



Eich cyf/Your ref P-06-1347
Ein cyf/Our ref JMEWL/00920/23

Jack Sargeant MS
Chair - Petitions committee
Senedd Cymru
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1SN

12 July 2023

Dear Jack,

Thank you for your letter of 25 May regarding issues raised in a petition received by the Petitions Committee from Clare Anna Mitchell.

The reforms Welsh Government are making to the education system in Wales have equity and inclusion at their heart. We are committed to delivering a system where individual needs are identified early, addressed quickly and all learners are supported to reach their potential.

Our education reforms include changing the Curriculum in Wales and introducing a new system to support learners with ALN. The [Curriculum for Wales](#) has been designed to raise the aspirations for all learners. It sees every learner as an individual with different strengths and areas for development, who may progress in different ways and at different paces.

Alongside Curriculum reform we are phasing in a new ALN system which is gradually replacing the special educational needs (SEN) system. The ALN system changes both the legal framework, and practices to support children and young people so their needs are met in a more timely way. The new system ensures that learners aged 0-25, who require additional learning provision to meet an ALN, have that support properly planned for and protected in a single statutory plan called an Individual Development Plan (IDP). It also strengthens children's rights and ensures the views, wishes and feelings of the child and their parents are heard. The ALN system is underpinned by the ALN and Education Tribunal Act and the [ALN Code for Wales](#).

We recognise the importance of a skilled workforce to the success of our education reforms. In both Initial Teacher Education (ITE) and continuing professional learning for teachers in practice, meeting the needs of all learners is identified as a priority. Supporting learners with

Bae Caerdydd • Cardiff Bay
Caerdydd • Cardiff
CF99 1SN

Canolfan Cyswllt Cyntaf / First Point of Contact Centre:
0300 0604400

Gohebiaeth.Jeremy.Miles@llyw.cymru
Correspondence.Jeremy.Miles@gov.wales

Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

ALN is part of a student teacher's core studies and professional standards for teaching and leadership make clear the responsibility on all teachers and leaders to ensure the needs of all learners are met, including learners with neurodivergent (ND) conditions. 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.

The Programme of Professional Learning and Initial Teacher Education (ITE) has been designed to prepare student teachers to foster inclusive classrooms, so that teachers remain equipped to meet the needs of all learners. As part of a refresh of the accreditation criteria for ITE programmes, we have strengthened expectations for supporting learners with ALN as part of student teachers' core studies.

A key part of our work on implementing the new ALN system aims to help ensure teachers can 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 so children can learn more effectively, and to help make best use of the expert advice and support provided by specialists.

Teachers have responsibility for their own professional learning and development. To assist them and other practitioners, we have developed a national approach to professional learning and a professional learning entitlement which promotes the support practitioners, system leaders and advisors are entitled to.

As part of the professional learning available to all teachers we have developed an online national ALN professional learning pathway, which is available on [Hwb](#) in Welsh and English. The training is to help all teachers support learners with ALN, and especially ALN Co-ordinators (ALNCos) who have a strategic role in schools and are the first point of call for staff seeking advice and guidance on ALN. Key elements of this learning include person-centred and inclusive practice, the whole-school approach, and the effective coordination of additional learning provision across educational settings. We have also been working with the Third Sector Additional Needs Alliance to produce information for schools on certain types of learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Teachers who want to take their knowledge further can undertake the National MA (Masters) in Education (Wales) – ALN. This pathway is available in Welsh and English and gives teachers the opportunity to enhance their ALN professional knowledge, engage with research and improve their ALN practice.

We have developed [training](#) and resources to raise awareness of the new ALN system in general and have published guides to assist practitioners which detail effective interventions for learners with [sensory impairments](#), [autism](#) and [ADHD](#) in education settings. We also work with Wales' [National Autism Team](#) which helps raise awareness of ND conditions across all professions, with [dedicated resources](#) for practitioners.

Teaching Assistants (TAs) are a valued and integral part of the school workforce and have an important role as part of a high-quality education profession. Our existing TA Learning Pathway offers professional learning to support TAs throughout their career. We have established a Professional Learning Steering Group to look at all professional learning for TAs in Wales. The aim of this group is to ensure equality of access to targeted, high quality and consistent training for our TAs. An investment of £1 million per annum is made to help with the development and professional learning of all TAs in the system.

Ensuring a supply of skilled, Welsh language teachers and teaching assistants is a key part of developing our Welsh language workforce. Our [Welsh in Education Workforce Plan](#) 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.

Regarding Welsh language provision for learners with ALN, one of the core aims of the ALN Act is to create a bilingual system of support for learners with ALN. The ALN Act requires local authorities and education settings to consider whether additional learning provision (ALP) should be provided to children or young people in Welsh. Where a learner has a need for ALP in Welsh, this must be specified in their IDP, and all reasonable steps must be taken to ensure that it is provided. Local authorities all have Welsh in Education Strategic Plans (WESPs) in place which include an objective on how they are improving Welsh medium ALP within their areas.

We recognise there is a need to develop more 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 the teaching and learning of the Curriculum for Wales and identify and commission resources to better support learners with ALN.

Regarding data collection, there is no code in the Pupil Led Annual School Census (PLASC) for 'universal provision' which is not a term defined in law or referenced in the ALN Code. This term is one which schools and local authorities are using to include strategies, resources and adaptations to the curriculum and environment adopted by practitioners to remove barriers to learning for all children and young people.

The 'General Learning Difficulties' (GLD) code was also removed from the PLASC. 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. This strongly suggests that many pupils categorised as having GLD did not in fact meet the legal definition of having SEN or ALN.

Changes to the ALN PLASC data collection is part of a longer-term piece of work to ensure it represents a robust data source on learners with ALN. A working group is being convened to plan and engage key stakeholders in any proposed changes to the data requirements for the January 2025 data collection. Until then no additional changes will be made in order to track and monitor a consistent data set for the remainder of the implementation period.

Regarding signposting for parents of learners with ALN, local authorities have a duty under the ALN Act to have regard to the views, wishes and feelings of the child and their parent; the importance of the child and their parent participating as fully as possible in decisions regarding their ALN/ALP; and the importance of the child and their parent being provided with the information and support necessary to enable participation in those decisions. This duty reflects the ethos of person-centred practice. We have published a [parents guide to rights](#) under the ALN system, and further information on involving and supporting children and their parents can be found in Chapter 4 of the ALN Code for Wales. Independent advice and guidance for parents is also available from [SNAP Cymru](#).

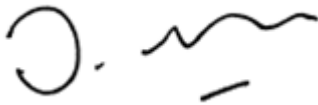
SNAP Cymru has been running a series of free face-to-face ALN reform awareness raising events for families of children with ALN across Wales and more events are planned. Information about these events will be posted on the SNAP Cymru website when it becomes available.

Through our ALN implementation programme we are working with the sector to ensure there is sound understanding of the ALN system and that learners with ALN are supported through a person-centred and needs-led approach.

A medical diagnosis is not required to access appropriate educational support to meet learner need and neither should support be delayed whilst learners wait for an assessment. As part of its work to build on the foundations of Wales' autism strategy and statutory code of practice for autism services, Welsh Government [announced](#) in July 2022 that it is investing £12 million in a new national improvement programme for neurodevelopmental conditions to 2025, and provided a progress [update](#) on 2 May. This programme is addressing immediate pressures on assessment waiting times and developing sustainable integrated needs led services with a skilled and resilient workforce, which includes supporting schools and teaching staff. It will also include additional advice and support services for parents and carers. In April this year we launched a pilot of an extension to the C.A.L.L. helpline, the Neurodivergence Listening Line which provides a safe space for neurodivergent people and their parents and carers to talk about their experiences (the contact telephone number is 0800 132737).

A [Neurodivergence Ministerial Advisory Group](#) has been established to provide advice to the Deputy Minister for Social Services on the progress of this programme, which includes representation from education and people with lived experience of neurodivergence. Our [National Autism Team](#) also provides expert advice, training and guidance on autism and other neurodevelopmental conditions. Their resources are available on the [AutismWales](#) website and on Hwb, the Welsh Government's online learning platform.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized 'J' followed by a wavy line and a short horizontal stroke.

Jeremy Miles AS/MS

Gweinidog y Gymraeg ac Addysg
Minister for Education and Welsh Language