

Cyflwynwyd yr ymateb hwn i ymchwiliad y [Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg i weithredu diwygiadau addysg](#)

This response was submitted to the [Children, Young People and Education Committee inquiry into Implementation of education reforms](#)

IER 72

Ymateb gan: Cymdeithas Seicolegol Prydain
Response from: British Psychological Society

We are pleased to have the opportunity to contribute evidence to the CYPE Committee's final session of the inquiry into education reforms in Wales.

The BPS is the representative body for psychology and psychologists in the UK and is responsible for the promotion of excellence and ethical practice in the science, education, and application of the discipline.

As a society we support and enhance the development and application of psychology for the greater public good, setting high standards for research, education, training and knowledge, and disseminating our knowledge to increase public awareness.

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1. Implementation of the new Additional Learning Needs (ALN) system and the effective transfer of learners from the existing Special Educational Needs (SEN) system.

We welcome the move to a new ALN system as this is potentially significantly transformational, but we feel that there is still more work to be done before the aspirations of reforms can be fully achieved.

We also welcome the Cabinet Secretary's announcement in July to explore a longer-term vision for an inclusive education system.¹ This longer-term vision must focus on developing a universal culture shift, from predominantly performance and outcomes driven to a system that embraces equity and measures inclusivity. Equity and inclusivity will naturally drive performance for all pupils. Welsh Government and schools need to prioritise meaningful development for each child that is unique to their own interests, strengths, and needs. This will ultimately facilitate the most optimal development.

The following pages provides more detail around how we think a culture shift is possible around:

- Improved training, awareness, resources and support for all staff
- Joined-up services across health, social care and education
- Advocating for non-medicalised pathways of support, which is needs led not diagnosis led
- Working better with children with significant and multifaceted support needs, and those who need significant support to attend school
- More funding for community services that is long-term and sustainable
- Adopting a national set of core principles and values that are embedded in all services
- Schools allowing themselves the flexibility when delivering their own policies
- A national review of the workforce to highlight gaps in provision and consider plans to work more effectively.

2. The professional learning and other support settings are receiving to ensure effective implementation of the Curriculum for Wales and the ALN system

The ALN system requires universal and adequate training, supervision and coaching to all school staff to ensure they are solutions focused and can deliver strength-based approaches to achieve the aspirations of ALN transformation. This must include training around the fundamentals of ALN such as differences in communication, sensory processing differences and differences in approaches to learning. Schools need ongoing support so that their default response is always about how they can ensure child-centred and creative/supportive solutions to inclusion, which help create that culture of equity and inclusivity.

We believe that all schools in Wales must be trauma informed and adopt the 'Whole School Approach to Emotional Wellbeing' to promote a sense of belonging. Existing frameworks are stalling due to limited capacity in the system in terms of workforce and budgets.

¹ [Written Statement: Update on the review of the ALN legislative framework \(10 July 2025\) | GOV.WALES](#)



Staff need to know how to recognise, understand and respond to the different types of trauma, the impact that stress has on children and young people, and how to use evidence-based approaches to support individuals. But there are still gaps in training provision across Wales to assist all staff in delivering support that is trauma informed for all learners. What is needed is an understanding on how context and circumstances can have a significant impact on a child's development and the support that a child received is often the strongest predictor in their later 'success'.

Schools and the wider society must adopt an understanding of behaviour from a regulatory/relational point of view. This approach focuses on helping individuals understand and express their emotions and actions (regulatory) through safe, supportive relationships (relational). It recognises that behaviour is not simply "good" or "bad," but a form of expression about what someone is feeling or needing in a given moment. We often focus on targeting the observable behaviour, but we need to a shift to understanding it as how the nervous system is functioning. Understanding this would mean we would support in very different ways to traditional 'behavioural policies'.

We need more healthcare and educational professionals trained in understanding sensory needs and development, and the impact on different contexts and environments for children of all ages. Without appropriate advice and support related to sensory needs, there can be incorrect assumptions made about a child resulting in inappropriate referrals, or inappropriately focused support, in particular when the focus is on trying to change the child, whereas the change in environment is what will have the most positive impact. This does not mean we ignore behaviour or create appropriate safe boundaries, it means we meet children where they are at and avoid challenges in a more preventative, solution-focused way. A more reactive approach often escalates challenges.

Schools must actively foster cultures of inclusion and diversity to reduce and prevent bullying. Research shows that 36% of children with special educational needs (SEND or ALN) experience frequent bullying compared with 25% of those without SEND.² We recommend that Welsh Government develop a toolkit for schools that can support a child in their development, and the BPS would be keen to help develop this through many examples of good practice, using a 360 degree approach to providing bottom up advice and guidance.

Support to children must be provided beyond the school grounds and alongside communities. We must be able to provide holistic support, which means a range of agencies and services that can be prioritised and supported in partnership at the most appropriate time. Welsh Government must make available more funding for community services that is long-term and sustainable. More work needs to be done in the community to generate support to families early on, starting with an awareness of child development and child-centred support, and myth busting around development and behaviour. For those children and families waiting for an ALN diagnosis or support, communities should be set up to provide activities to help build stronger networks and build a child's confidence, with a focus on empowering families themselves as we know this is where change is most effective. There should be better signposting to existing support networks provided by community groups and local and national charities. Community groups should be funded to provide support in both English and Welsh.

² [Do children with SEND experience more bullying?](#)



3. Other factors potentially affecting implementation of the Curriculum for Wales and the ALN system, for example levels of funding and fall out from the pandemic

There is still fragmentation between and within organisations and systems, which weakens opportunities to build capacity and creativity to support children and families. All support systems must adopt core principles and values, such as the NEST Framework,³ which would enable joining up education, health, communities, and social care to meet children's needs holistically with the child at the centre. This starts with a unified definition and understanding of ALN, which is much larger than the learning needs of a child. ALN includes children's social, emotional and behavioural needs, which is heavily dependent on context. There is a danger in trying to separate what constitutes an ALN and what is 'just behaviour or the environment' because the definition of ALN relates to a significant difficulty learning including all of these things. The current code of practice focuses mainly on cognition and learning with little reference to the identification of behaviour, emotional or social development.

We would like Welsh Government to conduct a national review into the allied health professional workforce that supports teachers and school staff (as recommended by the CYPE Committee⁴) in adopting a needs led approach so that services are streamlined and able to offer a 'no wrong door' approach. We believe that schools should build on existing initiatives and would strongly encourage Welsh Government to invest further in them so that they have a greater reach and impact. We also suggest introducing and training a trusted adult or "buddy" in schools to provide a safe place where children can turn to, without fear, judgement, or stigma.

We agree that children and young people need access to timely and appropriate assessment in both English and Welsh; but we would recommend that an assessment is based on needs rather than diagnosis. We must create non-medicalised pathways, but this requires buy-in especially from the health sector. We need consultation with the relevant professions to develop a pathway to achieve this. Wales could consider transferring more resources into schools and community services that children and families can access when early advice and support is needed.

Many children with severely complex needs are still being let down by the system. There has been a welcomed rise in advocating for neuroaffirming practice; however, this isn't always inclusive of those with significant learning needs and disabilities. Too often their behaviour is considered too challenging so they are excluded, which leaves them with few prospects in life. According to the Equality and Human Rights Commission, disabled children in Britain are more likely to be permanently or temporarily excluded than non-disabled children,⁵ and we are concerned that the rate of exclusions in Wales continues to rise.⁶ For some children and young people, it is appropriate for them to be placed in Pupil Referral Units or the nearest specialist school, but with the current shortage of spaces many end up out of county and miles away from home, family, and community. We continue to advocate that no-one is excluded from schools unless absolutely necessary and we would urge that more funding is

³ [NEST framework \(mental health and wellbeing\): introduction | GOV.WALES](#)

⁴ [Do disabled children and young people have equal access to education and childcare?](#)

⁵ [being-disabled-in-britain-executive-summary.pdf](#)

⁶ [School exclusions and managing 'challenging behaviour': Welsh Government action | EHRC](#)



available to support these children, particularly children in care. These children need to have the wider support outside of schools from multi-disciplinary teams, including youth justice.

Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA) - caused by emotional or mental health needs - is also a concern as it appears to be on the rise since the pandemic.⁷ For these children, school is not just a place of learning but a source of overwhelming distress.⁸ Prevalence of EBSA is higher with pupils who are neurodivergent.⁹ A whole systems approach that centres on creating safe, predictable and supportive environments was proven to work well in Hertfordshire County Council to help students become re-engaged with schools¹⁰, demonstrating the impact of a relational response. “Psychological safety is paramount, achieved through consistent routines, familiar faces and being 'held in mind'(which refers to feeling remembered, valued, and considered by someone, even in their absence). But beyond that, children need nurturing relationships – connections based on trust, autonomy, understanding, and care – not just academic performance.”¹¹ We need an increase in flexible practices and inclusive environments to support our children. Again, we advocate for all schools to have the capacity to deliver the Whole School Approach to Emotional Wellbeing and would like to see Welsh Government provide the resources to enable this.

School policies are still too prescriptive in their practices and do not provide flexibility to work around individuals with ALN. Schools must be creative when considering how to include children with ALN rather than shut them out if they can't adhere to mainstream practices. Consistent rules and boundaries are appropriate for the majority, but this may be inappropriate for those with ALN. Flexibility with these boundaries, deconstructing what is 'mainstream' and what is 'specialist', can provide pupils with feelings of self-worth and belonging.

4. The particular challenges and opportunities facing different types of schools in varying circumstances (e.g. language medium, demographics and locality) in terms of implementing curriculum and ALN reform.

Welsh medium provision for children with ALN is a postcode lottery and poorly understood. In Gwynedd for example, the two special schools operate a bilingual language policy which means that all pupils are able to learn in either or both languages. Other special schools are English medium entirely or mostly, and so pupils can find themselves denied the opportunity to learn in Welsh, the language of their family and community. Children and young people have the right to access a Welsh medium education as per ALNET Act (2018).

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⁷ [Emotionally-based school avoidance: What is it and what is the impact? - BBC News](#)

⁸ [Can't, not won't: Rethinking school avoidance | BPS](#)

⁹ McClelland, A. J., Morton, H. E., Gillis, J. M., & Romanczyk, R. G. (2021). Brief report: Predictors of school refusal due to bullying in children with autism spectrum disorder and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder. *Journal of autism and developmental disorders*, 51(5), 1781-1788.

¹⁰ [ebsna-framework-june2025](#)

¹¹ [Can't, not won't: Rethinking school avoidance | BPS](#)



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