

Cyflwynwyd yr ymateb hwn i'r [Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg](#) ar gyfer yr ymchwiliad: [A oes gan blant a phobl ifanc anabl fynediad cyfartal at addysg a gofal plant?](#)

This response was submitted to the [Children, Young People and Education Committee](#) for the inquiry: [Do disabled children and young people have equal access to education and childcare?](#)

AEC 32

Ymateb gan: Dr Rhiannon Packer, Prifysgol Metropolitan Caerdydd

Response from: Dr Rhiannon Packer, Cardiff Metropolitan University

Key Recommendations

1. Evaluate current local authority additional learning needs (ALN) provision, resources, and intervention programmes available in Welsh to support children and young people with additional learning needs in accessing education.
2. Develop or adapt a comprehensive range of bespoke assessments and educational resources in Welsh to aid early identification of need, and to support wellbeing.
3. Reform initial teaching training programmes so that Initial Teacher Education students have a sufficient knowledge base regarding inclusive educational practices and typical areas of ALNs which are embedded as a central part of the programme rather than seen as an additional element to the training.
4. Develop bespoke initial teacher training programmes for the ALN workforce so that newly qualified teachers are appropriately trained to teach learners with a wide range of needs.
5. Provide mandatory continual professional development to ensure a cohesive approach to inclusive education and continual dialogue and reflection about best practice.

Background and Detailed Response

The inquiry is a timely one in light of new legislation for Additional Learning Needs (ALN) and phased implementation of the ALN Code for Wales (WG, 2021) in creating a unified system for supporting learners from 0-25 with ALN (which include disabled and neurodivergent children and young people). One of the main challenges as a consequence of the ALN transformation is comprehensive implementation of the ALN Code ensuring parity for both Welsh-medium and English-medium settings.

The Additional Learning Needs and Educational Tribunal Act (2018) has the potential to significantly transform the life chances and educational experiences of all learners regardless of disability or neurodivergence. To do this successfully, a comprehensive and cohesive approach is required which provides parity for all learners in Wales. Currently children and young people wishing to receive their education and childcare through the medium of Welsh face significant barriers. Firstly, in being able to be assessed in the medium of their first or preferred language, and secondly, having access to the most appropriate teaching resources or intervention programmes in Welsh. For example, there are no standardised assessments available to assessors/practitioners which examine an individual's literacy capacity in Welsh. This means that practitioners have to work from their own knowledge and understanding of individual need rather than using a standardised tool which can pinpoint areas that require further support. There is a reliance upon practitioners to undertake their own research in the field which can be quite individualistic in nature. As a result, it is difficult to measure individual academic progress in a consistent and effective way. This is a barrier in enabling access to appropriate education provision and limits access to educational outcomes, which has a pronounced impact on children with ALNs

Young people of secondary school age seeking access arrangement for external examinations can only be assessed in English. These assessments do not consider an individual's language background and are standardised using monolingual English cohorts. This means that responses made by individual's influenced by their linguistic background cannot be accounted for and their linguistic competence in Welsh is not measured. A young person may be sitting all their external examinations from the age of 16 in Welsh but the assessment process to assess whether there is a need for additional support can only be administered in English.

The range of Welsh-medium resources to support learners, particularly at secondary school level and beyond, are at best, sparse. While resources are available for early years and primary school pupils these are limited, and the range of choice is not available to learners when compared to the variety of resources available in English. Many resources do not include a level test which makes it difficult for practitioners to confidently assess progress. The resources which are available are not catalogued or levelled in a consistent way to enable continuity from one resource to another. This has implications in terms of access to curriculum with potential impact upon educational outcomes and mental health and wellbeing.

In measuring impact upon wellbeing on all pupils, including disabled and neurodivergent children and young people, current assessments are stand-alone within-child evaluations, more suited to clinical settings. They are not mechanisms for directing interventions and adapting pedagogical approaches to support the needs of learners throughout their educational journey. There is a need for a tool to measure wellbeing of all pupils on a regular basis to identify those most at risk, and to enable the use of preventative measures tailored to whole-school approaches.

Practitioner knowledge base and pedagogical understanding of ALN is varied and inconsistent across the sector and risks excluding children and young people from aspects of education. Furthermore, practitioners wishing to work in Special Schools, the current programme of training is inadequate. Developing a bespoke programme for practitioners to work in Special Schools is one step but not the only solution. Initial Training for Educators needs to embed an inclusive approach to pedagogy as central to all aspects of training rather than viewing as a standalone element within programmes. This will enable cohesive understanding of inclusive educational practices and typical areas of additional learning needs leading to a comprehensive and consistent approach for all learners.

Continual professional development at a national level would be beneficial in ensuring a cohesive approach to inclusive practice and provide an opportunity to explore and share best practice. The National MA Education provides a foundation for this, where practitioners from across Wales come together regularly to discuss inclusive practices with an opportunity to meet leading academics and professionals in the field. This could be further expanded as a national offer to all practitioners, drawing upon existing material available on HWB on Additional Learning Needs and providing a forum for discussion and networking amongst practitioners.