



The additional learning needs system:

Progress of schools, settings and local authorities in supporting pupils with additional learning needs

December 2024

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This report is also available in Welsh.

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Executive summary

This report considers how well the funded non-maintained settings, maintained primary, secondary and all-age schools that participated in the review are implementing and embedding aspects of the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018 (ALNET) and the accompanying Additional Learning Needs (ALN) Code. It also considers how well local authorities have supported schools. This report builds on our findings from the first thematic review [The new additional learning needs system](#) (Estyn, 2023) and identifies effective practice to support inclusive education which includes developing strategies to support pupils with ALN, enhancing Welsh-medium support and strengthening professional learning, quality assurance and the roles of the Additional Learning Needs Co-ordinator (ALNCo) and Early Years Additional Learning Needs Officer (EYALNLO).

Our findings are based on engagement with a sample of eight funded non-maintained settings, 11 primary schools, seven secondary schools and two all-age schools. Of these, nine were conducted through the medium of Welsh. Eight of the schools, including one Welsh-medium school, host local authority specialist class provision for pupils with ALN. We also drew on evidence from our ongoing inspection activity and from discussions between our local authority link inspectors and local authority officers. Further, the report draws on evidence from discussion with a focus group of Early Years Additional Learning Needs Lead Officers (EY ALNLOs). We also canvassed the views of parents and carers in relation to their experiences.

Implementing and embedding ALN reform has been a significant undertaking for local authorities, schools and settings. During our visits and in our meetings with stakeholders, the inspection team consistently noted the strong commitment and resilience demonstrated by staff in local authorities, schools and settings. Staff were working diligently to support children and young people with ALN within the context of ongoing challenges. These included the lasting impact of the pandemic on well-being, challenges with attendance, the reported but unverified increase in children and young people with complex needs as well as budgetary and workforce pressures. Overall, the requirements of ALN reform were starting to ensure improvements in provision for pupils with ALN across the country. As a result, where ALN reform had been implemented successfully, many pupils made suitable progress from their initial starting points. However, the implementation of ALN reform was not consistent and, as a result, pupils' additional learning needs were not always supported well enough. Further, the majority of schools and local authorities in the sample had begun to strengthen the quality assurance of ALN processes and provision. Many leaders expressed concerns about their ability to continue to deliver the necessary ALN services, once additional funding comes to an end.

Our findings show that leaders and staff at many schools and settings had started to develop inclusive culture and practice. These schools and settings focused well on the learning and well-being of all pupils. However, in a minority of cases, inclusive vision and purposeful teaching and learning aimed at meeting the needs of all pupils

were not effective enough. Based on our discussions with school leaders, as part of this review, local authority guidance for improving the quality of inclusive teaching and learning was variable across Wales. Even in the most effective cases, schools acknowledged that this support and guidance was at an early stage of development.

Overall, the number of pupils identified with ALN or special educational needs (SEN) on schools' registers had continued to reduce. However, the number of pupils whose additional learning provision (ALP) / special educational provision (SEP) was identified in a statutory plan, either through an individual development plan (IDP) or a statement of SEN, had continued to increase. In addition, there was a significant increase in the number of individual development plans (IDPs) that were maintained by schools. Across local authorities, inconsistencies remained in the interpretation of the ALN Code and in the subsequent approaches to school maintained and local authority maintained IDPs.

Overall, participating schools and settings had a secure understanding of the provision that they make for pupils with ALN. However, it remained the case that the extent to which the provision is classed as ALP was unclear. Most schools and local authorities agreed that it would be beneficial for ALP to be clarified at a national level.

Most schools that participated in this review recognised the enhanced and specialist role of the ALNCo under the Act and welcomed the increased accountability and strategic responsibility of the role. Where the role of the ALNCo was most effective, they were part of the senior leadership team, and they made a significant contribution to the provision for and outcomes of pupils with ALN. However, in a minority of schools, ALNCos were not fully involved in influencing the strategic direction and decision-making of the school.

This is the first time that we have reviewed the progress of funded non-maintained settings and the role of the Early Years Additional Learning Needs Officer (EYALNLO) in relation to ALN reform. Many of the funded non-maintained settings that we visited as part of this review provided effective learning experiences for children with ALN. Overall, they planned carefully to tailor learning experiences to meet the individual requirements of each child including those with ALN. Further, the role of the EY ALNLO was well established across Wales. Overall, these officers worked effectively to support parents and early years settings to ensure beneficial and timely support for younger children with emerging or identified ALN.

The extent to which local authorities, schools and settings planned and provided equitable support for Welsh-medium ALN provision remained underdeveloped. This has been recognised by the Welsh Government and local authorities, but significant challenges remained in relation to Welsh-medium recruitment and retention as well as the provision of Welsh-medium standardised assessments and resources.

Our report identifies a range of effective practice, including in areas that remained challenging such as Welsh-medium delivery. We also make some recommendations.

Recommendations

Schools and settings should:

- R1 Ensure that high quality teaching and learning meets the needs of **all** pupils and supports inclusive education.

Schools should:

- R2 Ensure that ALNCoS are fully involved in influencing the strategic direction and decision making of the school.

Local authorities should:

- R3 Work with schools and settings to promote inclusive education, targeting support where needed and strengthening the co-ordination of support services to ensure high quality teaching for all pupils.
- R4 Continue to develop the workforce, services, professional learning and provision for pupils through the medium of Welsh.

The Welsh Government should:

- R5 Work with all local authorities to ensure that they have a common and secure understanding of the definition of additional learning provision and that local authorities and their schools apply this consistently.
- R6 Continue to develop workforce planning, resources and professional learning to ensure equitable Welsh-medium ALN provision.
- R7 Evaluate the impact of implementation and the demand for additional and specialist provision for pupils with ALN; this evaluation should guide future funding arrangements, ensuring that resources meet identified needs.

Introduction

This thematic report is written in response to a request for advice from the Minister for Education and the Welsh language in his remit letter to Estyn for 2023-2024. This is the second thematic review on the implementation of additional needs (ALN) reform in Wales. This report builds on our findings from the first thematic review [The new additional learning needs system](#) (Estyn, 2023) on schools' and local authorities' progress in implementing additional learning needs reform in Wales.

This report focuses on how well the funded non-maintained settings, maintained primary, secondary and all-age schools that participated in the review were implementing and embedding aspects of the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018 (ALNET) and the accompanying ALN Code. It also considers how well local authorities have supported schools. Further, the report identifies effective practice aimed at supporting pupils with ALN in accordance with the provision and implementation of the Act.

The evidence base for the report is outlined in an appendix and included visits to providers, discussions with staff and pupils, feedback from parents and other stakeholders as well as evidence from our ongoing inspection work and reviews of documentary evidence.

The intended audience for this report is the Welsh Government, headteachers and staff in schools and settings, local authorities, and school improvement services. It may also be of interest to parents and relevant partners. We hope that the report will contribute to professional discussions on both the strengths and areas for development identified.

Background

The Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018 (the ALNET Act) was passed by the National Assembly for Wales (now known as Senedd Cymru – the Welsh Parliament) in December 2017 and became an Act in January 2018. In its document [Additional learning needs \(ALN\) transformation programme](#) (2018a) the Welsh Government notes:

This will create the legislative framework to improve the planning and delivery of additional learning provision, through a person-centred approach to identifying needs early, putting in place effective support and monitoring, and adapting interventions to ensure they deliver desired outcomes.

Initially it was intended that the Act be implemented over a three-year period (2020-2023). The appointment of three statutory roles came into force in January 2021. Due to the impact of the pandemic, the process of identifying and confirming which

children had an ALN was moved on a year to September 2021. In March 2023, a further year was added. This meant that implementation will now take place over four years and will conclude in August 2025.

The Act has 11 aims, which are detailed in our first thematic report [The new Additional Learning Needs system](#) (Estyn, 2023). This report will address various aspects of those aims.

1. The introduction of the term 'additional learning needs (ALN)
2. A 0 to 25 age range
3. A unified plan
4. Increased participation of children and young people
5. High aspirations and improved outcomes
6. A simpler and less adversarial system
7. Increased collaboration
8. Avoiding disagreements and earlier disagreement resolution
9. Clear and consistent rights of appeal
10. The ALN Code
11. A bilingual system

Inclusive education and duties on schools and settings

This chapter considers the definitions and implementation of inclusive practice in schools and settings. Further, it examines the duties of schools and settings to adopt these practices in relation to the aims of the ALN Code.

Defining inclusive practice

In their [Inclusion and Pupil Support](#) (2016) guidance document, the Welsh Government defined the principles of inclusion as;

A process through which all pupils access common opportunities in ways relevant to their needs, and which ensures that they fully belong to the school community. Inclusion requires the active involvement of all concerned. It places the onus on schools to adapt their organisation and their ways of responding to both meet the needs and value the development of all children and young people in all areas of school life... It requires an inclusive curriculum and measures to improve teaching and other staff's awareness of inclusive learning and equality issues.

Knight and Crick (2021) noted in their paper [Inclusive Education in Wales: Interpreting Discourses of Values and Practice](#)

That an inclusive curriculum should move away from a standardised approach, which may focus on the needs of the “average” learner. Instead, a curriculum should be designed to encompass the diversity of needs of all learners, rather than including individualised actions that compensate for specific groups.

Implementing an inclusive learning environment

Leaders and staff had created and sustained inclusive culture and practice in many of the schools and settings that we visited. Later in this report, we will explore the key aspects of inclusive leadership and culture in more detail. These leaders created environments that actively supported all pupils' learning. Pupils with ALN in these schools told us that they felt a clear sense of belonging to the school community which impacted positively on their learning. They accessed, engaged in and enjoyed learning activities alongside their peers. In nearly all cases, we observed positive and trusting professional working relationships and interactions between staff and pupils during lessons and sessions. Pupils with ALN responded well to the caring and committed approach of staff. Pupils told us that these relationships were key to their well-being and progress.

In the most successful cases, parents and carers appreciated the way in which schools and settings adapted learning to suit their child by removing any barriers to learning to meet the needs of their child. For example, a few parents gave specific examples of how schools and settings had improved the learning environment to support, for example, their child's neurodevelopmental needs. However, on too many

occasions, parents and carers expressed frustration over inadequate communication from schools, settings and local authorities. They frequently reported delays in receiving responses to their concerns or inquiries, which left them feeling unsupported and disconnected from the decision-making process regarding their children's education.

In responding to questions from members of the Senedd in the Children and Young People and Education Committee in May 2024, the Cabinet Secretary for Education responded that some children:

... will be absolutely fine with good inclusive teaching that is geared towards their needs, and just because something is universal doesn't mean it's uniform. It is about responding to the needs of children ... But where children need extra support, that's where we have to make sure that that happens, really, and it might just be a little bit of extra support, or it might be that they get an IDP. I don't think there is a one-size-fits-all on this, but universal provision has a role to play, and surely, we all want inclusive education environments for our children.

(Source: Senedd Cymru, Young People and Education Committee May 2024)

Our thematic report [The new additional learning needs system](#) (Estyn, 2023) reported on the confusion amongst schools and local authorities around terminology and practice relating to the graduated response to support pupils with ALN. Terms such as universal, universal plus, targeted, specialist and, specialist including multi-agency provision are increasingly being used by local authorities and by schools. It should be noted, however, that these terms do not appear in the ALN Code. This has led to widespread and ongoing confusion around what constitutes 'universal' provision which is generally available to all pupils of the same age and what is additional learning provision. We recognised in our visits to settings, schools and local authorities that the shared understanding and common application of these terms and practices remained inconsistent.

Duties on schools and settings

The duties on schools and settings to ensure that every child or pupil, regardless of their individual need, background, or ability, is provided with equitable opportunities to participate fully in the educational experience so that they fully belong to the school or setting community, is clearly stipulated in [The Additional Learning Needs Code for Wales 2021](#) (2021b) It specifies:

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 (p.71)

The expectation, therefore, is that teaching and learning should support the progress of **all** pupils equitably, including those with additional learning needs.

Local authority support and guidance for inclusive teaching

Based on our discussions with school leaders, as part of this thematic, local authority guidance for improving the quality of inclusive teaching and learning was too variable across Wales. Many schools and settings had received beneficial support and guidance from local authority officers to build their capacity and expertise within their own schools and settings to support, for example, pupils' language and communication skills, pupils with autism, and pupils with social, emotional and behavioural needs. This advice and guidance was provided to schools in a range of different formats such as through digital platforms, cluster meetings and ALNCo fora. Alongside established teams, such as the educational psychology service, most local authorities had employed specialist teachers and higher-level support staff to provide both systemic and bespoke support to schools to improve their inclusive practice. For example, these officers supported with developing effective interventions and support, the use of resources and creating inclusive environments. However, even in the most effective cases, schools acknowledged that this support and guidance was at an early stage of development.

Developing inclusive schools

In Merthyr Tydfil, the ALN team have been focusing on developing inclusive schools where all practitioners address the needs of all pupils equitably. They have discussed what an inclusive school should look like and set half termly focused cluster working tasks on self-evaluation of where schools feel they are, how schools can move forward and the sharing of good practice between schools and clusters.

All agreed that to become an inclusive school:

- The school leader/s should have a clear commitment to inclusive practices that underpins the school's visions and goals.
- All pupils and parents should feel valued.
- There are positive working partnerships between professionals, pupils and parents.
- All teachers and other practitioners address and meet the needs of all pupils equally.
- School leaders are skilled and in being able to support staff to teach all pupils.
- Staff have high expectations and expect all pupils to make progress.
- The school and classroom environments are accessible to all pupils.
- Pupil voice is paramount and pupils participate fully in evaluating how well they learn and how they could be supported to overcome barriers to their learning.
- Classroom practice is consistent in supporting inclusive education, for example through the organisation of resources; bespoke planning; withdrawal areas and individual workstations to minimise distraction; visual timetables; or additional adult / peer support being available to enable pupils to become independent.

Cluster working is embedded and is effective in identifying good practice. A

growing number of schools are now adapting their teaching offer to meet the growing needs of pupils. Schools are also developing the learning environment, creating areas within mainstream schools to be able to support pupils with a wider range of learning needs.

Successful strategies to support the learning of pupils with ALN

This chapter considers the effective features of inclusive learning and teaching to support pupils with ALN in non-maintained settings, primary, secondary, and all-age schools. It also considers what constitutes effective additional learning provision (ALP) for pupils with ALN across schools and settings.

Teaching and learning

In the most effective schools and settings in the sample, improvements in the teaching and learning of pupils with ALN were not isolated from improvements in the teaching and learning for pupils across the school or setting. In these schools and settings, effective provision for pupils with ALN, including ALP, was underpinned by high quality teaching and learning and continually improving classroom practice.

In their report *Special Education Needs in Mainstream School*, the Education Endowment Foundation (2021a) noted that:

- To a great extent, good teaching for learners with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) is¹ good teaching for all
- Searching for a ‘magic bullet’ can distract teachers from the powerful strategies they often already possess
- The research suggests a group of teaching strategies that teachers should consider emphasising for learners with SEND. Teachers should develop a repertoire of these strategies they can use flexibly in response to the needs of all learners.
 - flexible grouping;
 - cognitive and metacognitive strategies;
 - explicit instruction;
 - using technology to support learners with SEND; and
 - scaffolding

Many schools and settings that we visited as part of this thematic review have focused on developing meaningful inclusive teaching strategies and learning opportunities where practitioners address the needs of all pupils equitably. Leaders in these schools and settings told us that since the implementation of the ALN Act and subsequent Code, there had been an increased focus on adapting and personalising learning to meet the needs of pupils with ALN. In the most effective schools and

¹ Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) is the terminology used in England. In Wales, we use the term Additional Learning Needs (ALN).

settings, teaching, learning and assessment were designed and delivered taking pupils' additional learning needs into account purposefully from the outset. However, this inclusive practice was not consistent across Wales. As a result, pupils' ALN were not always supported well enough.

In their response to the recommendations made by the Children, Young People and Education Committee's report [Do disabled children and young people have equal access to education and childcare?](#) (2024c) Welsh Government acknowledged that:

while some areas have developed good inclusive practices, these can be the result of individual determination rather than a consistent, structural approach (p.2).

In the most successful schools and settings that we visited, teaching, curriculum and assessment were designed and delivered to engage pupils in learning that was meaningful, relevant and accessible to all. For example, schools and settings developed successful working relationships with pupils based on mutual respect. Teachers planned for all groups of pupils' needs and interests well in a range of real-life contexts. They assessed all pupils' progress accurately, using this information to inform next steps in learning. They provided purposeful, timely and meaningful feedback, which moved on learning at an appropriate pace, ensuring that the pupil was successful in their learning. Where pupils had ALN, teachers planned learning carefully to deliver the agreed ALP. This included, for example, incorporating regular physical activities or speech, language and communication interventions.

In many cases, schools and settings adapted teaching to respond to pupils' needs and potential barriers to learning. Effective schools and settings successfully delivered a structured and consistent set of classroom strategies which not only scaffolded and supported the learning of pupils with ALN but benefited all pupils. As a result, pupils with ALN benefited from consistent and familiar structure and approaches and made effective progress across a range of skills from their initial starting points.

Further, staff at these schools worked closely with parents and carers and other agencies to develop supportive one-page profiles for pupils with ALN. In these cases, the one-page profiles ensured a continuous focus on individual provision and progress and facilitated early intervention where necessary. In addition, person centred IDP review meetings ensured an inclusive and co-ordinated approach to support provision.

Sharing information about pupils with ALN to support teaching and learning

Many schools and settings that we visited communicated valuable information to teaching staff about pupils with ALN in a range of different ways. For example, they provided staff with regular newsletters and bulletins sharing information about pupils with ALN and suggesting effective teaching and learning approaches and strategies to support pupils with a range of different ALN. Many schools had developed their own internal dedicated ALN digital platforms. These platforms were used to share centralised resources to support effective teaching and learning which supported all pupils. In addition, staff from a range of specialist agencies had provided beneficial

advice and materials to populate these resources. As a result in these schools, staff knew and understood the pupils well and made effective use of the information provided to them to tailor learning opportunities to interest pupils and ensure that they made effective progress.

Class rationale documents

At **Whitmore High School**, all teachers prepare class rationale documents for each teaching group. These documents include information about all pupils' current and expected attainment as well as providing adapted teaching strategies to support each pupil with ALN within each class. These strategies are drawn from a range of sources including pupils' IDPs and one-page profiles. Class rationale documents are quality assured by leaders at the school to evaluate the planned strategies.

Leaders at **Porth Community School** and **Ysgol y Moelwyn** have supported staff to understand how to interpret and use the results of cognitive baseline assessments to adapt their planning and teaching. They have provided useful case studies on how these results impact on pupils' learning and suggested possible approaches to support teachers' practice.

Display from Cardiff High School



Ysgol y Tymbl is federated with another local primary school. The federation has established a central digital platform 'y cwpwrdd', to allow access to staff to all relevant documentation and information about pupils with ALN. It also includes helpful resources to support practice.

High and realistic expectations for all

Effective schools that we visited had considered carefully what constitutes effective teaching and learning to meet individual pupils' needs. These schools had high, yet realistic, expectations of all pupils including those with ALN. Hattie (2023) concurs that:

The most important thing for teachers to do is to have high expectations for all students. This means not labelling students (as "bright", "strugglers", "ADHD" or "autistic"), as this can lead to lower expectations in both teachers and students but seeing all students as learners who can make leaps of growth in their learning

Research informed practice

A few schools and settings made valuable and appropriate use of research findings to reflect on their practice and to refine their repertoire and approaches to meet the evolving needs of pupils. Staff at these schools and settings worked collaboratively to design inclusive, whole-school teaching strategies. In these schools, there was a clear understanding of how these teaching approaches refined and enhanced practice and supported all pupils.

Cardiff High School has developed the use of consistent whole-school teaching and learning approaches, which support all pupils well, including those with ALN. These approaches prioritise engagement in learning, role modelling, deep thinking and high challenge for all pupils. These approaches provide a shared language across the school to talk about learning and teaching. Leaders at the school introduced and unpacked the techniques gradually and explored the potential impact of each of the approaches. Leaders spent time modelling and putting the techniques into subject specific contexts and considering how they work at all levels and for all types of pupils.



CARDIFF HIGH SCHOOL
YSGOL UWCHRADD CAERDYDD

LEARNING & TEACHING TECHNIQUES
TECHNEGAU DYSGU AC ADDYSGU



1 Do Now Tasg Cyflym

A short warm-up activity that students can complete without detailed instruction or direction from you. An individual task that requires students to put pen to paper, it lets the learning start even before you begin teaching. This has a high engagement ratio and can be used to contextualise the learning as well as a retrieval practice activity.



2 Everybody Writes Sgwennu Sydyn

Prepare students to engage meaningfully by giving them the chance to reflect in writing before you ask them to discuss. Everybody Writes is a low stakes, short burst of activity which has a high participation ratio. It can be used to think deeply or to recall prior knowledge.



3 Turn & Talk Troi a Trafod

Encourage students to better formulate their thoughts by including short, contained pair discussions but make sure to design them for maximum efficiency and accountability. A Turn and Talk can be planned or spontaneous and should be short and pacy with a clear time target.



4 No Opt Out Dim Osgoi

Turn "I don't know" into a success by helping students who won't try or struggle to offer answers an opportunity to participate whilst also being accountable for trying. This should be used as you build a culture of participation and foster positive attitudes to learning.



5 Task Target Time Beth? Pam? Pryd?

Promote high engagement in learning through the clarity of task setting. State the task, be explicit with the expected outcome, and be specific about the time given.



6 Pose Pause Pounce Bounce Cwestiynu Cyflym Cywir

Powerful questioning should challenge pupils and support the development of their listening skills. This can be used with cold call and enable pupils to add, build, or challenge their peers as you bounce the question around the room.



7 Right is Right Ateb Cant y Cant

When you respond to pupils' answers in class, hold out for answers that are 'all-the-way right' or all the way to your standards of rigour. Don't fill in the gaps for pupils instead ask supplementary questions or give them thinking time to improve their answers.



8 Silent Solo Tasg Tawel

This should be used to promote thinking in a more considered and deliberate way allowing pupils time to synthesise or consolidate their ideas more carefully. Undertaken individually in silence, it is still a relatively short activity - between 3 and 20 minutes. It is not to be confused with completing a test / extended piece without classroom discussion or in exam conditions. Build stamina and increase time limits accordingly.



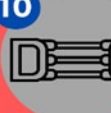
9 ABC 123

Be word curious and word aware. Support pupils to develop their vocabulary by exploring word origin and etymology. Focus on key words and common prefixes and suffixes. Layer your explanations with complex language and more understandable synonyms. Unpick language usage explicitly and encourage pupils to practise saying unfamiliar words aloud.



10 Stretch It Ymestyn

Reward 'right' answers with harder questions that extend learning. Ask pupils to apply their learning to a new context, compare it with prior learning, categorise or rank the learning, or summarise or codify the learning to share with others. It should always avoid simply doing more of the same and should add levels of challenge.



This successful whole-school approach meets the needs of pupils effectively and nearly all make good progress from their initial starting points.

Grouping arrangements

Schools that we visited had a range of different grouping arrangements to support all pupils and to respond to individual pupil needs. This included those pupils with ALN.

Mixed ability teaching

At **Whitmore High School**, mixed ability teaching is used across the school to foster an inclusive classroom environment where all pupils, regardless of their ability, can thrive. This approach promotes a diverse learning experience for all because it encourages pupils to learn from each other. This approach, combined with the Whitmore High School Teaching & Learning model, helps to address individual needs through questioning, modelling and scaffolding. Mixed ability teaching not only supports ALN pupils in the school with their academic attainment but also supports the development of social skills and empathy through collaboration.

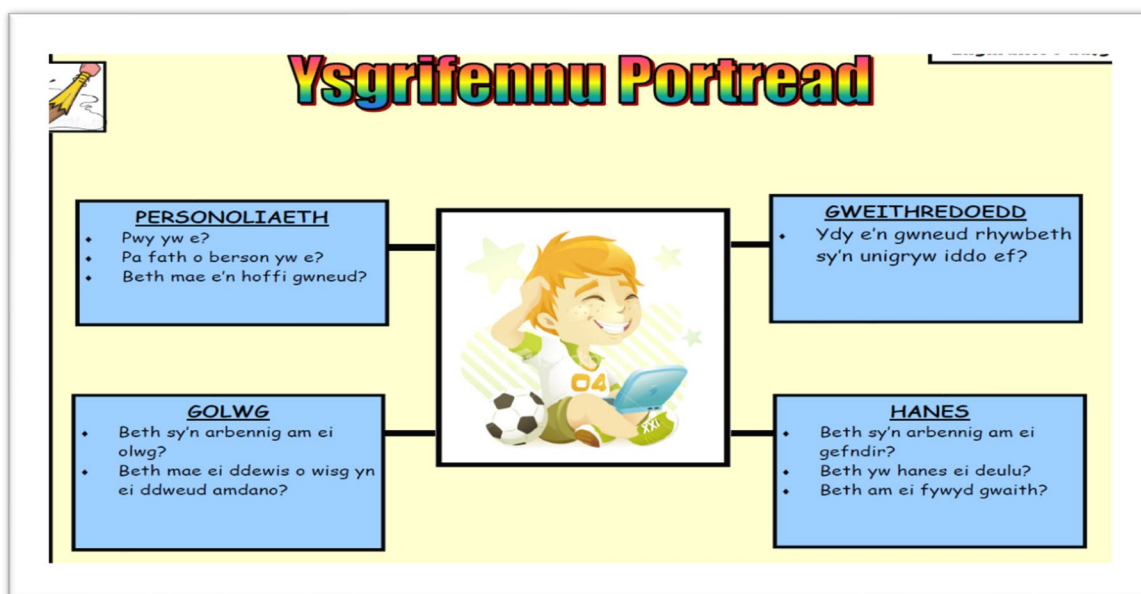
In a few secondary schools in the sample, pupils who required it, both with and without ALN, accessed beneficial universal learning provision in smaller teaching groups with higher staffing ratios. For example, in a few secondary schools, younger pupils were taught by the ALN teacher for language and humanities lessons. Pupils in these classes benefited from specialist teaching strategies, which supported their needs well. In addition, leaders reported that pupils' progress in literacy was improved due to the greater focus on literacy during these teaching sessions.

Many primary, secondary and all-age schools had paid careful consideration to purposeful seating plans across all classes to support learning and well-being. These

considerations included ensuring that pupils could hear instructions clearly without interference as well as supporting pupils with vision impairment to sit away from windows or glaring lights for example. In many classes, teachers had planned their grouping arrangements carefully to allow pupils with ALN to be supported in their learning by their peers. Leaders advised that they had not experienced any detrimental effect on the higher-ability children when they supported lower-ability peers. Staff told us that pupils sitting in mixed ability groups encouraged improved peer-to-peer learning.

Scaffolding and chunking

Scaffolding refers to a technique where teachers support pupils as they develop new skills and understanding of concepts. Scaffolding helps pupils achieve tasks that they cannot currently complete independently. Many of the schools visited used effective verbal, visual or written scaffolding to support pupils' learning. This included the effective use of support staff to further model and support learning. This was based on a robust understanding of pupils' learning needs. In the most effective schools, this support was gradually removed when it was no longer required. As a result, pupils developed the confidence and competence to complete tasks independently and successfully.



Chunking refers to a teaching strategy where teachers and support staff break down information into smaller, more manageable segments. In many cases, effective schools had developed the strategy of 'chunking' learning by breaking down tasks into smaller, more accessible units that supported pupils who required it, and benefitted pupils with ALN. In these cases, schools had thought carefully about accessible and step-by-step approaches. For example, schools provided one question or instruction at a time and made effective use of timers to motivate pupils to complete short tasks within expected time frames. This helped pupils to focus on completing manageable tasks in a timely manner.

Questioning and giving small step instructions

Many teachers in the schools and settings that we visited used clear and explicit instructions and effective questions, which supported pupils' understanding well. Teachers shared one instruction at a time and often demonstrated meaning with objects of reference, pictures and signs. They successfully monitored pupils' understanding by asking pupils to repeat or rephrase instructions. In the most effective cases, teaching staff engaged pupils well by allowing appropriate processing time to respond to questions or instructions. Teaching staff elicited responses from pupils by using a range of approaches that developed pupils' understanding, confidence and self-esteem. These strategies included sharing responses on white boards, discussing responses in pairs or groups before sharing with the class and sharing a partner's response to questions. In the most effective lessons, teaching staff enabled pupils to add and build ideas or indeed challenge their peers as questions were bounced around the room.

Resources

Many schools and settings in the sample provided equipment or modified resources to support pupils with ALN with their learning. These resources included mobility aids and assistive technology resources such as text reading pens and text to speech features on computers. Additionally, many ALNCoS in schools provided worthwhile support to class teachers by adapting teaching resources such as modifying font size to make text accessible for pupils with visual impairment or providing symbolised versions of activities to support pupils with ALN. Many teaching staff in schools and settings with a clear understanding of pupils' communication difficulties wore communication lanyards with symbolised images to support pupils with their understanding and communication.



Where practice was most successful, teaching staff made effective and purposeful use of real-life, physical and multi-sensory resources to support pupils' understanding of new concepts and daily routines. These resources provided pupils with concrete experiences that pupils associated with mathematical and other concepts. These were particularly helpful for pupils with ALN across all sectors. These resources included objects of reference, visual timetables and number lines.



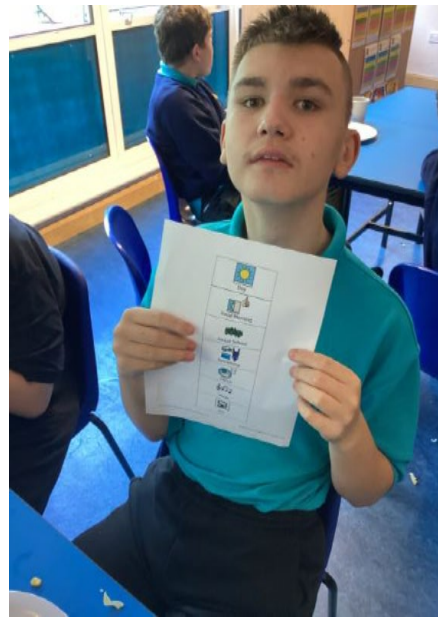
Using Resources

Using resources to support learning in mathematics

Mathematics teachers at Ysgol y Moelwyn use manipulatives when presenting new ideas to ALN pupils. This is developed from primary and then transitions to secondary lessons. Manipulatives are not used in all lessons and not all pupils always see the need for them or use them, but they are a key tool in terms of supporting learners.

As a result, pupils are able to see and understand the more abstract concepts of mathematics. Once pupils are able to 'see' the mathematics happen, this leads to a much deeper understanding.





Effective feedback

In effective classrooms, teaching and support staff provided immediate and meaningful feedback to pupils with ALN. This feedback helped pupils understand what they had done well and to clearly identify what they needed to do next and how to do it. This practice ensured that assessment was a supportive, collaborative two-way process. In a very few cases, where it was most effective, teachers used feedback successfully to support pupils in achieving their individual targets or IDP objectives. However, in instances of less effective teaching and inadequate feedback, pupils' progress and the overall quality of support for pupils with ALN were significantly affected. The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) supports schools, colleges, and early years settings to improve teaching and learning through better use of evidence. They believe that:

- Different methods of feedback delivery can be effective, and feedback should not be limited exclusively to written marking. Studies of verbal feedback show slightly higher impact overall (+7 months).
- Low attaining learners tend to benefit more from explicit feedback than high attainers.

EEF (2021a)

Live feedback

Leaders at **Whitmore High School** believe that giving immediate verbal feedback to pupils fosters a dynamic learning environment. Teaching staff often use visualisers and whiteboards which encourages participation and engagement. This approach helps personalise instruction from the teacher because they can tailor feedback to meet the individual needs of each pupil. The school has identified an increase in pupils' confidence and motivation due to the timely recognition of pupils' efforts and achievements.

Understanding child development



Support staff

Support staff in many schools and settings that we visited facilitated and supported the inclusion of pupils with ALN successfully. In the few most effective cases, support staff were skilled and knowledgeable and complemented what teachers were doing. They knew the needs and interests of pupils well. In these cases, they liaised well with teachers in preparing for their role in the classroom or within an intervention activity. Where it was most effective, enabling adults adapted learning skilfully, ensuring that it was accessible and engaging for pupils with ALN. However, this was not the case across all schools; there were a few instances where staff did not adapt their pedagogy adequately to meet the needs of pupils with ALN.

If TAs [teaching assistants] have a direct instructional role, it is important they add value to the work of the teacher, not replace them – the expectation should be that the needs of all learners are addressed, first and foremost, through high quality classroom teaching.

Schools should provide sufficient time for TA training and for teachers and TAs to meet out of class to enable the necessary lesson preparation and feedback.

EEF Making best use of Teaching Assistants (2021, b)

Access arrangements

A few secondary schools that we visited made appropriate access arrangements for pupils with ALN and prepared them well for their external examinations and assessments by means of consistent adaptations to their teaching and learning arrangements. These adjustments to teaching and learning approaches enabled

pupils to become familiar and confident with additional provision to support their needs such as the provision for a reader, scribe or extra time to complete their work.

Specialist approaches to teaching and learning

A few schools and settings successfully incorporated specialist teaching and learning strategies to support pupils of all ages with more complex needs within mainstream settings, including those identified as requiring ALP. This included approaches to support the development of communication, social and cognitive skills in children with autism. The activities included multi-sensory and motivating activities to engage pupils in their learning. This helped them to develop their social skills and to sustain their attention for longer periods. A few schools started the day for pupils with ALN with a programme of sensory-based movement activities. As a result, pupils were well regulated and ready to engage and to focus on their learning. In these most effective cases, teaching staff followed consistent routines and provided supportive structure through visual cues.

Supporting learning / interventions

As part of their curriculum, most of the schools that we visited facilitated beneficial literacy, numeracy and social and emotional intervention groups to support mainstream learning. In a minority of the most effective cases, teachers and highly qualified support staff liaised and planned these sessions well together. However, this was not the case across all providers. In a few schools, support staff were not included in the planning activities, which hindered the provision of targeted support and limited the overall effectiveness of the learning experience for pupils with ALN.

In the most effective schools, pupils were allocated to smaller groups based on individual needs. These targeted interventions allowed valuable and purposeful opportunities for collaborative learning, to develop and reinforce literacy and numeracy skills, and to pre-teach key vocabulary or key concepts before they were introduced in pupils' mainstream classes, particularly in subjects and topics pupils might have found to be challenging. We observed that pupils felt increasingly confident to answer questions in classes which had a longer-term positive impact on both their well-being and attainment. However, overall, schools did not consider how their approach to supporting learning and interventions impacted the well-being and outcomes of targeted pupils well enough. Further, across schools and settings visited, schools were not as clear as they need to be as to whether such provision is additional learning provision (ALP) or not. In many cases, schools advised that they were following local authority guidance and definition of ALP.

The EEF (2021b) notes that:

interventions are often quite separate from classroom activities and the lack of time for teachers and TAs to liaise means there is relatively little connection between what learners experience in and away from the classroom. This means it can be left to the pupil to make links between the coverage of the intervention and the wider curriculum coverage back in the classroom. Given that supported learners are usually those who find accessing learning difficult in the first place, this presents a huge additional challenge. The integration of the specific intervention with the mainstream curriculum is therefore vital.

Modelling conversations

ALNCos in a few schools had provided useful modelling of language to staff which included valuable prompts regarding the appropriate use of language to support pupils with ALN. As a result, staff in these schools told us that they felt empowered to communicate positively and sensitively to respond to pupils' ALN.

Modelling staff conversations

Ysgol Gyfun Aberaeron and **Ysgol y Moelwyn** developed clear guidelines for staff to communicate positively with ALN pupils. Workshops were held with members of the ALN Advisory Team and a CAMHS officer to reflect on positive communication methods and less inclusive ones. A number of good examples were shared with staff and there were beneficial opportunities to discuss and trial during practical sessions.

Using indirect language

"I wonder if we can..."

"Let's see if we can make something..."

"I can't see how to make this work..."

"Shall we see if we can beat the clock..." "Maybe we could investigate..."

"Who do you want to help us today..."

"Perhaps we could....."

Try to avoid saying: "It's time for you to..." "You've got to..." "You need to..." "You must..."

Using the language of choice

Example 1: "Do you want your scooter, or do you want your bike?' Going to school is the Law- you have no choice about that, but you do have the choice of how you get there".

Example 2: "Do you want to wear your shoes, or do you want to wear your crocs? You know, shoes have got to go on, but it's your choice what to wear".

Useful de-escalation scripts

"Tell me more so that I can help you..."

"Let's talk about this, so that I can understand how to help you/help the situation"

"I can see something has happened...How can I help you"

"Let's call Mr. Jones....I know he will be able to help us sort it out..."

Curriculum for Wales

Leaders in a few schools and settings valued the simultaneous implementation of the Curriculum for Wales and additional learning needs reform as an opportunity to create more inclusive and learner-centred approaches to learning. In these schools, leaders had addressed these changes thoughtfully through careful planning. During our visits for example, they described how it enabled them to develop a more personalised curriculum to meet the needs and interests of children and young people with ALN. Leaders at successful schools and settings aligned strategies to meet the goals of both Curriculum for Wales and ALN reform, fostering a cohesive approach to teaching and learning. However, many of the schools and settings visited were not consistently developing an inclusive and learner-centred approach to learning.

Bespoke curriculum to enable and support pupils' progress

Personalised learning allows pupils to be educated in a way and at a pace that suits them. It is a tailored and responsive approach to each pupil's learning in order that they can make progress, achieve and fully participate in engaging learning experiences. Only a few schools provided personalised learning experiences that effectively met the needs of pupils with ALN. In these few instances, teachers carefully planned lessons to address individual targets, used IT to create bespoke learning plans, and tailored activities to align with pupils' interests. However, this is not a widespread approach, and many schools did not engage pupils adequately, leaving them without a clear understanding of their next steps in learning.

Real-life learning experiences

Where schools and settings were most effective, they provided authentic and purposeful learning experiences for pupils with ALN that had adaptability to real-life settings. This provision allowed learning to be more flexible and relevant to the needs of pupils. These valuable opportunities enabled pupils to develop important skills that prepared them well for the next stage in their learning and their lives. Often, they developed beneficial skills such as independence, self-care or money management in practical real-life situations.

Life skills programme

Staff at **Whitmore High School** have responded to the need for a life skills programme for their ALN pupils. The school ALNCo works with families and pupils to identify and address skills that pupils will need to live independently. The school recognises that these skills are as important as those skills traditionally learned in school. This ensures that pupils are progressing in every area of their life and allows them the best chance of achieving their life goals.

Where practice was particularly successful for pupils with ALN, teaching staff planned engaging and practical, real-life learning experiences tailored to meet the individual requirements of each child across a range of subject matters. In these cases, pupils became active participants in their own learning and developed a

deeper understanding of new concepts. Where this was done well, pupils benefited from a range of learning experiences which allowed them to evidence their learning by other means.



Homestead Nursery provides effective environments and worthwhile opportunities for children with ALN to enable learning through artistic expression. By incorporating recycled and reclaimed materials into their activities, the nursery encourages creativity and exploration, offering a rich sensory environment where children can express themselves freely.

In addition, the outdoor environment is a playground for exploration and discovery, offering children with ALN excellent opportunities to learn. Forest school sessions and carefully planned outdoor activities provide a multi-sensory learning experience, promoting physical development and independence.

Practitioners use the many outdoor spaces effectively to promote holistic development and problem-solving skills among children with ALN. Through innovative activities such as digging in the mud pit, building in the workshop, story time sessions and open-fire cooking, they create meaningful learning opportunities that cater to the diverse needs of all children. This planned provision ensures that children with ALN are actively engaged in their learning journey and development.

To meet the needs of all pupils at **Whitmore High school**, teaching staff have established an outdoor learning area. This work aims to support the engagement of all pupils acknowledging that some pupils need a bespoke and holistic approach. The area has a log cabin, polytunnel, raised beds and a potting shed. Pupils choose this pathway and follow the 'Learning in the Outdoors' qualification. The produce in the garden can be used within the school's weekly bakery and other cookery sessions.



Meeting the needs of all pupils

Overall, where schools had decided that a pupil does not have ALN, teaching staff in the majority of schools, had worked diligently to ensure that the needs of these pupils are well considered. Overall, during our visits we observed that these pupils were suitably supported by schools' universal provision and by additional intervention sessions. Many schools in our sample continued to use 'monitoring registers' to monitor the progress and review the provision of pupils who do not receive ALP. In the few most effective cases, pupils that fall into this category have one-page profiles and teaching staff make purposeful use of these documents in their planning.

Local authority specialist classes in mainstream schools

A minority of the schools in the sample hosted a local authority specialist class (LASC) for pupils with a range of additional learning needs. These are specialist provisions within mainstream schools for pupils with identified ALN. They may be known locally as specialist resource bases, enhanced teaching facilities, specialist teaching facilities or learning support centres. The needs of pupils that attend the local authority specialist classes varied and included, for example, autism, ADHD, social, emotional and behavioural, speech language and communication, or hearing or visual impairment. In a few of these classes, pupils' needs did not differ from the needs of pupils that attended special schools. Over the years local authorities have increased their provision of specialist classes in mainstream schools.

In LASCs where practice was most effective, both pupils and teaching staff at the school benefited from this provision. For example, specialist staff in the classes provided bespoke learning and interventions that met the needs of pupils well. Pupils benefited from a range of specialist resources, with high staff to pupil ratios, in enabling learning environments. Furthermore, in a few cases, pupils from the LASCs benefitted from integrating into identified mainstream lessons. This integration provided meaningful opportunities for pupils to learn together across the full range of

the curriculum and experience and to empathise with one another. Mainstream teaching staff valued the collaboration and expertise shared by their colleagues within the LASC and adopted specialist teaching approaches into their own teaching.

LASCs are an important part of the spectrum of specialist provision to support pupils with ALN. However, there was not always a clear and shared understanding of the entry and exit criteria for specialist classes, or how their provision was different or complementary to any special school provision in an area. In the best examples, local authorities planned strategically to ensure that there was enough specialist provision to meet the spectrum of additional learning needs in their area and that specialist expertise was shared across the workforce in these settings. However, throughout this review, we saw evidence of pressure on places in special schools and LASCs, meaning too many pupils with complex needs remained in mainstream settings and did not receive the specialist support they required.

Alun School's Hearing Support Centre provides highly effective support for pupils who are hearing impaired. These pupils access mainstream classes and are supported well by their peers and specialist communication support workers. The local authority ALN team ensures that colleagues are provided with useful information about the needs of individual pupils and how they can best support them. Staff have nurtured valuable relationships with the parents of pupils with ALN and seek their views to help shape provision effectively.

Special school support

In a very few local authorities, officers in the ALN and inclusion teams promoted collaboration among mainstream and special schools to support them to meet the needs of pupils with additional learning needs successfully.

Staff at **Trinity Fields School**, including the Autistic Spectrum Service, in Caerphilly, provide an extensive range of high-quality specialist support to mainstream schools and settings. The service provides support to over 2,500 pupils with autism. It has been instrumental in building the capacity of mainstream schools to support pupils with autism, for example through creating low sensory environments and delivering strategies to support individual pupils. The service also provides direct support to the families of pupils with autism.

Trinity Fields School has nine satellite classes across the borough for pupils with high level needs. Pupils in the satellite classes are on the roll of the special school but benefit from integration and inclusion with pupils in mainstream settings. This provision enables pupils with ALN to receive their education within their local community. A recent development is the satellite class at Coleg y Cymoedd for post-16 learners. Pupils in this satellite benefit from the range of courses on offer at the college but also receive specialist support from Trinity Fields staff. This is successful in raising the aspirations of young people with ALN to achieve their future goals.

Trinity Fields School also provides a range of support for local authority specialist classes (LASC) across the borough. Working jointly with the educational

psychology service, staff at the school have provided support and training for the assessment of pupils with ALN. They also carry out joint moderation of IDPs and work scrutiny. This means that staff across the LASCs and the special school have a common understanding of pupils' needs. This is raising expectations and improving the progress that pupils with ALN make in the LASCs.

The extensive, high-quality range of outreach support and professional development provided by Trinity Fields School has a valuable impact on the quality of additional learning provision across the county.

Ysgol Bryn Derw is a special school. It has worked with local authority officers to improve the provision for pupils with autism in learning resource bases across the county. For example, it has supported staff in the learning resource bases to carry out sensory profiling. This has led to the introduction of sensory circuits across all learning resource bases in Newport, which has positively impacted the learning experiences of pupils with autism in mainstream schools.

Additional learning provision

The findings in our last thematic review relating to inconsistencies in the understanding and application of ALP across Wales remain relevant. Confusion continues regarding local authorities' understanding and subsequent consistent application and delivery of the ALNET Act and ALN Code.

Judge Jane McConnell, the President of the Education tribunal for Wales, noted in the [Education Tribunal for Wales, Annual Report 2022-2023](#)

Any time of change is always unsettling. It is essential that the introduction of new ALN law goes as smoothly as possible for children and young people in Wales, so they are not disadvantaged. LA decision makers must ensure that they know the law, understand the law and then apply it. It must always be remembered that duties under ALN Law will always “top trump” any LA policy. Decision making in LA must be transparent and accountable. The Tribunal must and can only apply the law in making decisions (p. 2).

There remained a lack of consistency in the advice provided by local authorities to schools in relation to the extent to which provision should be classed as ALP. This is significant as only when provision is deemed to be ALP will a child or young person be considered as having ALN and in need of an IDP. This continued to have implications for pupils and practice within schools and settings. It remains likely that some of the provision being made for pupils should be considered as ALP. Most schools and local authorities agreed that it would be beneficial for ALP to be clarified at a national level.

Nevertheless, in response to our findings from our first ALN thematic, most local authorities included in this thematic had made suitable progress in developing both their own interpretation and delivery of ALP across all educational settings. The measures implemented had been multifaceted, focusing on disseminating clear

guidance and enhancing support systems and professional development opportunities. Nearly all local authorities had developed key documents, such as 'principles and expectations' documents and ALN toolkits to ensure a better understanding of ALP across settings and schools. Nearly all local authorities had a consistent approach across their schools and settings to the application of the graduated response. As a result, schools and settings that took part in this thematic were generally secure in their understanding of what is classified as ALP within their own local context and understanding.

Newport local authority has established a beneficial Inclusion Partnership Forum, where a group of representative headteachers can influence current policy and practice with regards to ALN. This is a useful tool in ensuring that the local authority works in partnership with schools to develop its approaches to universal learning provision and ALP.

Implementation from 0-5 years

Under [The Additional Learning Needs Code for Wales 2021](#) (2021b)

Where it is brought to its attention, or otherwise appears to a local authority, that a child for whom it is responsible may have ALN, the local authority **must** decide whether the child has ALN (11.5). The possibility that a child has ALN might be brought to the attention of a local authority in many ways. It may start with a referral from one of a wide range of different agencies and professionals. For example, a provider of childcare or non-maintained nursery education might inform the local authority where it suspects a child has ALN. Alternatively, a health body might have formed the opinion that the child has or may have ALN and brought this to the attention of the local authority in compliance with its duty in section 64 of [The Additional Learning Needs Code for Wales 2021](#) (Chapter 21). Concerns might also be expressed by the child's parents. These concerns might be raised through a non-maintained education setting (if the child attends one) or directly with the local authority. Parents' observations of their child are often crucial to early identification. Local authorities and non-maintained nursery providers should be open and responsive to such expressions of concern and take account of any information provided. (11.6)

Local authorities had generally implemented systematic approaches to identifying the emerging ALN of children aged birth to five years old. All of the local authorities who participated in this thematic told us that working across services and with an extensive range of partners and stakeholders had been a notable success of the role of the EY ALNLO. This had enabled the development of joint referral processes ensuring common approaches across each local authority. For example, colleagues from across services attended referral panels to identify emerging needs, decide on the additional learning provision and develop the one-page profile and individual development plan (IDP). More recently, local authorities had worked jointly with colleagues across services to develop beneficial systems for keeping ALN under review.

Nearly all local authorities provided an extensive range of training, support and guidance to support settings and other early years providers in identifying additional learning needs and in developing the relevant ALP. In many cases, they carefully scheduled the timings and delivery model of training to meet the needs of early years providers. This included offering sessions during the evenings and weekends as well as using social media platforms for greater accessibility. Many local authorities provided, for example toolkits or infographics that supported identification of need. They provided detailed information to providers which outlined the possible additional learning provision to meet the identified needs. Where this was most effective, local authorities provided teams of officers to work alongside providers, developing and modelling the agreed provision.

Recruitment and retention in early years settings

Local authorities identified challenges in the recruitment and retention of staff in early years settings. In a few cases, where there had been high turnover of staff, the setting lost staff with valuable experience in meeting individual children's needs. This negatively impacted the capacity and ability of the settings to meet the additional learning needs of individual children and placed additional strain on local authority officers who had to upskill new staff. Many local authorities responded appropriately, for example by creating on-line training which could be used flexibly by settings. In addition, they provided regular 'bite-size' or 'mop up' training for setting staff and early years providers. This meant that staff who were new to the settings could be upskilled promptly and were better equipped to meet the needs of children with emerging and identified needs.

Individual Development Plan (IDP) implementation

Individual Development Plans are a single statutory plan that are provided for pupils that are identified as having an additional learning need. They replace statements of SEN and non-statutory plans such as individual education or behaviour plans. Individual Development Plans are developed through collaboration with the pupil, parents and carers and any other professionals who might be involved with the pupil. They should provide children and families with certainty and clarity about the ALP that is to be made to meet a learner's ALN. The IDPs should be a living document that is reviewed regularly.

The National Academy of Educational Leadership (2023) concluded in their commission report, [What is the role of educational leadership in delivering the Additional Learning Needs reform in Wales?](#), that only a minority of schools felt secure in developing and maintaining IDPs. Leaders in many of the schools and settings that we visited as part of this work reported that ALN leaders were gradually becoming more confident in developing and maintaining IDPs. In the few most effective cases, IDPs were well understood by teaching staff and used effectively as part of their planning which ensured quality provision and outcomes for pupils with ALN. In these examples, staff successfully integrated external advice and specialist support for pupils into their learning in a beneficial way.

A few local authorities and schools in the sample advised that pressures remain in meeting the statutory timescales for issuing IDPs. Colleagues working within health continued to experience challenges in providing input within the given timescales.

Nearly all local authorities provided useful training and guidance about what constitutes an effective IDP. Many local authorities provided useful examples of completed and anonymised IDPs to share with providers. Schools and settings within those authorities valued this support. However, a few local authorities had not shared examples of completed IDPs as they believed this to be detrimental to person centred practice.

Individual Development Plans play an important role for children who are transitioning or moving schools. Whilst the new setting is likely to produce a new IDP, they can use previous IDPs to understand how the pupil has previously been supported, what has worked and, crucially, what has not.

Using IDPs during transition

Ysgol Gynradd y Tymbl discusses all Year 6 pupils in regular progress meetings with the local secondary school. During these meetings, IDPs are used effectively to ensure effective and consistent provision for pupils with ALN during transition.

In our report [The new Additional Learning Needs system](#) (Estyn, 2023) we noted that:

Many schools were clear that local authorities will maintain the IDPs for children that are looked after and those that are dually registered. However, beyond these groups there was a lack of clarity and transparency regarding those IDPs that will be maintained by local authorities.

Across local authorities, inconsistencies remained in the interpretation of the ALN Code and in the subsequent approaches to school maintained and local authority maintained IDPs. For example, one authority may deem provision in a local authority specialist class as ALP requiring a local authority maintained IDP, whereas in another this may be classed as a school maintained IDP. Local authority officers and school leaders acknowledged that this variability leads to confusion for schools, for children and young people and for parents and carers.

Approaches to local authority and school based IDPs

Officers at Denbighshire local authority have a measured approach to the consideration of school based and local authority maintained IDPs. As a result, ALNCOs and leaders in schools are clear on local authority processes and the distinction between a school or a local authority maintained IDP. Through regular professional dialogue and close collaboration with schools, pupils are appropriately identified for early interventions and a graduated response ensuring delivery of high-quality teaching and Additional Learning Provision. This ensures those who are referred to the local authority are appropriate with clear evidence of a need for Additional Learning Provision that the school cannot secure.

Under [The Additional Learning Needs Code for Wales 2021](#) (2021b):

It is expected that schools and local authorities adopt a graduated response to children and young people with ALN, making use of a wide range of strategies that allows for movement along a continuum of support to reflect needs and progress made (p. 39).

In nearly all cases, local authority approaches to the graduated response and to IDPs were clearly stated in their principles and expectations documents. This is helpful for schools and other educational settings in understanding their responsibilities for children and young people with ALN.

In nearly all local authorities we sampled, ALN and inclusion teams have successfully upskilled ALNCoS in developing effective IDPs, for example, through their ALNCo forum and short bitesize training sessions. Many of these training sessions were recorded online so that schools could use them for in-house training. Many local authorities in the sample provided useful support to quality assure IDPs. For example, they provided training and guidance, Educational Psychologist consultations, 'drop-in sessions' with local authority officers and specialist teachers, and cluster moderation with IDP or ALNCo champions. Where this was most effective, a few local authorities allocated an IDP officer or caseworker to a family where ALN is agreed for the child or young person. They attended all person-centred meetings and supported the discussion of ALN provision. Collaborating effectively with all stakeholders, they contributed to the development of the IDP and were thoroughly engaged in the moderation and quality assurance process.

In the sample of IDPs shared with us as part of this process, most outlined the child or young person's needs well and provided very useful profiles. A few IDPs provided clear outcomes and identified useful small steps in achieving the overall outcome. In these cases, it was clear to see the planned progress for the child or young person. However, in many IDPs, outcomes were too vague. This had a negative impact on determining the most appropriate ALP. In a few examples, it was not always clear how providers planned to measure the progress of children and young people. This is a significant shortcoming.

Digital platforms

At the time of this review, the majority of local authorities across Wales had developed digital platforms to support the statutory referral process and the development of the associated IDP. This is beneficial in developing a clear local rationale for ALP and in supporting the development of both school maintained and LA maintained IDPs. However, there is no nationally agreed rationale for ALP and as a result this provision was not consistent across Wales. Where these systems and processes were most effective, they supported local authorities successfully in sharing the IDP, ensuring collaboration with all key partners and stakeholders. This meant that everyone who was supporting the child or young person was fully involved in decision making processes regarding the most appropriate ALP. Despite the clear advantages of online systems, the extent to which these ease the flow of information between local authorities, and between schools and post 16 settings to support timely decision making for pupils, is not fully known.

Transition

The [Additional Learning Needs Code](#) (Welsh Government, 2021b) states that:

Every child and young person will experience transitions in different ways, and any plans made for additional support need to be developed around their individual needs.

Children and young people with ALN may find transitions more challenging than their peers do and consequently, may need additional support to ensure their education or training, including their ALP, is not adversely affected by the transition. (27.5)

Transition planning is usually most effective when a person-centred practice approach is adopted, allowing the child, the child's parent, or young person to voice any concerns relating to their next transition. Discussing the likely changes to the child or young person's education or training can help prepare the learner for transition and highlight what additional support may be required. Some meetings that discuss transition planning will benefit from involving other partners that can help the child or young person understand how transitions will work in practice and what additional support is available to them. Any additional support identified for transitions can be documented in the child or young person's IDP to enable action to be taken at the relevant time. (27.6)

(p.294 and 295)

We noted during our visits to schools and settings that, in the most effective transition arrangements, there were close links between educational establishments. This related to transition into non-maintained settings, into primary and secondary schools, and transition for post-16 pathways. In the most effective schools and settings ALP was consistent on transition. However, this was not the case on all occasions. In these cases, pupils' ALP was adversely affected by poor transition arrangements.

In most cases, the transition into a child's first education setting is from their home environment. A key aspect of the role of the EY ALN lead officer has been to establish effective working relationships and manage transitions across all teams and services that support children from birth to five years of age. This has been successful in nearly all cases in the sample. For example, officers noted improved joint service working with colleagues in Children's Services, initiatives such as Flying Start, sensory and disability services, schools and non-maintained settings and childcare providers. These strengthened links across partners have facilitated transition arrangements for children aged birth to five years. A few local authorities have established beneficial transition teams to support children with admission to childcare providers, non-maintained settings and schools.

However, this practice was not consistent in schools and settings across the sample that we visited. In a few cases, there is a lack of consistency and co-ordination for children who move from a setting to a school, especially where they are accessing additional adult support.

Transition to primary school

Homestead nursery, in Wrexham, has established a robust system of regular meetings between its practitioners and reception teachers from the feeder schools. These meetings are scheduled several months before transition to primary school. During these sessions, practitioners provide comprehensive information about each child's developmental progress, learning styles, likes and dislikes and social behaviours. Special attention is given to children with ALN, ensuring that effective strategies and interventions used in the nursery are communicated and can be continued or adapted in the school environment.

An essential aspect of the transition is the visit by reception teachers to the nursery setting. These visits allow teachers to familiarise themselves with the children who have ALN in a familiar environment, which reduces anxiety and helps build trust. Teachers observe the children during their regular activities, gaining valuable insights into their interests and interactions. This helps establish a connection between the children and their future teachers, making the transition to school smoother and more comfortable.

During the meetings, there is a focused discussion on ALN and ALP that children may have. Practitioners share detailed information about successful strategies to ensure consistency and continuity. The role of parents and the support they provide at home is also considered, promoting a holistic approach to each child's transition.

Transition to secondary school

To ensure pupils' needs are well understood and timely and that appropriate intervention is put in place, **Cardiff High School** ALN department works closely with ALNCoS in cluster primary schools, and ALN colleagues in post-16 educational settings. Pertinent discussions around intended outcomes in IDPs take place, and relevant ALPs are identified and agreed between settings. The final IDPs include specific ALP relating to each school or intended destination, to clearly indicate that the provision is likely to be different, whilst acknowledging that the pupils' needs are likely to remain unchanged.

This ensures that the IDP continues to be relevant and specific to the pupils' needs across both providers, that transition is seamless and that the provision is appropriate to individual settings. It also provides reassurance to staff at the intended destinations that the pupils' needs can be met through their provision.

Working with other agencies

One of the ambitions of the Act as captured in the [Welsh Government's Additional Learning Needs \(ALN\) transformation programme](#) (2018a) is:

improved collaboration and information sharing between agencies, which are essential to ensuring that needs are identified early, and the right support is

put in place to enable children and young people to achieve positive outcomes (p.3)

In the most effective cases, local authorities, schools and settings had established positive and improved collaborative approaches with parents and other specialist agencies to ensure that pupils with ALN and their families were suitably supported. In these cases, schools and settings worked closely with families and other agencies in a timely manner, sharing insights and securing tailored support as necessary. However, overall, collaboration and information sharing between agencies remained too variable. The ability of health services, for example, to provide information in a timely enough manner, and within statutory timeframes, remained a concern and places pressure on families, local authorities and schools and other settings. A very few secondary schools employ their own specialist teams to provide timely support for pupils with ALN. However, many smaller schools may not be able to afford this level of service.

Specialist services to support pupils with additional learning needs

Leaders at **Cardiff High School** believe in the importance of swift access to effective specialist services to maximise the academic, social and emotional development of pupils with additional learning needs. To this end, the school no longer participates in the process of externally referring pupils for support but, instead, employs its own educational psychologist, autism consultant, occupational therapist, emotional health and well-being specialist and speech and language therapist. Whilst these colleagues are not based at the school each day, they are employed to work with the school on a regular basis and are also accessible for advice and support whilst not based at the school.

Specialist support within statutory meetings has become a standard feature of the school's protocols for supporting pupils, their family and school staff as they work together to ensure maximum outcomes for each pupil.

The availability of specialist colleagues not only ensures that timely and effective support for pupils is easily accessible, but it also provides a rich source for the delivery of professional learning to teaching and support staff. This underpins the school's drive to improve learning and teaching for every pupil in the school – including those with additional learning needs.

Early years settings working with other agencies

Most early years settings and participating early years additional learning needs lead officers (EYALNLOs) noted improvements in joint working across services for children and their families. This improved collaboration was often successful in ensuring that all services involved with the child and their family were fully aware of the needs of the child and the support that they required. As a result, nearly all local authorities had developed better joint referral processes, ensuring that emerging needs were identified promptly.

Working with parents and agencies when transitioning to non-maintained settings

Before starting at **Caban Cegin** non-maintained setting, health visitors work closely with the families of children with ALN and other agencies. They plan a one page profile before children start at the setting. As a result, practitioners have a better understanding of the needs and preferences of children within the setting. They plan more purposefully from the outset. For example, a sensory area and soft play areas have been prepared in response to pupils' needs.

Early Years Team Around the Child

Pentre Pengwins non-maintained setting is proactive in supporting children with emerging needs and ALN. For example, they routinely instigate 'Early Years Team Around the Child' meetings to discuss the needs of the children with parents and health visitors. They beneficially gain advice from professionals where necessary. This approach is also used successfully to support transition into school for certain children.

Many EYALNLOs cited the capacity of colleagues in health services as a challenge particularly regarding the diagnoses of neurodivergence. Many local authorities had developed successful working relationships with the Designated Educational Clinical Lead Officer (DECLO), which was supporting them well in strengthening the collaboration across education and health services. However, in a minority of cases, this relationship was less successful, largely due to the perceived capacity of the DECLO. This meant that important decisions regarding joint support for children were delayed, which negatively impacts identification of needs and transition into the most appropriate setting or school.

Information and advice for parents and carers

The quality of information provided by schools, settings and local authorities to parents is gradually improving. Many schools and settings provided workshops and coffee mornings to support parents and carers with their understanding of aspects of ALN or ALP.

Family surgery

Ysgol Uwchradd Aberaeron has developed a weekly family ALN Surgery to strengthen the home-school partnership and ensure early intervention for pupils with ALN.

Since the surgery was established, provision has gone from strength to strength and is a valuable resource for pupils with ALN and their families. Parents understand the procedure for making appointments and other professionals sometimes join, as necessary. This ensures effective and co-ordinated provision around ALN pupils.

In the surgery, there is an opportunity to share information and an "Information

Wall” has been developed for this purpose, with family-friendly pamphlets available to take home. There is also an ALN Information Wall for pupils outside the surgery, where pupils with ALN can visit for information (pupil-friendly posters/pamphlets) about a variety of support that is available to them, when the need arises.

Secondly, the surgery is a place to discuss concerns, solve problems and draw up an action plan and the ALNCo has designed a Consultation Form as a record of this discussion. The report is shared with everyone who has attended the meeting. The action points can include additions to the one-page profile, further referrals, along with action points for the family and the pupil. In some cases, there are second and third appointments to ensure that monitoring takes place.

To develop the family support further, the school has developed family workshops on different ALN conditions. To date, the ALNCo has developed workshops on reading/dyslexia, ADHD and anxiety in partnership with other professionals to ensure that the support that is offered to the school’s families is of good quality.

As a result of this partnership work, relationships between the school and ALN families are sound, it allows early intervention for many children and young people, and it strengthens the pupil’s voice in the process of co-ordinating and organising various provision. It has also strengthened multi-agency partnerships and promotes the concept of working as one cohesive team around families.

Many local authorities included in this thematic have improved their work with parents and carers of children and young people with ALN. For example, nearly all local authorities provided information and guidance about identifying emerging needs and provided useful signposting to services who can help and support. A few local authorities held regular support groups for parents and carers of children and young people with ALN. In the most successful cases, they established family liaison officers or caseworkers to work directly with families. This was beneficial in supporting families of children and young people with ALN and has led, for example, to a common understanding of needs and the associated ALP.

Cardiff local authority has developed beneficial arrangements for supporting parents and carers of children and young people with ALN. When a child is identified as having emerging needs, the local authority allocates a transition worker as a first point of contact for the family. They also support parents and carers through useful guidance, helplines and ‘drop ins’ across the city run by inclusion officers. The local authority has established six parent and carer groups across the city for children and young people with emerging needs or identified ALN. These groups are co-ordinated by specialist teachers and often attended by colleagues from social services or the health board. The local authority provides support and training for families with children with a diagnosis of autism, jointly with health colleagues. The authority uses a range of social media and digital platforms successfully to share support, guidance, signposting and training for parents.

Parents' experiences

In the survey of parents, a total of 121 parents responded to a question about whether the support the school provides is of good quality. Of those, around half (44.6 %) strongly agreed, a minority (33.9%) agreed, a few (10.7%) neither agreed nor disagreed, a very few (5.8%) disagreed, and a very few (5.0%) strongly disagreed.

We also asked what measures their school had put in place to support their child. The responses to this question were mostly positive. One parent told us:

They've done everything! Made sure his needs are accommodated always. School drop-off at a different door so my son doesn't get overwhelmed, adapted the class to suit his vestibular sensory needs. The teachers are very thorough, understanding and great at communicating things to us parents.

Another said:

The school has set up a space for my child away from the classroom as he sometimes finds it a bit too overwhelming to be in the class. He can stay in the independent area and still not feel excluded from his peers. And he is welcome to join them anytime he is ready to do so.

However, there were also a few negative responses, highlighting parents' frustrations with poor communication from the school or teachers and ALNCOs, or a complete lack of support.

Website review

Nearly all local authorities provided useful information for parents and carers about ALN on their websites, including points of reference and contact information. Nearly all authorities, through their principles and expectations documents, provided useful outlines that described the criteria for both school maintained IDP or local authority maintained IDPs.

The majority of schools and settings in the sample also provided information on their websites about ALN, for example explaining carefully to parents how they can support their child if they have ALN or if they think their child might have ALN. However, many schools and settings did not provide information on their websites about the support or ALP for pupils with ALN.

Dispute resolution

In our meetings with local authorities, a further area of effective practice identified in the ALN reform in Wales was the strong processes for preventing and resolving disagreements, along with the provision of independent advocacy services. Local authorities had generally developed beneficial working relationships with the independent advocacy services, for example, SNAP Cymru. A few local authorities had established disagreement resolution processes and panels. As a result of the enhanced relationships between schools, settings and families, a few local authorities reported that this had been beneficial in reducing disputes regarding the identification and provision of ALN and led to a reduction in the number of appeals to

Education Tribunal Wales (ETW). However, in [The Education Tribunal for Wales, Annual Report 2022-2023](#) Judge McConnell explains:

Again, as you would expect, the total number of appeals registered with the ETW has dropped slightly. This reflects the fact that parents, children, young people as well as Schools, Colleges and LAs are still learning about the new ALN process and how it should be delivered (p.1)

It is clear that effective strategies that can be applied to all pupils may also be relevant to the learning needs of pupils with ALN. However, the extent to which practices are, or become, ALP was not understood as well as it should be.

Welsh-medium provision

This chapter considers the impact of reform on ALN provision in Welsh-medium schools and settings.

One of the principles that underpins the ALN system is developing a

bilingual system where all reasonable steps are taken to deliver ALP in Welsh for children and young people who require support through the medium of Welsh, with scope for increasing the delivery of ALP in Welsh over time (Welsh Government, 2021, p.37).

In our last thematic report, we referred to comments made by the Children's Commissioner for Wales and the Welsh Language Commissioner in their report [The Welsh Language and the Additional Learning Needs System](#) (2023). They concluded that:

The language medium of Additional Learning Needs (ALN) provision is integral to the effectiveness and quality of the provision itself. Currently the ALN system in Wales does not reflect the needs of a bilingual nation (p. 3).

The extent to which local authorities and schools and settings plan and implement equitable support for Welsh-medium ALN provision remained underdeveloped.

Leaders at many schools and settings told us that Welsh-medium pupils that have ALN, either received support through the medium of English, or did not receive the full support they need. In the survey of parents, a total of 86 parents responded to a question about whether their child had moved from a Welsh-medium school to an English-medium school to get the support they need. A few parents told us that their children had to move to English-medium schools to support their additional learning needs.

Over time, local authorities are gradually improving Welsh-medium provision for pupils with additional learning needs. For example, a minority of local authorities had been successful in recruiting a few Welsh speaking officers across a range of ALN and inclusion teams. A minority of local authorities had worked in collaboration with other authorities to share Welsh-medium support, for example procuring assessment from Welsh speaking educational psychologists.

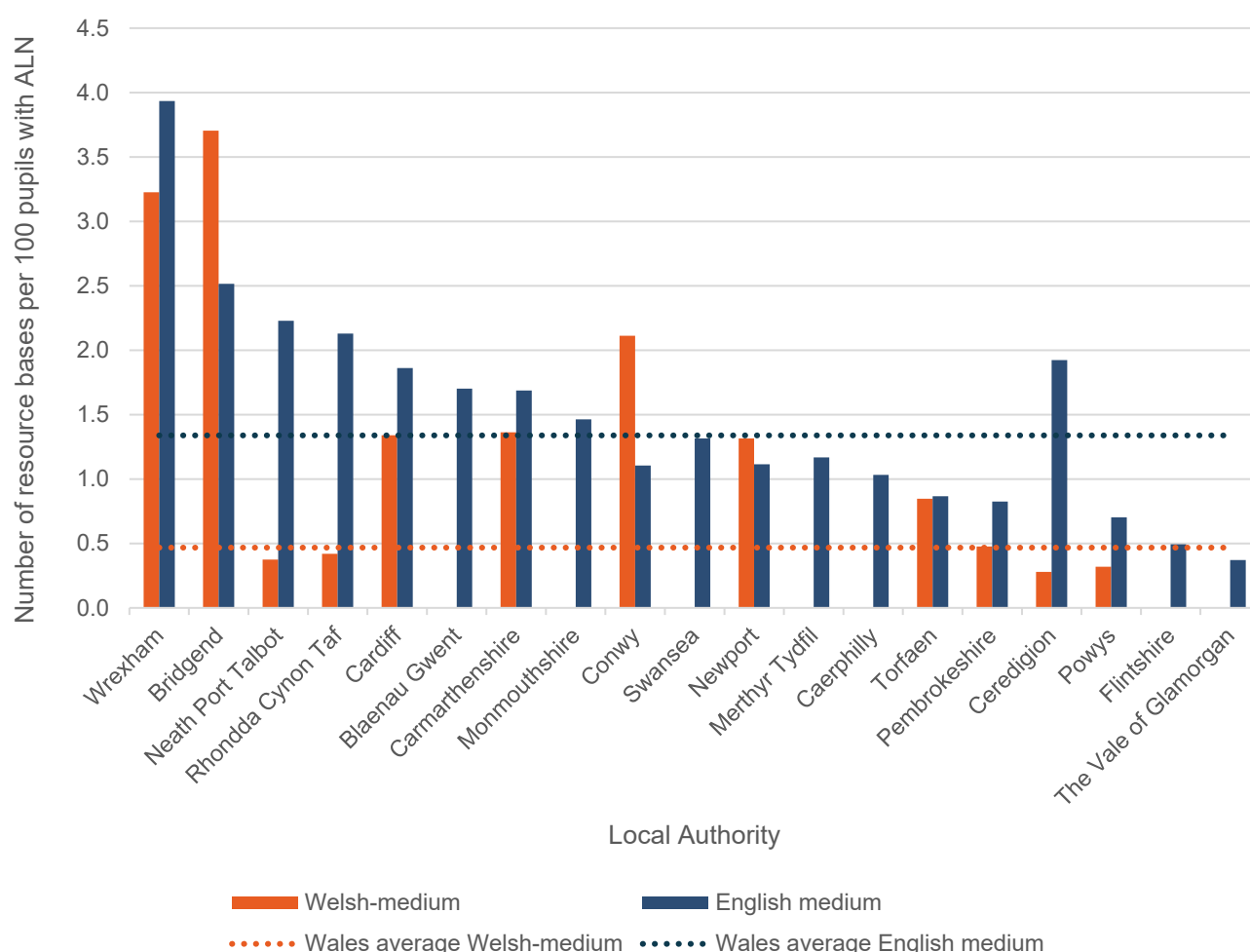
Most of **Pembrokeshire local authority's** ALN support teams have at least one Welsh speaker, usually more. All materials are produced in Welsh, for example training materials and presentations. ELSA training materials have been translated into Welsh by the local authority and distributed across Wales following requests by other authorities. All training for ALN is available through the medium of Welsh. The local authority has also recruited a Welsh speech and language therapist who can also train teachers and support staff through the medium of Welsh and with a focus on specific strategies that work for Welsh-speaking pupils.

Welsh-medium local authority specialist classes

Around half of local authorities had established specialist classes in Welsh-medium mainstream schools. Overall, this was appreciated by schools, children and young people and their families and had begun to improve the provision for pupils with ALN who learn through the medium of Welsh.

However, due to the limited number of Welsh-medium provisions, too often the specialist classes did not meet the ALP that the pupil needed and was entitled to. Staff did not always have the training and support to meet the identified needs of the pupils, and the support provided was too generic. Further, we are aware that data collected by Welsh Government as part of the Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC) does not accurately reflect the number of Welsh-medium local authority specialist classes across local authorities.

Number of local authority specialist classes per 100 pupils with ALN, by local authority and school language medium, 2024



Source: Schools' census data 2024 (PLASC)

This data reflects primary, secondary and all age schools.

Isle of Anglesey, Gwynedd and Denbighshire do not have a local authority specialist class. Blaenau Gwent, Monmouthshire, Swansea, Merthyr Tydfil, Caerphilly, Flintshire and The Vale of Glamorgan do not have a local authority special class in a Welsh-medium school.

Welsh-medium resources and additional learning provision

Many of the challenges outlined in the first ALN thematic remain. For example, standardised assessments and diagnostic testing used to assess ALN are not readily available through the medium of Welsh. Similarly, there are very limited Welsh-medium learning and teaching resources. In the few most successful cases, local authority ALN officers have developed a range of worthwhile Welsh-medium resources to support pupils' literacy and numeracy skills and to provide Welsh-medium ALP.

In April 2023, the Welsh Government created a new company '[Adnodd](#)' to commission Welsh-medium resources. Adnodd aims to secure high quality, accessible and bi-lingual resources in a variety of formats to meet the needs of all pupils. When commissioning and quality assuring resources Adnodd will encourage content creators to consider how resources can be designed to be as accessible and inclusive as possible and to avoid creating barriers to pupils with additional learning needs. No resources have yet been commissioned by Adnodd. It is too early to evaluate the impact of this work on resources to support Welsh-medium pupils with ALN.

To support children with ALN in Welsh-medium non-maintained settings **Mudiad Meithrin's** language immersion project 'Croesi'r Bont' has developed an effective tool to facilitate the assessment of children's speech, language, and communication progress. The 'Croesi'r Bont' language immersion project supports and records the progress of children's speech, language, and communication development four times a year.

The aim of the updated language assessment procedure is to improve practitioners' ability to support and capture the progress of children with ALN. The assessment tool is aimed at effectively assessing early stages of communication and non-verbal progress in communication such as signing or making sounds. This ensures that practitioners can record the progress of each child (in the Mudiad Meithrin settings which receive Croesi'r Bont support) and plan for individual needs accordingly. In addition, Croesi'r Bont have produced a Welsh-medium resource pack of communication strategies which supports practitioners' skills and confidence when working with children with speech, language, and communication difficulties.



Carmarthenshire is a bilingual local authority, with both Welsh and English having equal legal status and parity. When considering provision for pupils whether in bilingual or Welsh-medium schools there is an agreement that both languages will be considered in line with the needs of the child.

The local authority provides specialist provision through the medium of English, Welsh or bilingually. They have recently opened three primary specialist classes for pupils with autism within Welsh-medium primary schools, who deliver provision through the medium of Welsh and or bilingually.

A significant proportion of pupils with ALN attend Welsh-medium education in Carmarthenshire. This includes pupils from first language Welsh, bilingual, non-Welsh speaking and multi-lingual homes. To ensure that the local authority clearly identifies the language profile and the needs of children and young people, all pupils undertake a baseline assessment to ensure that the starting point of their learning journey is correctly aligned to language and learning needs of the child. This assessment is undertaken in Welsh and English. The local authority provides ALP through the medium of Welsh or English, meeting the language needs of individual pupils.

As is nationally the case, the local authority notes that access to Welsh language resources and assessments is an ongoing barrier. However, Carmarthenshire has overcome this successfully, by creating resources internally or translating resources to support schools and other educational settings. Over many years it has developed a library of resources and advice/guidance documentation to

support schools to deliver provision through the medium of Welsh.

All professional learning is delivered bilingually by the ALN and inclusion department. Where external services deliver training that cannot be presented bilingually, they provide translation services, and all associated documentation and slides are translated into Welsh.

Carmarthenshire has increased its specialist classes from 38 places to 62. The majority of specialist settings have staff who can offer support if required through the medium of Welsh or enhancement to the support offered can be considered through additional funding. Pupils within their specialist classes are not disadvantaged from the Welsh language, they receive a differentiated pupil centred approach in line with the teaching of all subjects.

Staff recruitment

In our last report [The new additional learning needs system](#) (Estyn, 2023) we stated that:

Local authorities advised that recruiting staff with the relevant specialist skills and securing support from Welsh speaking colleagues in other agencies and services is an ongoing challenge (p. 40).

Overall, the evidence we collected shows that these shortcomings in provision remained. In response to these concerns, the Welsh Government's [Welsh in education workforce plan](#) (2022) highlights the need to secure a Welsh-medium workforce to support effective and equitable provision for pupils with ALN. The plan includes references to worthwhile activities already in place to support this development. These activities include a Welsh for classroom assistants' course as part of the Welsh Language Sabbatical Scheme and developing a national Teaching Assistants Learning Pathway (TALP), which includes the option of assessment for achieving the Higher-Level Teaching Assistant (HLTA) status in both English and Welsh. The Welsh Government annually funds 10 places on Cardiff University's Doctorate in Educational Psychology programme, with a minimum of one place for those able to progress to work in Welsh on graduation. Further, graduates of this scheme are expected to work in Wales for at least two years post-graduation.

In respect of the Welsh Government's Welsh in Education Workforce Plan, the objective of funding a Welsh language national implementation lead to the sector has been realised. The aim of this role is to provide advice, support and challenge to sectors in implementing their responsibilities under the Act in relation to the Welsh language. This is a newly established role and as such it is too early to evaluate its impact.

Welsh in Education Strategic Plans (WESPs)

Section 84 of [School Standards and Organisation \(Wales\) Act 2013](#) requires a local authority to prepare a Welsh in Education Strategic Plan. Subsection (6) of Section 85 places a duty on a local authority to take all reasonable steps to implement its approved plan. The guidance advises local authorities to include seven key

outcomes to drive its plans. Outcome six relates to children and young people with ALN:

An increase in the provision of Welsh-medium education for pupils with additional learning needs (ALN) in accordance with the duties imposed by the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018.

We carried out a review of the published WESPs in relation to outcome six, for all local authorities in Wales. Most local authorities set out clear five-year and ten-year plans, with a review of their current progress. In most cases, they had developed generally appropriate targets to improve the Welsh-medium provision for pupils with ALN. For example, they aimed to employ or second additional local authority officers who can provide support through the medium of Welsh, increase the number of Welsh-medium specialist classes and work in collaboration with other local authorities to procure specialist support through the medium of Welsh. In their report [The Welsh Language and the Additional Learning Needs System](#) (2023) the Welsh Language Commissioner and the Children's Commissioner for Wales note:

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. The general pattern indicates that most local authorities have some general Welsh-medium provision. As the needs of the pupils become more complex and specialised, it seems that the capacity of most local authorities to provide support through the medium of Welsh diminishes significantly (p. 3).

Further, most local authorities noted significant challenges and barriers in the recruitment and retention of Welsh-speaking staff, especially in the Educational Psychology service and hearing and vision impairment teams.

Post graduate certificate in primary ALN education at Bangor University

In September 2024, Bangor university launched its post graduate certificate in ALN education. The bilingual programme is designed to provide students with an understanding of how children learn with a focus on additional learning needs. Students learn about children's development from 3-11 years, including neurodiverse pupils. This programme of study focuses on opportunities to develop bilingual ALN support.

Effective leadership of ALN

This chapter examines the approaches of effective leadership of ALNET in schools and settings. It also considers the policies and culture related to leadership of ALN within schools and settings.

Vision for ALN

In many schools and settings included in this review, leaders had created a clear vision that set high aspirations for all children and pupils whatever their abilities and needs. In the most effective cases, schools and settings promoted an inclusive and nurturing vision with personalised support and high-quality learning and teaching for all at their core. Leaders, including governors, within these schools and settings, ensured that all staff understood their responsibility for pupils with additional learning needs. In the most effective schools and settings, ALNCoS, teachers and learning support staff worked together effectively to ensure that the vision was realised in practice. However, in a few cases the vision and ethos of the school did not promote inclusive practice and did not ensure well enough the well-being, progress and outcomes of children and young people with ALN.

Role of the ALNCo

The accountability of the ALNCo as a school leader to deliver the functions prescribed in law is a key and demanding responsibility within school leadership. The ALNCo is the individual who at a strategic level ensures the needs of all pupils with ALN are met. These responsibilities include contributing to giving advice about teaching methods to meet individual pupils' needs and providing professional learning for staff at schools or settings.

All schools that participated in this review recognised the enhanced and specialist role of the ALNCo under the Act and welcomed the increased accountability and strategic responsibility of the role. In many cases, where the role of the ALNCo was most effective, they were part of the senior leadership team, and they made a significant contribution to the provision for and outcomes of pupils with ALN. For example, they took a lead role in securing and evaluating the appropriate learning provision, ensuring that it met the needs of individual pupils with ALN.

However, not all ALNCoS were fully involved in influencing the strategic direction and decision-making of the school. In these schools, their absence from key discussions limited the school's ability to develop a cohesive approach to ALN across all aspects of the curriculum. When ALNCoS were not engaged strategically, essential practices for supporting pupils with ALN were overlooked, leading to fragmented support and missed opportunities for enhancing teaching and learning for these pupils.

Since our last ALN thematic report, most local authorities had strengthened the work of cluster groups that meet regularly to drive school to school self-improvement and support professional development. These local authorities gave ALNCoS opportunities to share good practice with others in the local authority, for example via

an ALNCo forum. In many local authorities, officers visited schools and acted as critical friends to suggest improvements and ways forward. For example, they worked creatively in collaboration to trouble shoot and develop the most appropriate ALP to meet the needs of individual pupils. Where local authority officers identified gaps in experience or knowledge, bespoke support was available from the ALN and inclusion teams. A few local authorities had produced a useful guide to what makes an effective ALNCo and used this to support leaders in evaluating their work in their schools. They provided a range of highly beneficial training and guidance to upskill new ALNCos. Overall, the strategic leadership and direction of ALNCos has improved since the publication of our last thematic report. However, across Wales, the role of the ALNCo as a strategic leader still needs to be enhanced to fully meet the requirements set out in the ALN Act.

Our previous ALN thematic report (Estyn 2023) noted that schools' ALNCos have seen considerable changes to their role, not only in relation to workload but also in relation to responsibility and accountability. Leaders in schools and local authorities remain concerned about the increased workload and responsibility of the ALNCo. The ALN Code (Welsh Government, 2021b) notes clearly that:

It is vital that ALNCo have sufficient time and resource to undertake their responsibilities effectively, including dedicated time away from teaching. (para 8.5 p. 71).

Many ALNCos had other leadership and/or teaching roles in their school. This reduced the time that they could devote to overseeing the quality of provision for and progress of pupils with ALN.

In their [review into the pay and working conditions of the additional learning needs coordinator](#) (Welsh Government, 2024a), the task and finish group recommended to Welsh Government that:

- The Additional Learning Needs Coordinator should be appointed as part of the Senior Leadership Team of the setting in order to effectively meet their required responsibilities.
- The Additional Learning Needs Coordinator should be remunerated in line with appointment to the Senior Management Team of the setting in order to reflect the managerial responsibilities of the role.
- The Additional Learning Needs Coordinator should be offered a Professional Learning package appropriate to their role, experience and needs, and should be allocated non-contact time to undertake this.
- Consideration should be given to identifying a level which reflects the role designated to the ALNCo. This should be at Senior Management level in the setting and should draw remuneration commensurate with the role.

In September 2024, the Cabinet Secretary for Education confirmed in a [written statement](#) that the Welsh Government is providing £5 million of funding to support the recommendation regarding ALNCos moving to the Leadership Pay Range. Welsh Government confirmed that this will require further detailed work that is ongoing.

A few local authorities raised concerns about the challenges that ALNCOs faced in

smaller schools, where they were class teachers and may also have other leadership roles. This, alongside their teaching and leadership commitments, negatively impacted the ability of ALNCos to fully evaluate, develop and coordinate the provision for pupils with ALN.

Our discussions with local authorities raised concerns about the ongoing recruitment and retention of ALNCos. For example, a few experienced ALNCos had chosen to leave the role due to the increased administrative burden. A few schools had found it difficult to recruit ALNCos, due to the perceived demands of the role. Further, due to staff recruitment or budget constraints, there had been too few opportunities to develop future ALNCos to build capacity.

Monmouthshire local authority provides clear guidance to its schools about the role of the ALNCo. This includes clear messages that the role is strategic and as a result, requires management time to ensure that the ALNCo can carry out their duties effectively. Further, the specialist provision and outreach team (SPOT) supports ALNCos to identify and share effective, inclusive practice across schools through embedded cluster working. They provide guidance and support for self-evaluation and action planning.

The local authority provides a range of useful support for its ALNCos. This includes coaching and mentoring for all ALNCos, and tailored professional learning, based on their individual needs. The local authority also provides a professional learning pathway for new and aspiring ALNCos to support recruitment and build capacity across its schools.

Cluster ALNCo

Many local authorities had continued to develop successfully the role of cluster ALNCo or IDP champions. Officers believed that this role was vital in supporting their capacity to develop inclusive practice across schools. Further, in many cases this approach supported purposeful and beneficial development of Welsh-medium resources within clusters. Most ALNCos had a robust understanding of the ALN system and were confident in their ability to implement this across schools. They had a good oversight of resource and coordinated of provision across schools and had been successful in supporting and advising teachers on all aspects of ALN.

Role of the Early Years ALN Lead Officer

The Additional Learning Needs Code for Wales 2021 (2021b) places the duty on local authorities to designate an Early Years ALN Lead Officer (10.1):

‘Every local authority must designate an officer to have responsibility for co-ordinating the local authority’s functions under the Act in relation to children under compulsory school age who are not attending maintained schools. The designated officer is to be known as the ‘Early Years Additional Learning Needs Lead Officer’ (‘the Early Years ALNLO’). The Early Years ALNLO is a strategic role and should have two aspects to it: an inward facing role and an outward facing role. The purpose of the inward facing role is to be responsible

for the local authority's arrangements for exercising its functions in relation to the ALNLO cohort. In order to support the effective exercise of those functions, the outward facing role is about developing and maintaining effective relationships with others who work with the local authority's ALNLO cohort (10.6).'

In its response submitted to the Children, Young People and Education Committee inquiry into Implementation of education reforms (IER 34 Ymateb gan: Lywodraeth Cymru Response from: Welsh Government 2.19), the Welsh Government reported that:

The role of the EY ALNLO has enabled nearly all local authorities to make progress in implementing the ALN Act. Anecdotal evidence from EY ALNLOs has highlighted families have more confidence in the system as their views are considered and they are involved in decisions including through person centred meetings. Any frustrations have primarily been around miscommunication of information about the new ALN system, with most cases being swiftly resolved.

Local authorities reported that the role of the EY ALNLO was well established, with clear roles of responsibility and accountability.

A key aspect of the role of the EY ALNLO has been to establish working relationships across all teams and services that support children from birth to five years of age. This has been successful in most cases. For example, officers noted improved joint service working with colleagues in Children's Services, especially Flying Start, sensory and disability services, schools and non-maintained settings and childcare providers. A few local authorities noted challenges in working with colleagues in health boards, largely due to the capacity of staff in these services.

In nearly all cases, EY ALNLOs felt well supported in their roles by their local authority. Many were part of the senior leadership team in the local authority. All of those who participated noted that they felt that ALN early years provision was now better understood by senior leaders, as a direct result of their role and the work they have done. They felt appreciated and valued and benefitted from improved opportunities to contribute to strategic developments, ensuring that they met the needs of the ALN Code and keeping early years ALN high on the council agenda.

However, there was variation in the role across local authorities. In most cases, the role was both strategic and operational. In a few cases the role was strategic only, with a team of officers providing direct support to non-maintained and childcare settings and schools. Many of the settings we spoke to noted the significant support and guidance provided by the EY ALNLO and their team. A few settings had not met the EY ALNLO and were unclear about the support available. There appeared to be a misunderstanding among providers about this role, especially where the EY ALNLOs were more strategic and support to settings was provided by other early years teams.

Professional learning and building capacity

The ALN Code stipulates that:

All teaching practitioners ought to undertake regular professional learning in relation to ALN, regardless of previous experience, qualifications or the education setting in which they are based ... professional learning requirements ought to be identified as part of the education setting's planning process. (1.90)

In general, across many schools, settings and local authorities in Wales, the provision of professional learning was a strength and had improved since the last thematic. It focused appropriately on a balance between cluster and individual school training. A few local authorities had introduced weekly drop-ins and monthly workshops run by specialist teachers and therapeutic staff. These could be thematic based, for example taken from emerging themes and are available for education partners to attend.

Nearly all local authorities provided a range of beneficial professional learning in relation to implementing ALN reform and developing confidence in the system and processes. Local authorities were active in their support of schools both directly through staff and through developing a range of useful guidance materials and establishing fora for the collective sharing of practices. In general, across Wales, relationships between local authorities and schools and settings appeared to be strong.

Where support from local authorities was most effective, there were annual plan and review sessions during which schools were supported to reflect on their current ALN provision, to enhance provision and improve outcomes. Information gathered from these sessions was then subsequently analysed in order to inform future training needs and identify opportunities to facilitate and promote school to school support.

Evidence from providers and from our inspections indicated that local authorities had improved the range and quality of professional learning to meet the needs of children and young people with ALN. No local authorities and very few schools received recommendations related to improving the provision for or outcomes of pupils with ALN during the academic year 2023-2024. Across Wales, person-centred practice was increasingly becoming embedded and schools' and local authorities' knowledge of their statutory duties related to the ALN Act was generally secure. A notable strength was how many local authorities respond to the professional development needs of individual schools and settings and the focus on removing barriers to learning.

Officers across many local authorities gathered a range of useful information to plan and adapt professional learning. For example, they made good use of information from informal teacher drop-ins and ALNCo fora, feedback from referral panels, collaboration with headteacher reference groups and quality assurance of IDPs. As a result, where this was most successful, officers developed a range of universal and bespoke professional learning to meet the needs of individual schools, clusters and other providers.

While a few local authorities were beginning to evaluate the impact of professional learning on the provision for pupils with ALN, the extent to which this work impacts directly on teaching is unclear. Across most local authorities in our sample, the evaluation of the impact of professional learning on outcomes for pupils with ALN was underdeveloped.

Pembrokeshire local authority has evaluated the impact of ELSA across targeted schools. Officers collected data over a three-year period and evaluated the impact on pupils' well-being after 6-week interventions. They noted significant improvements in pupils' emotional health and well-being. This research was subsequently published in the journal for [Educational Psychology in Practice theory, research and practice in educational psychology](#) and shared across the sector,

Swansea local authority has carried out beneficial evaluations after all training events and activities. This has helped them to tailor future events to meet the needs of individual clusters, schools and educational settings. In addition, officers in the local authority recently worked with headteachers and ALNCoS to plan a successful ALN 'marketplace' event to meet their professional learning needs.

The local authority uses a range of useful information to evaluate the impact of professional learning. For example, they use data from training attendance and evaluations, and feedback from ALN panel and caseworkers. In a recent evaluation, the local authority noted that professional learning has contributed successfully to improving the quality of IDPs.

Many schools and settings had benefitted from worthwhile professional learning about how teaching and learning can meet the needs of all pupils. The focus of professional learning was on adapting teaching to meet the needs of individual pupils and on creating suitable environments, removing any barriers to learning. While there was a recognition that each school was on a development journey towards effective inclusive practice, there were common themes which ran across local authorities. These included improving support for pupils with autism, developing-trauma informed approaches and developing pupils' language and communication skills.

Nearly all schools, settings and local authorities identified supporting pupils' social, emotional and behavioural needs as an ongoing challenge due to the negative impact of the pandemic.

Upskilling support staff

Many schools, settings and local authorities had focused their training on both developing support staff's understanding of ALN as well as their deployment to support pupils with ALN. In most cases, this work was at the early stage of implementation. The range of professional learning and guidance was appreciated by schools and settings.

All support staff at **Ysgol Bro Llew** are trained in ALN strategies and interventions. As a result, they are multiskilled and can work with a range of pupils with ALN. The school very rarely uses identified support staff for 1:1 working. This means there is seamless support if a particular staff member is absent. It also means that support staff feel valued and skilled.

Quality assurance

Since the last ALN review, the majority of schools and local authorities in the sample had begun to strengthen the quality assurance of ALN processes and provision. In schools where the provision for pupils with ALN was particularly strong, leaders carefully evaluated the progress of pupils with ALN and adapted their provision accordingly. Quality assurance processes included full lesson observations, learning walks, listening to pupils, scrutiny of data and pupils' work and canvassing pupils' and parents' opinions. In these schools, mechanisms for self-evaluation and improvement planning reflected the inclusive ethos of the school well.

Leaders at **Idris Davies School** regularly monitor the impact of ALN provision and adjust support as necessary. As a result of monitoring ALN intake data and following the pandemic's impact, leaders established a basic skills group in year 7. This has successfully improved most of these pupils' literacy skills to the point that they can access mainstream education.

At **Milton Primary School** ensuring high quality teaching and learning for all pupils, including those with ALN, is a priority within the School's Improvement Plan. In addition, performance management has supported improvements in teaching and learning on a whole school scale with specific reference to supporting pupils with ALN. Each staff member has this as a personal target. Staff access beneficial professional learning opportunities, try these strategies with pupils with ALN in their classes and then reflect on their practice's impact.

Through a range of systems and support, such as ALN fora, panels, informal drop-ins and guidance, ALNCo and IDP champions have played an important part in the quality assurance of IDPs and the subsequent ALP and provision maps. In collaboration with local authority ALN and inclusion officers, they have a key role in supporting ALNCoS and other leaders in the self-evaluation of ALN for example by participating in learning walks and moderation processes.

A few local authorities worked closely with cluster ALNCo and IDP champions to support schools with development plan priorities relating to ALN and inclusive teaching. In many cases, local authorities have strengthened their message to schools and settings about the strategic role of the ALNCo. In those schools where the ALNCo was a member of the senior leadership team, or where there was highly effective collaboration between the ALNCo and the senior leadership team, the concept of high-quality teaching for pupils with ALN was successfully built into strategic planning. This integration encompassed the curriculum, professional learning, and quality assurance arrangements.

Funding

In the previous ALN thematic we noted that all settings, schools and PRUs, further education institutions and local authorities across Wales had benefited from significant grant funding to implement ALN reform.

More than £107 million additional revenue investment has supported ALN implementation since 2020 and more than £170 million capital investment over the past five years has improved ALN facilities. The additional funding has been generally welcomed by both local authorities and schools.

The increase in both investment and spend can be seen in the local authority budgeted expenditure on SEN/ALN, which has increased by £42million over the past year and is now £592million.

[Budgeted expenditure on Special Educational Needs \(SEN\) and Additional Learning Needs \(ALN\) provision: April 2024 to March 2025 | GOV.WALES \(2024b\)](#)

In our meetings with local authorities, schools and settings, many expressed concern over the conclusion of additional funding for ALN from the Welsh Government. They noted that many key services and professional learning are fully or partially supported by grant funding. This included officers and teams who provided statutory functions or direct support to schools and settings, and support for cluster working and quality assurance processes. Many schools and local authorities who participated in this review were concerned about whether they would be able to maintain current ALN services without the continuation of additional funding for ALN, especially at a time of economic uncertainty and an increase in demand for services for children and young people with ALN.

Methods and evidence base

The report draws on evidence from discussion with a focus group of Early Years Additional Learning Needs Lead Officers (EY ALNLOs), and visits to 28 providers including non-maintained settings, primary schools, all-age schools and secondary schools. Of these, nine were conducted through the medium of Welsh, eight of the schools, including one Welsh-medium school, host local authority specialist class provision for pupils with ALN. Schools and settings were selected based on their size, type, geographical location, and socio-economic context.

We also drew on evidence from our ongoing inspection activity and from discussions between our local authority link inspectors and local authority officers.

All discussions took place during the summer term 2024. Most of these discussions, were face-to-face, with one online focus group with local authority EY ALNLOs. In schools and settings, we observed teaching sessions, met with the Additional Learning Needs Co-ordinator (ALNCo) and other senior leaders, including the headteacher, and interviewed teaching staff and pupils. In addition, we canvassed the views of parents and carers about their experiences. Findings in this report relate to the sample of schools and settings visited during the review.

During the week beginning on 22nd of July 2024, we viewed the websites of the 28 providers and of a sample of eight local authorities, to evaluate the usefulness and accessibility of the information provided. This information is included in the relevant sections of this report. The providers are listed in the methods and evidence section.

Further, we met with representatives from Rhieni dros Addysg Gymraeg (RhAG) (Parents for Welsh-medium Education), Mudiad Meithrin, an organisation that provides Welsh-medium learning provisions for children from birth to school age and the Third Sector Additional Learning Needs Alliance (TSANA). This organisation represents different groups of people with additional learning needs and their families. We also met with Judge McConnell, President of the Education Tribunal for Wales.

Estyn would like to thank the following for their participation in this thematic inspection:

School or funded non-maintained setting	phase	Local authority
Caban Cegin	Funded non-maintained setting	Gwynedd
Cylch Meithrin Cynwyd Sant	Funded non-maintained setting	Bridgend
Derw Bach Preschool	Funded non-maintained setting	Powys
Homestead Day Nursery	Funded non-maintained setting	Wrexham
Little Rascals	Funded non-maintained setting	Merthyr
Llanfyllin pre-school playgroup	Funded non-maintained setting	Powys

Mini Miners	Funded non-maintained setting	Caerphilly
Pentre Pengwins	Funded non-maintained setting	Rhondda Cynon Taf
Coed y Garn primary school	Primary	Blaenau Gwent
Grangetown primary school	Primary	Cardiff
Knighton Church in Wales school	Primary	Powys
Milton Primary School	Primary	Newport
St. Anne's Roman Catholic Primary School	Primary	Wrexham
Tywyn Primary School	Primary	Neath Port Talbot
Undy Primary School	Primary	Monmouthshire
Ysgol Bro Lleu	Primary	Gwynedd
Ysgol Gynradd Aberaeron	Primary	Ceredigion
Ysgol Gynradd y Tymbl	Primary	Carmarthenshire
Ysgol y Tywyn	Primary	Anglesey
Afon Taf High School	Secondary	Merthyr
Cardiff High School	Secondary	Cardiff
Emrys ap Iwan	Secondary	Conwy
Whitmore High School	Secondary	Vale of Glamorgan
Ysgol Gyfun Aberaeron	Secondary	Ceredigion
Ysgol Llangynwyd	Secondary	Bridgend
Ysgol y Moelwyn	Secondary	Gwynedd
Idris Davies	All-age	Caerphilly
Porth Community School	All-age	Rhondda Cynon Taf
Local authority discussions with Early Years Additional Needs Lead Officers and website review		
Cardiff		
Carmarthenshire		
Ceredigion		
Gwynedd		
Merthyr		
Newport		
Rhondda Cynon Taf		
Swansea		

Glossary

ALN	Additional learning needs
ALNET	Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018
ALNCo	Additional learning needs co-ordinator
ALP	Additional learning provision
Assistive technology	Products or systems that support and assist individuals to perform functions that might be otherwise be difficult or impossible
DECLO	Designated Educational Clinical Lead Officer
EYALNO	Early years additional learning needs lead officer
IDP	Individual development plan
LASC	Local Authority specialist class
PCP	Person centred practice
PLASC	Pupil Level Annual School Census
WESP	Welsh in Education Strategic Plan

Numbers – quantities and proportions

nearly all =	with very few exceptions
most =	90% or more
many =	70% or more
a majority =	over 60%
half =	50%
around half =	close to 50%
a minority =	below 40%
few =	below 20%
very few =	less than 10%

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