of the planning process, along with those of their parents/carers. Estyn report a consensus from schools that person-centred practice brings a significant and well-needed improvement to supporting learners with ALN and their families. Additional learning needs coordinators (ALNCOs) in schools have a good understanding of the new requirements and are positive about the changes.
- 2.34. The Welsh Government recently funded SNAP Cymru to run a series of free parent and carer events for families of children with ALN/Disabilities aged 0-25. Nearly 300 people participated in 14 sessions held in local venues across Wales and online.
- 2.35. The sessions took place online and in person across Wales and offered parents and carers opportunities for attendees to find out more about the implementation of the ALN system in Wales; share with the Welsh Government their experiences of the ALN reforms and their views on the ALN code; and access independent support and advice from the SNAP Cymru team. The in-person events also encouraged parents and carers to meet and connect with other families with a shared lived experience of ALN.
- 2.36. The sessions have provided useful feedback on what is going well, but importantly parent and carer feedback on actions and recommendations for key partners and government to improve system effectiveness for learners.
- 2.37. We have commissioned Children in Wales to establish an Additional Learning Needs (ALN) Children and Young People's Participation programme across a

range of settings in Wales, to ensure the voice and rights of children are at the core of planning and policy. This project has been initiated and recruitment is underway.

Welsh Language

- 2.38. One of the core aims of the ALN Act is to create a bilingual system of support for learners with ALN. Welsh-medium education is for all, and no child should be left behind. However, Welsh-medium providers and families continue to express concerns around the availability of Welsh language workforce, assessments and resources to support ALN identification and provision.
- 2.39. The planning of Welsh-medium ALN provision forms a key part of Welsh in Education Strategic Plans (WESPs). Local authorities must set out in their WESPs how they will use the findings of its reviews under the ALN Act to improve Welsh language provision for learners with additional learning needs and for workforce planning within the ALN sector.
- 2.40. We recognise that there is more to be done to develop Welsh language resources for learners with ALN. Through the newly established bilingual educational resources company, 'Adnodd', we aim to continue creating new Welsh-medium resources to support learning and teaching under the CfW and identify and commission resources to better support ALN learners.
- 2.41. The importance of having a sufficient number of teachers, support workers and other practitioners able to work through the medium of Welsh to support learners with ALN is recognised in the [Welsh in Education Workforce Plan](#). It includes actions that aim to develop capacity and expertise within the workforce to support learners with additional learning needs in the Welsh-medium sector.
- 2.42. To strengthen the Welsh language support and additional learning provision available to children and young people we will appoint a Welsh Language Implementation Lead. The officer will facilitate the sharing of good practice, encourage collaboration and effective sector working to maximise expertise knowledge and skills developing a consistent approach to Welsh language provision across Wales.

Collaboration and multiagency input

- 2.43. The ALN system encourages 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.
- 2.44. The Interim National Implementation Lead reports that LAs have excellent productive and professional relationships with the Designated Educational Clinical Lead officers (DECLOs) and significant efforts are being put into multi-agency

working. All health boards are committed to providing as much support as is practicable in helping LAs and schools through attending individual person-centred practice (PCP) meetings and contributing to the development of IDPs. Where this is working well, collaborative approaches enable the development of a joint understanding of how best to support individual learners and their families.

- 2.45. Effective work has been undertaken in each health board by DECLOs to raise awareness at a practitioner and executive level about the duties of the Act and the ALN system. All health boards are cognisant of their responsibilities, however, because of the continuous and cumulous impact of the pandemic, understandably efforts and resources are prioritised to address these acute issues, and demand for involvement from health practitioners outstrips the capacity to supply. Although the DECLOs are well-supported by executive leads, influencing systemic changes to support the principles of the new way of working in nearly all health boards, is in the early stages of development.
- 2.46. Significant inroads have been made in collaboration between the DECLOs. This has enabled initial developments in establishing joint national approaches to address specific operational or strategic issues. Further activities are planned with delivery partners to share and refine this work on a national footprint.
- 2.47. The effectiveness of partnership working between LAs and health boards is variable but is continuing to improve. Some early successes however have been secured which have led to very useful improvements to a shared and co-ordinated approach, for example multi-agency ALN panels or forums (including early years and post 16). Local authorities have concerns around the capacity of health professionals to engage consistently in the IDP process, a few school leaders believe that health representatives are not clear about their role in the IDP process.
- 2.48. Developing consistent practice across health boards is noted as sometimes challenging, given that each one serves multiple local authorities. Typically, each LA has different operational practices, different information management systems and have different ways of supporting ALN. Both health boards and Las will need to look for ways to adjust their approaches to ensure cooperative working.
- 2.49. In a gradually maturing system, further work is needed to establish joint expectations between local authorities and health boards, and to realise the expectations of good quality interprofessional working between jointly accountable bodies in education and health. The ALN evaluation activity will need to ensure that the views and perspectives of DECLOs and health practitioners are captured, to support a balanced understanding of multiagency implementation.

Strengthening the rights of the child

- 2.50. The Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018 established duties on local authorities to deliver a less adversarial system by

providing people with information and advice about the ALN system, arrangements for resolving disagreements and provision of independent advocacy services for the children and young people for whom it is responsible.

- 2.51. Local authorities have a responsibility to ensure parents have access to impartial information and advice regarding SEN/ALN provision in addition to arranging dispute resolution and advocacy services.
- 2.52. SNAP Cymru provides reliable impartial support for children and young people, parents and carers throughout Wales in relation the ALN system. As part of their services, SNAP provide independent disagreement resolution services to most local authorities in Wales. Most local authorities sub-contract to external organisations, whilst some provide impartial in-house services.
- 2.53. Educational Tribunal Wales (ETW) has jurisdiction to determine appeals about additional learning needs, special educational needs and discrimination in schools. Appeals can be brought by or behalf of nursery age children and young people from 16 to 25 years. Short term additional resources have been provided for the Welsh Tribunal office to respond to additional workload as a consequence of test cases and increase parental rights under the new system. Welsh Tribunals are expected to publish an annual report during 2023 to provide early insights on appeals.

Increased complexity of need

- 2.54. Estyn's 2021/22 annual report highlighted the continued social and emotional impacts of Covid 19 have led to an increase in learner needs and demands on services.
- 2.55. The National Implementation lead monitoring of LA's concurs and reports an increase of learners presenting with complex needs across all age groups. It is of particular concern in the early years in relation to language and social communication with a significant increase of referrals being made to LAs. Consequently, LAs have needed to develop professional learning opportunities that support schools in establishing capacity building approaches to meeting needs.
- 2.56. All LAs report that schools are facing unprecedented an on-going demand to cater for a much wider than usual range of need particularly in relation to social and emotional well-being of learners with an increasing trend of exclusions, reduced timetables, non-attendance and those choosing elective home education. A reduction in school budgets is believed to have exacerbated the situation as schools report that they no longer have the capacity to meet such increased demands. All LAs report that there is an increased demand for specialist placements which far exceeds current capacity.

- 2.57. The WG has maintained a £9.1m Local Authorities grant from 2023-2024, 24-25 to respond to additional pressures and social and emotional issues of ALN learners.
- 2.58. Meanwhile, we are clear the only sustainable way of responding to rising demand and the multifaceted nature of mental health support is to ensure prevention and early intervention, coupled with good, universal support available and good access to specialised services which is why we are adopting a whole system approach to service provision in Wales.
- 2.59. We have developed the NYTH/NEST Framework as a planning tool for Regional Partnership Boards (RPBs) to implement a Whole System Approach in their areas. We have recently appointed a NEST Implementation Lead who is working across Government, with RPB's and external stakeholders to truly embed NYTH/NEST in children and young people policy.
- 2.60. This compliments our whole school approach to emotional and mental wellbeing and the statutory guidance we published in March 2021. We provided £12.2m funding in 2022-23 to support schools to embed the guidance and develop a school ethos with wellbeing at its heart. Funding has been used to appoint implementation coordinators embedded within the Welsh Network of Healthy School Schemes; implement a range of universal and targeted wellbeing interventions in schools; train teachers and other school staff on wellbeing; and ensure all-Wales coverage of the CAMHS school in-reach service, which sees dedicated mental health practitioners in schools.
- 2.61. A three-year Neurodevelopmental Services Improvement Plan backed by £12M is addressing immediate pressures on neurodevelopmental assessment waiting times and improving support within services. It is developing sustainable integrated needs led services with a skilled and resilient work force. However, a diagnosis is not required to access educational support, and neither should support be delayed while children and young people wait for an assessment.

3. Managing ALN reform

Implementation support

- 3.1. The Transformation Programme was fundamental and successful in providing advice, support and challenge to local authorities and other delivery partners in preparing for the ALN system. Estyn find that Local authorities and ALN advisory teams provided beneficial support for schools during the four-year transformation programme process, including helping schools to understand the ALN Code and Welsh Government guidance. Their work included briefing sessions, professional learning opportunities, facilitating school-to-school collaboration, cluster working and providing useful materials.

- 3.2. An ALN Reform National Steering Group was established in May 2022 to provide strategic direction, multi-agency oversight and support to the sector and move the ALN programme from transformation, through implementation and beyond. Liz Jones was appointed as Interim National Implementation Lead role in April 2022. Chris Denham, ALN Transformation Lead (Further Education) continued work with FEIs on implementation readiness.
- 3.3. Implementation funding has been deployed for transformation preparations and support implementation, recognising pressures of implementation whilst managing parallel SEN system, with over £62m revenue funding invested between 2020 and 2023.
- 3.4. For 23-24, the ALN implementation grant has been increased to £12m, from £6.6m for 23-24 across Wales. £10.4m direct to schools and £70k per local authority.

Shared understanding of the Act and Code

- 3.5. Improving understanding of responsibilities under the ALN system is critical, and ambiguity is reported from a range of sources around the responsibility for planning and maintaining an IDP.
- 3.6. Estyn have found that generally, school leaders understand when an IDP will be maintained by the school and those that will be maintained by the local authority. However, they have found instances where there has been inconsistency and ambiguity around the responsibility for maintaining an IDP.
- 3.7. Estyn has raised some concern that this lack of understanding of the definition of ALN or ALP is leading to inconsistent application of the terms. A few school leaders comment that the definitions of ALN or ALP are too broad and are, therefore, open to different interpretations. Some leaders report that health professionals have different understanding of the terms too.
- 3.8. The Code expects all LAs, in consultation with schools to establish and publish, a set of principles that will be applied when determining whether the school or LA should secure the ALP required to meet individual need. Just over half of the LAs have published their Principles Document with work underway in all the remaining LAs to complete this during the academic year.
- 3.9. As part of the National Implementation steering group we are currently establishing task and finish groups to improve shared national understanding of duties as described in the code.

Professional learning

- 3.10. Professional standards for teaching and leadership make clear the responsibility on all teachers and leaders to ensure the needs of all learners are met, all staff

who work with children and young people with ALN have a responsibility for ensuring that their learners' needs are identified and provided for.

- 3.11. The ALN professional learning offer available to practitioners, system leaders and advisors enables them to develop the skills they need to meet the needs of learners with ALN so they can put in place differentiated teaching or other targeted interventions and make best use of expert advice and support.
- 3.12. The national ALN professional learning pathway is available to all teachers who support learners with ALN, and especially ALNCoS who have a strategic role in schools and colleges and are the first point of call for teachers seeking advice and guidance on ALN. Education practitioners can also opt to enhance their professional knowledge of ALN by pursuing the ALN pathway on the National MA (Masters) in Education (Wales). Training on the ALN system is available for those in statutory and senior leadership roles.
- 3.13. As part of a refresh of the accreditation criteria for ITE programmes, we are strengthening expectations for supporting learners with ALN as part of student teachers core studies.
- 3.14. The National Implementation lead reports that all LAs have provided extensive guidance and support to schools in developing effective individual IDPs. The practice of evaluating the quality and impact of IDPs is continuing to develop but remains variable. In a few LAs robust and embedded process are in place that have secured sustainable school-led mechanisms for quality assuring IDPs. All LAs though, have at the very least, basic processes for assuring the quality of IDPs. Early feedback suggests that the quality of school maintained IDPs are variable and that in most LAs there is a need to revisit professional learning for ALNCoS to improve effective and consistent practice.
- 3.15. Wider workforce is integral to effective reform, and we are responding to deficits across with sector. The WG is investing £6.2m to train 10 new Doctorate in Educational Psychology (DEdPsy) students per year for three years from 22-25.
- 3.16. In 2018 we allocated over £289k to regions over three years to support the post-graduate training of local authority-based specialist and advisory teachers of learners with sensory impairment.
- 3.17. We have funded the Third Sector Additional Needs Alliance (TSANA) to develop a set of e-learning modules to help practitioners identify and support learners with certain disablements and learning needs in schools.

ALNCo Workloads

- 3.18. The National Implementation Lead reports that there is a general consensus from schools that person-centred practice brings a significant and well-needed improvement to supporting learners with ALN and their families.
- 3.19. Although this new approach is valued and much preferred, conducting the IDP process as it is intended requires more time than anticipated and far exceeds that allowed for Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators under the old system.
- 3.20. All LAs, and the education workforce express considerable concerns about workload issues in schools and settings in implementing the new way of working. Consequently, many ALNCOs report that there is a significant increase in demand on their time. In addition, the new statutory duties bring increased accountabilities for schools which in turn impacts on the responsibilities of ALNCOs and senior leaders. Many LAs report that schools are currently or at risk of, experiencing retention and recruitment issues with regard to ALNCOs.
- 3.21. Whilst the ALN Code makes clear that the designation of an ALNCO does not remove the responsibilities of the wider workforce; we are alert to concerns about the increased workload placed upon ALNCOs and the need for schools to ensure there is sufficient support around the ALNCO to prevent them becoming isolated and overwhelmed with caseloads.
- 3.22. £12m implementation funding has been deployed for 23-24, £10.4m direct to schools to temporarily increase schools and settings capacity and time to deliver a whole school/settings approach to meeting needs of ALN learners.
- 3.23. The National Academy ALN Unlocked events will provide a forum for ALNCOs to support each other by sharing experiences and best practice.
- 3.24. Additional INSET days have been agreed to align effective professional learning with Welsh Government priorities including ALN and help ensure all staff understand their individual and collective responsibilities.
- 3.25. A task and finish group made up of practitioners and trade union representatives will review and provide recommendations on ALNCO pay and non-contact time by December 2023. Similarly, the WLGA Social Partnership Forum Task and Finish Group is looking into a variety of issues relating to Teaching Assistants, including workload and responsibilities and a move towards common pay scales across Wales. The group is expected to report in July 2023.

4. Monitoring, Data and Evaluation

Evaluation

- 4.1. The Welsh Government has commissioned Arad Research to undertake an evaluation of Evaluation of the Additional Learning Needs System. The aim of the research is to carry out a formative evaluation of the additional learning needs (ALN) 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, and any early anticipated or emerging impacts of the new system. The programme will work closely with stakeholder groups to support us with assessing the impact.
- 4.2. This will involve developing a logic model and theory of change and evaluating the implementation of the ALN system including exploration of cost implications of implementing the reforms, as well as identifying any emerging impacts.
- 4.3. The evaluation will involve four phases. Following the development of a logic model and theory of change, the first two phases will focus on evaluating the implementation of the ALN system. A survey of practitioners will take place during the summer of 2023 and in-depth field work with schools/settings, stakeholders, parents and learners between Oct 2023 and Sept 2024. The third and fourth phases will consider early impacts and progress. A survey of practitioners, parents and caregivers between Oct 2024 and June 2025 and in-depth fieldwork with schools/settings, stakeholders, parents and learners between July 2025 and September 2026. A report will be published at the end of each phase of the evaluation.

ALN Data

- 4.1. Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC) data is published annually. The last PLASC data for February 2022 showed 74,661 SEN/ALN learners, down from 92,668 in April 2021 (just prior to the start of the first year of the ALN system implementation), a fall of 19.5% (18,007 learners) in SEN/ALN numbers.
- 4.2. The 2023 PLASC headline statistics will be published on 25 May and provide a more up to date snapshot on learner status and changes in the system.
- 4.3. It is too early to draw conclusions from the data, and we are continuing to monitor the impact on data and metrics as a consequence of the introduction of ALNET.
- 4.4. The Welsh Government made a commitment to the committee to provide more regular data on ALN learners. Management information data collected from schools can provide a snapshot of learner status, and weekly attendance data shows, in the week beginning 13 March 2023, 8,867 learners in maintained settings had an Individual Development Plan (IDP). 6,853 of these are school maintained IDPs, and 2,014 are maintained by local authorities. It reports the total number of learners with SEN or ALN is now at 61,397.

- 4.5. The data from the weekly attendance collection provides useful intelligence, but its accuracy should be heavily caveated. This data is management information extracted from school management information systems once a week and has not undergone the same level of quality assurance as official statistics. In addition, some schools do not update the SEN/ALN information regularly for the attendance data, and instead wait until the annual PLASC return is required.
- 4.6. The PLASC data points to a continuing downward trend in numbers of children with ALN as the ALN system commences for groups of learners. In September 2022, the Minister for Education and Welsh Language wrote to the Committee to outline the reasons for the reduction.
- 4.7. It is likely that the numbers of children recognised as SEN or ALN will continue to reduce throughout the implementation period, predominantly from those children at the SEN school action level, who are now receiving support as part of improved differentiated teaching and inclusive education practice.
- 4.8. We have since sought assurance from Estyn during the autumn term of 2022. They conducted visits to ten maintained primary and secondary schools with a focus on the new ALN arrangements. They noted a significant reduction in the number of pupils on the ALN register but that overall, it appears that in many schools, learners' ongoing progress is monitored appropriately, and they continue to receive suitable targeted support. Most leaders explain that most of the learners removed from schools' ALN registers were formerly on the school action stage of special educational needs (SEN) provision.
- 4.9. They highlighted the various strategies many schools have already implemented to ensure the needs of these learners are still being met, and their ongoing progress is monitored appropriately. For example, planning to meet the needs of learners, upskilling staff to ensure they have a clear understanding of universal provision and using a range of data to monitor all learners' progress. However, Estyn highlighted that many schools are in the early stages of implementing these processes and they do not have robust mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating them.
- 4.10. Estyn's thematic review of ALN implementation taking place during 2023 will provide further insights as implementation progresses.