

Lynne Neagle MS
Cabinet Secretary for Education
10 February 2026

Implementation of Education reforms

Dear Lynne,

Thank you for giving evidence in October as part of our Implementation of Education Reforms inquiry. This was the end of our evidence gathering for the Senedd long inquiry. This letter provides a final opportunity for us to share our views on the effectiveness of the implementation of these two key pieces of education legislation: [Curriculum and Assessment \(Wales\) Act 2021](#); and the [Additional Learning Needs and Educational Tribunal \(Wales\) Act 2018](#).

We adopted a different approach to this work, keeping it a live inquiry throughout the course of the Senedd. This meant stakeholders could keep us updated in real time on what is working well and what isn't. We think this responsive, and long term approach lends itself well to scrutinising implementation of a key policy or legislative change. A key feature of this work has been regular "check-ins" which have usually involved school visits, citizen engagement and oral evidence.

Following each check-in, we have reported on findings, either via correspondence or our last output, the interim report.¹ This ongoing inquiry has also informed other pieces of work, in particular our inquiry [do disabled children and young people have equal access to education and childcare](#); budget scrutiny and annual scrutiny of bodies such as Estyn, the Children's Commissioner and Qualifications Wales.

¹ First check in: [Letter from Chair, CYPE Committee to Minister for Education and Welsh Language, Key education reforms: summer 2022 check in, 8 August 2022](#) Second check in: [Letter from Chair, CYPE Committee to Minister for Education and Welsh Language and Deputy Minister for Social Services: Implementation of education reforms: outcome of our summer 2023 check in, 17 July 2023](#) Third check in: [CYPE Committee, Implementation of education reforms: Interim report, July 2024](#)

As part of this final check in, we visited a school, and had the oral evidence session with you on 23 October 2025. Following the publication of the ALN Toolkit in November, we also brought together some members of our Online Advisory Group for the Disabled Access inquiry to give their views on the Toolkit.² Some of these issues we also covered in our general scrutiny session with you on 4 February 2026.

This letter sets out our final views, focusing on developments since our third check-in and report in July 2024.

Additional Learning Needs and Educational Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018

We have particularly focused on implementation of this Act during the Senedd, not just in this inquiry, but through other strands of our work. We have welcomed the focus you have brought to addressing some of the implementation challenges. We think the recent review was a positive step. We hope that the actions coming out of the review will start to see real and tangible improvements for children, young people, families and staff supporting them. We note your five areas of action, which all chime with our previous findings. We have summarised these as:

- Clarifying who and how learners with ALN get support;
- Ensuring national consistency;
- Improving support and information for families;
- Strengthening multi-agency integration; and
- Advancing bilingual and inclusive education.

Additional Learning Needs Code

During the oral evidence session, you highlighted that there wasn't sufficient time in this Senedd to amend the Additional Learning Needs Code. We appreciate that this is the case, but are disappointed that this work did not begin earlier in this Senedd term, especially when it was clear early on in the Senedd term there were issues with the Code. We therefore hope that the next Welsh Government will prioritise this work following the May elections, and that the next Senedd and relevant stakeholders are given sufficient time to scrutinise the Code. The Code is an essential part of the legislative framework underpinning the ALN system.

² Welsh Parliament, Citizen Engagement Team, ALN Toolkit for Parents: Advisory Group Review, December 2025

Clarifying who and how learners with ALN get support

The situation for public finances continues to be challenging. We welcome the additional £113 million in the Welsh Government's Final 2026/27 Budget for local authorities to deliver core services, including schools. We also welcome the additional £4 million for the ALN BEL in the Education MEG in the Final Budget, which follows the £5 million for the Reforms strand of the Local Authority Education Grant already allocated in the Draft Budget. But, we know that this still presents challenges to local authorities and schools.

As we have documented throughout this inquiry, the number of children recognised as having ALN and receiving an Individual Development Plan is significantly lower than those who received support under the previous SEN system. We have explored the possible reasons behind this in detail previously, and do not repeat them here. However, to us, it appears that the greater amount of work involved in supporting each pupil with ALN, including preparing and maintaining an IDP, has meant that schools have had to 'cut their cloth accordingly' and essentially raise the bar for what counts as ALN. We remain concerned that some children will be missing out on necessary support partly because of the financial climate. It must remain a priority for the Welsh Government to ensure that all children who need ALN support receive it, and that decisions are not driven by financial constraints.

As you have acknowledged, it is imperative that key elements of the ALN definition are clarified, such as 'significantly greater difficulty in learning' and 'additional learning provision' as opposed to what is 'generally available', so there is a common understanding of these and so the ALN definition can be consistently applied.

We welcome the news, from the general scrutiny session on 4 February 2026, that the upcoming guidance is expected to be published by the end of March and will set out:

- The process to identify and evidence ALN using the two stage legal test;
- Clear expectations on how decisions are communicated,
- How disputes and reconsideration are handled; and
- How families exercise the right to appeal.³

³ CYPE Committee, 4 February 2026, Record of Proceedings, paragraph 88

Also during the session on 4 February , you noted that the work on defining general provision would take longer due to the scale, significance and the need to consult widely. You said this would follow after the Senedd election.⁴

Conclusion 1: We believe it is imperative that greater clarity is provided about the definition of ALN and how it should be applied, and hope that the upcoming guidance will do that.

1. Can you provide a timeline for when the work on defining general provision will be completed and be in place?

An ongoing issue in this inquiry and other linked work has been the options and support available to learners with ALN when they finish compulsory education.

One particular issue has been around the entitlement available. The language in the ALN Code indicates that a young person is entitled to only two years of further education unless a local authority determines they have reasonable needs for more education or training in particular circumstances. This reflects what is in the Additional Learning Needs (Wales) Regulations 2021. But in the President of the Education Tribunal Wales' recent review, she noted that this does "not appear to take account of duties under the Learning and Skills Act 2000. She called for "further clarification on how these two potentially conflicting concepts are intended to interact".⁵

You acknowledged during the session on 23 October that there is need for greater clarity on how the various legislation interact, including the Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Act 2022, and indicated that work was being undertaken to provide this clarity.⁶

Conclusion 2: We think it is essential that this important entitlement for post 16 education is clarified so that learners, and their families know what they can expect and can make informed decisions about what is best for the individual learner.

2. Can you provide an update on how questions about the interaction between the ALN Code, Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Act 2022 and the Learning and Skills Act 2000 will be resolved?

Improving support for families

The oral evidence session was before the publication of the [Toolkit for parents and carers with additional learning needs](#). During the session you said that this had been developed with families.

⁴ CYPE Committee, 4 February 2026, Record of Proceedings, paragraph 90.

⁵ Education Tribunal for Wales, Review of the Additional Learning Needs Legislative Framework in Wales, Judge June McConnell, 1 September 2025, paragraph 2.9.

⁶ CYPE Committee, 23 October 2025, Record of Proceedings, paragraphs 133-135.

After its publication we sought the views from members of our Online Advisory Group who had provided an invaluable insight and input into our disabled access inquiry. A copy of the engagement report is provided alongside this letter.

Participants from this Group felt that the toolkit:

*"... oversimplifies the realities of the ALN process, including timelines, local authority involvement, and the transition between school and local authority responsibility. Participants agreed that the toolkit presents processes as seamless and straightforward, whereas the reality for many parents is much more nuanced, complex and often emotionally challenging."*⁷

They wanted to see more detailed practical advice, in particular around challenging decisions and navigating the complex processes. Where the toolkit does highlight avenues for challenge, they felt it was "overly simplistic" and did not sufficiently convey the costs, stress, complexities and risks associated with routes such as judicial review or appeals.⁸

They also called for the toolkit to have more information on children and parent's rights, and to include more detail on the steps needed to get support. They also made suggestions on how the information in the toolkit could be more clearly communicated, for example with the use of flowcharts. They also wanted to see the toolkit "more adequately prepare parents for a complex and often lengthy timeline they are likely to encounter." Finally, they wanted to see the toolkit more clearly recognise the wide diversity of needs, while continuing to emphasise the importance of individualised provision and support.⁹

3. What are your views on the issues raised by our Advisory Group, and how some of the issues raised might be addressed?

We know that when the system fails, some families will decide to home educate. While for many, home educating is a positive and proactive choice, for some it can be a response to a lack of adequate support. This was highlighted in the report of the survey of parents and carers, which found that 85 per cent (28 of 33) said their decision to begin home educating was influenced by a concern that the schooling offered by the local authority would not meet their child's learning needs. Half of these said they would prefer their child to return to school if appropriate support and provision was in place.¹⁰

⁷ Welsh Parliament, Citizen Engagement Team, ALN Toolkit for Parents: Advisory Group Review, December 2025

⁸ Welsh Parliament, Citizen Engagement Team, ALN Toolkit for Parents: Advisory Group Review, December 2025

⁹ Welsh Parliament, Citizen Engagement Team, ALN Toolkit for Parents: Advisory Group Review, December 2025

¹⁰ Welsh Government, Evaluation of the additional learning needs (ALN) system: survey of parents and carers, October 2025, p69

We note that alongside the commitment to publish guidance regarding the ALN definitions which we outline earlier in the letter, you also highlighted additional guidance would be published in tandem. This guidance will set out the expectations of support in specific circumstances including for looked after children, home educated children and those in Education Other than at School.¹¹ As you may be aware, the issues of the first two groups have been raised in our other scrutiny work.¹²

In both our pupil absence inquiry and disabled access inquiry we heard of families who had felt that they had no option but to home educate because of a lack of appropriate support in school.¹³ We are aware that home education is in the main a positive choice for children and their families, but we cannot ignore the stories we heard from those families who felt they had no choice.

4. Can you provide further information on the support that will be given to children with ALN and their families who are home educating? What more can be done to ensure that families don't feel forced to make a decision to home educate because of a lack of support for their child's needs in school?

Strengthening multi-agency integration

Throughout all our work, the importance of an integrated approach from public services and others supporting children and their families has been a constant theme. We know that there continue to be long waiting times for diagnosis and support from health services. Obviously, support through the ALN system is not supposed to be dependent on specific assessments or diagnosis and should be based on a child's individual needs. Although this does not seem to be how it is working in practice in some cases. There is a clear need for swifter access to diagnosis and support through the NHS, education and social services, as well as the third sector and other support organisations. During the oral evidence session you mentioned a trilateral meeting with the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care and the Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing, with a further one due to happen.¹⁴ You said on 4 February that this had taken place.¹⁵

Driving forward the necessary improvements requires a cross Government approach, with each responsible Cabinet Secretary and Minister ensuring this remains a priority. To successfully work it also

¹¹ [CYPE Committee, 4 February 2026, Record of Proceedings, paragraph 89](#)

¹² The Committee's inquiries into: [Services for care experienced children: exploring radical reform](#); [Pupil Absence](#); and [Do disabled children and young people have equal access into education and childcare?](#)

¹³ [CYPE Committee, Pupil Absence, November 2022, paragraphs 136-137](#) and [CYPE Committee, Do disabled children and young people have equal access to education and childcare, July 2024, paragraphs 248-249](#)

¹⁴ [CYPE Committee, 23 October 2025, Record of Proceedings, paragraph 106](#)

¹⁵ [CYPE Committee, 4 February 2026, Record of Proceedings, paragraph 94](#)

needs full support and buy in from local government. It is unclear to us how effective this joint working is.

5. Can you provide an update on outcomes from the trilateral meetings?

6. How effective do you think cross-Government working has been in ensuring ALN support is holistic, integrated and timely? Reflecting on your time in the Government, what has worked effectively, and what do you think should change?

7. Have local authorities, the NHS and the Welsh Government been able to work together to effectively meet the needs of learners? Are there examples of good practice and how can this be disseminated across Wales?

An important element of ensuring effective multi-disciplinary working is the role of the Designated Education Clinical Lead Officer (“DECLO”), established by the 2018 Act. We continue to be unimpressed that while the current position may comply with the letter of the law, it does not follow the spirit of this Act. It has been frustrating that when we have raised this previously, we have not felt that there has been real engagement with the scale of change we believe is needed. Instead there has been a reliance on saying that the Act is being complied with by four DECLOs being shared across seven Health Boards. We do not believe this was the express intention when the legislation was going through the Senedd, for example the Explanatory Memorandum referred to “a senior, strategic lead in each health board area overseeing the board’s responsibilities”.¹⁶ We reiterate our findings in our interim report, and our recommendation that every health board should have its own dedicated DECLO.

Conclusion 2: Every Health Board in Wales should have its own dedicated DECLO. The current situation where Health Boards share a DECLO may follow the letter of the 2018 Act, but it does not follow the spirit. The DECLO is a critical role to support multi-disciplinary work and ensure holistic learner focused support.

Advancing bilingual and inclusive education

Ensuring all education staff have the sufficient training to support ALN learners is essential to delivering fully inclusive education. It is apparent that training and information is not always readily

¹⁶ [Welsh Government, Revised Explanatory Memorandum – November 2017, Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal \(Wales\) Act 2018, paragraph 3.62](#)

available to staff. We have previously made recommendations around mandatory training on disability (which we acknowledge is different to ALN). We were disappointed these were rejected.

We also acknowledge the changes in this area, in particular the establishment of Dysgu. It is too early to see what impact Dysgu will have on improving professional learning opportunities for education staff. But we would like some reassurances about the opportunities for all staff who work with and support children with ALN to access training and guidance to ensure they are providing the highest quality support. Such opportunities should be available to everyone supporting ALN learners, whether they are employed by schools and local authorities directly, or are contracted out, for example those who provide transport.

8. What training and development opportunities are available to staff who work with children with ALN? In particular, those who may be contracted to support children, such as transport escorts.

Having bilingual support is essential to support children and their families effectively. We are also aware of the broader challenges in recruiting and retaining education staff with Welsh language skills. As you are aware, this is something we looked at during our scrutiny of the then Welsh Language and Education (Wales) Bill¹⁷, and our more recent policy inquiry on teacher recruitment and retention.¹⁸

It is essential that the Welsh medium sector has the same expectations for ALN training and skills as are in the English medium sector. We have consistently made the argument for ensuring that education staff have access to training to help them in supporting children with ALN or disability. We were disappointed that our recommendation for mandatory disability awareness training for all education staff was rejected, as part of our disabled access inquiry.¹⁹ This would have provided a baseline that would have helped in ensuring both English and Welsh medium education settings had staff with the skills and knowledge to confidently provide support.

Conclusion 3: In the forthcoming Strategic Education Workforce Plan, the Welsh Government should ensure that there is sufficient training to support the delivery of Welsh medium ALN support and provision. This should include both Initial Teacher Education and professional learning for serving teachers.

We know that the first five yearly review of the sufficiency of Welsh medium additional learning provision has been initiated. This will be an important review that the future Senedd and Welsh

¹⁷ [CYPE Committee, Welsh Language and Education \(Wales\) Bill: Stage 1 Report, December 2024](#)

¹⁸ [CYPE Committee, Teacher recruitment and retention, January 2026](#)

¹⁹ [Letter to Chair, CYPE Committee from Cabinet Secretary for Education, Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care, Minister for Children and Social Care, 30 September 2024, Recommendation 19](#)

Government will need to take account of, including issues such as the “reasonable steps” test the Act places on efforts to make provision in Welsh where this is desired.

We note that since the 2018 Act was passed, the Senedd has moved from five year to four year terms. It is unclear to us whether it was the original intention that there should be a review in every Senedd term. If that was the case, this may need revisiting. We appreciate this would require a change to primary legislation.

9. In setting a five year timescale, was the original intention of the 2018 Act that the review of the sufficiency Welsh medium additional learning provision should be carried out once every Senedd term? If so, are there any plans to revisit the timings of the reviews to reflect the change in the length of the Senedd term?

Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Act 2021

The 2021 Act was a once in a generation change to education in Wales. The level of change that has been expected of the education system should not be underestimated. This has been done in conjunction with the also seismic ALN reforms under the 2018 Act. Additionally, the education system is still also dealing with the long tail of the pandemic, and increasing societal changes that schools are being expected to manage, and in some places mitigate. As we said in our recent teacher recruitment and retention report, schools are being asked to do a lot, and there is a clear need to minimise any further change in the system.²⁰

We know that in some cases, the effectiveness of the implementation of the new curriculum has been mixed, with Estyn observing “there remains too much variation in schools’ understanding of the purpose driven curriculum”.²¹ It is important that there is support to ensure that all learners are receiving the same level of education, even if the individual curriculum in different schools will differ. While there will not be uniformity, there must be enough consistency. To better support schools in implementing the 2021 Act and delivering the Curriculum for Wales, we believe there is a need for clearer guidance on assessment and progression. This continues to be one of the most challenging areas in implementing the new curriculum, with schools reporting difficulties in assessing individual learners’ progression and where they are on the learning continuum. Estyn told us that providing minimum age-related expectations would be useful²² and you indicated on 23 October²³ that work

²⁰ [CYPE Committee, Teacher recruitment and retention, January 2025](#)

²¹ [Estyn, Annual Report 2023-24, Teaching and the Curriculum](#)

²² [CYPE Committee, 5 March 2025, Record of Proceedings, paragraphs 43 and 72-73](#)

²³ [CYPE Committee, 23 October 2025, Record of Proceedings, paragraphs 153-157](#)

was ongoing to develop these, recognising that detail isn't there at the moment for schools²⁴. We warmly welcome the work to develop these age related expectations to provide greater clarity for schools.

10. When do you expect to publish further guidance on assessment and progression, such as the age-related expectations you have said were under development? Will this provide a clear framework for education professionals to assess pupils, support their learning development and provide clarity on how they should progress under the Curriculum for Wales?

Our approach to scrutiny

Finally, as we have taken a novel approach to our scrutiny on these two pieces of legislation, we would welcome the Welsh Government's feedback on our approach. Do you believe this has been a helpful approach to scrutiny? Are there any aspects that worked well, or did not work well in your opinion.

We would appreciate a response by 6 March. We appreciate this is a quicker turn around than usual, but this will enable us to reflect on the response in our legacy output.

Yours sincerely,



Buffy Williams MS

Chair

Children, Young People and Education Committee

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg.

We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.

²⁴ [CYPE Committee, 6 November 2025, Record of Proceedings, paragraph 75](#)