

# Review Additional Learning Needs Policies

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 11 Medi 2023  
Petitions Committee | 11 September 2023

Reference: SR23/5997

**Petition Number:** P-06-1347

**Petition title:** Review Additional Learning Needs policies & make compulsory to FULLY train all teachers and TAs in regulation techniques

**Text of petition:** A review of the ALN policies in schools and a huge increase in support for the 40% of children who are struggling daily is needed. They need to be taught regulation techniques from early years, creating happier, less disruptive classrooms & providing a tool box to take through life. Long term, decreasing mental health issues, drug and alcohol abuse and lowering crime rates.

There are very few Welsh language Specialist Training Facilities discriminating against a right to Welsh medium education.

1. Teacher training in university should have a significant focus on ALN to ensure the ALNET act can be effectively rolled out. 40% of learners have some form of ALN. This should be compulsory and not optional! ALN strategies help all learners.
2. Neurodiversity Awareness campaign – ND affects at least 1 in 5 people in Wales. Awareness of ND and how it presents and affects people should be commonly understood to ensure an inclusive Wales.
3. Teaching Assistants support – TA's need to be valued, trained and paid properly



4. Funding for a ND specialist teacher and TA in each LA to support, guide and train staff in school.
5. Welsh medium provision for ALN is not as well supported as in English medium schools and this is not giving equality or inclusivity for Welsh learners.
6. 40-60% of pupils with General Learning Difficulties can now not be coded with the new ALNET code of Universal Provision.
7. Parent Support from trained staff who can sign post them to support for their child's needs.

## 1. Background

### 1.1. Additional Learning Needs Reform

The provisions of the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018 (ALNET) are reforming the Special Educational Needs (SEN) system in Wales. The term 'Additional Learning Needs' (ALN) is replacing SEN, although essentially the same definition is retained, which is that learners:

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

Instead of a three-tiered system, as with the SEN system (where only those with the most severe/complex needs have statutory statements), every learner with ALN will have a statutory Individual Development Plan (IDP) setting out their needs and what interventions they require.

The new ALN system is being phased in over a four-year period from September 2021 to August 2025. All newly identified learners with ALN are covered by the new system, while those already in the SEN system are transferring across

between January 2022 and August 2023, or between September 2023 and August 2025, depending on which year group they are in and whether they are currently supported under School Action or School Action Plus or have a statement of SEN. The time profile for transferring pupils with statements of SEN is generally later within the four-year period than those on School Action or School Action Plus. More information is available in [Senedd Research's article](#) (April 2023).

## 1.2. Initial Teacher Education

To become a teacher and teach in a maintained school in Wales, individuals need to gain Qualified Teacher Status (QTS). This is done by meeting a set of [Professional Standards](#) that are set out in legislation. Initial Teacher Education (ITE) providers are responsible for designing their programmes so that trainee teachers can demonstrate that they meet the required standards. The content of the ITE programmes are at the discretion of the providers, but they must be accredited by the Education Workforce Council.

In the Minister for Education and Welsh Language's letter to the Committee, he states that under the [refreshed accreditation criteria for ITE programmes](#), (from September 2024) expectations for supporting learners with ALN as part of student teachers' core studies have been strengthened.

## 1.3. Professional Learning

All teachers and teaching assistants have a [National Professional Learning Entitlement](#). All education professionals are entitled to:

- an individual professional learning journey;
- well-designed professional learning that includes a blend of approaches and opportunities for reflection, enquiry and collaboration for learning; and
- to work in a school or setting, or organisation that sees itself as a learning organisation and uses professional standards in all aspects of professional development.

The [Welsh Government state](#) that when planning their professional learning practitioners should seek to include professional learning on:

- Curriculum for Wales
- additional learning needs

- embedding equity, well-being and the Welsh language across the whole-school community.

## 1.4. Support for teaching assistants

On 18 February 2022, the Minister for Education and Welsh Language issued a written statement, Update on activities to support those assisting teaching. He said that a Task and Finish Group, which included Welsh Government, trade unions, local authorities, the Welsh Local Government Association, the Education Workforce Council, teaching assistants and headteacher representation, had identified several key areas for attention:

- Deployment of teaching assistants
- Access to training and professional development –
- Standardisation of roles
- Pay.

## 1.5. Welsh medium

In his letter to the Committee, the Minister states that ensuring a supply of skilled, Welsh language teachers and teaching assistants is a key part of developing the Welsh language workforce. The Welsh in Education Workforce Plan (May 2022) sets out a number of actions including developing and promoting more pathways to becoming teaching assistants in Welsh-medium schools and developing specific and targeted professional learning for all teaching assistants to be confident to support learners to develop their Welsh language. The plan also notes:

the data analysis document shows that we have a particular issue in terms of teaching assistants, with numbers suggesting that we don't currently have a sufficient supply with Welsh language skills to fill roles in Welsh-medium schools

The Children's Commissioner for Wales and the Welsh Language Commissioner published a joint report the Welsh Language and the Additional Learning Needs System in June 2023. Included in its findings was that:

- Whilst some local authorities report that they can provide for all ALN needs through the medium of Welsh, most local authorities report that they cannot provide through the medium of Welsh for many additional needs.

- 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 ALN support.

It identified two 'key challenges':

- The lack of a specialised workforce who have the requisite linguistic skills.
- Offering specialised Welsh-medium provision is difficult when the numbers likely to take advantage of such provision is comparatively low in many local authorities.

The Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018 (section 63) requires local authorities to consider the sufficiency of Welsh-medium provision in their area when fulfilling a duty to keep additional learning provision under review. Section 89 of the Act requires the Welsh Government to arrange for reviews of the sufficiency of additional learning provision in Welsh.

## 1.6. Data collection and coding

The Petitioner states that '40-60% of pupils with General Learning Difficulties (GLD) can now not be coded with the new ALNET code of Universal Provision'. The Minister states that 'universal provision' is not a term defined in law or referenced in the ALN Code. He states removing the GLD category appears to have led to many pupils being removed from the SEN register altogether since they could not be identified as having another category.

The Minister told the Children, Young People and Education Committee in May 2023 that "the landscape has changed quite a lot" since the ALN reforms were first conceived and the more inclusive approach of the Curriculum for Wales means some learners with lower levels of ALN can now have their needs met through universal classroom provision in ways not previously feasible.

The number of learners identified with ALN has decreased by almost a third since the new system began being implemented (from 92,688 in 2021 to 63,089 in 2023). The Senedd Research article, Identifying Additional Learning Needs: Has the bar been raised or was it previously too low? (October 2022) gives more background on this shift.

The proportion of pupils who are identified as having ALN is 13% in 2023 (down from 20% in 2021). Over the previous decade, the rate had been between 20% and 22% (less than the 40% figure given by the petitioner).

## 2. Welsh Parliament action

### 2.1. Petitions Committee

In 2017, the Petitions Committee considered petition P-05-707 Teachers' Training Must Include Statutory Training in Autism. At that time, Kirsty Williams, then Cabinet Secretary for Education said that the Welsh Government had launched a Learning with Autism Programme for primary schools and was extending it to secondary schools and Further Education. The programme aimed to increase the ability to recognise signs of autism at an earlier age. The Welsh Government was also consulting on the criteria for accreditation for ITE programmes. These criteria are currently being used, until September 2024. The Petition was closed in 2017.

On 27 February 2023, the Committee considered petition P-06-1317 Recognise Teaching Assistants as an important asset to schools by raising wage. In light of the work already underway to address the issues (see paragraph 1.4 above) the Committee agreed to keep the petition open and seek an update from the Minister for Education and Welsh Language in January 2024.

### 2.2. Children, Young People and Education Committee

The Children, Young People and Education Committee are currently undertaking an inquiry, Do disabled children and young people have equal access to education and childcare? The Committee is considering how children and young people who are neurodivergent, have physical, sensory or learning disabilities are able to access all aspects of education and childcare. The Committee will continue to take evidence in the Autumn.

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in this briefing is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.