Evaluation of the Additional Learning Needs System: Scoping Report

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Views expressed in this report are those of the researcher and not necessarily those of the Welsh Government

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Glossary

Acronym/Key word	Definition
ALN	Additional Learning Needs
ALNCo(s)	Additional Learning Needs Co-ordinator(s)
ALP	Additional Learning Provision
CAMHS	Child and adolescent mental health services
CfW	Curriculum for Wales
CRDP	Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities
CYP	Children and young people
CYPE	Children, Young People and Education Committee
DECLO(s)	Designated Education Clinical Lead Officer(s)
EOTAS	Education other than at school
FEI	Further education institution
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency
IDP	Individual Development Plan
ITE	Initial Teacher Education
LA	Local Authority
LDD	Learning difficulties and/or disabilities
LHB	Local Health Board
NAEL	National Academy for Educational Leadership
NAPL	National Approach to Professional Learning
NPLP ALN	National Professional Learning Pathway for Additional Learning Needs
P&C	Parents and carers
PRU	Pupil Referral Unit
RIA	Regulatory Impact Assessment
SEN	Special educational needs
SENCo	Special Educational Needs Coordinator
SWAC	School Workforce Annual Census
ToC	Theory of change
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
WLGA	Welsh Local Government Association

1.   Introduction

1.1   The Welsh Government commissioned Arad Research to conduct a four-year formative evaluation of the implementation of the additional learning needs (ALN) system. The aim of this report is to present early findings from the scoping phase of the evaluation. The report presents a theory of change for the reforms, summarises findings from a synthesis of existing evidence on ALN system implementation, and reports on the outcomes of a data mapping exercise. Finally, the report also identifies the plans and priorities for the next phases of the evaluation.

1.2   The report is structured as follows:

(i)   Chapter 1 provides an overview of the ALN system, setting out the policy background and the aims of the evaluation.

(ii)   Chapter 2 outlines the methodology for the scoping phase of the evaluation.

(iii)   Chapter 3 presents a theory of change (ToC) for the ALN system.

(iv)   Chapter 4 sets out a synthesis of existing evidence on ALN system implementation to date.

(v)   Chapter 5 sets out the findings of a data mapping exercise, exploring data sources that have the potential to support the evaluation.

(vi)   Finally, drawing on the findings of the preceding chapters, Chapter 6 sets out plans and priorities for the next phases of the evaluation.

Policy background

1.3   The ALN system is the new system for supporting children and young people aged 0-25 in Wales with ALN. The ALN system replaces the previous special educational needs (SEN) system for children is schools and Pupil Referral Units and the system for supporting young people in further education with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD).[1]

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[1] The ALN Act replaces the existing special educational needs (SEN) legislation (provided for in Part 4 of the Education Act 1996), the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice for Wales and learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD) legislation (provided for in the Learning and Skills Act 2000).

The ALN legislative framework and the case for change

1.4   The current ALN legislative framework was created by the [Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018](#) (the Act), [The Additional Learning Needs Code for Wales 2021](#) (the ALN Code) and regulations made under the Act. The [Explanatory Memorandum](#) that accompanied the Act set out the reasons for embarking on a process of reforming the previous SEN and LDD systems. These can be summarised as follows:

- The previous system was outdated, based on a model introduced over 30 years ago.

- The previous legislative systems for supporting children and young people with SEN or LDD, provided planning and support on different bases for children and for young people, depending on their age, educational setting and the severity or complexity of their needs. This inconsistency in approach acted as a barrier to integration and collaboration, undermined the timeliness and effectiveness of interventions, and resulted in an adversarial climate which could appear unfair and lacking in transparency.

- Reviews of SEN provision carried out by Estyn, the Wales Audit Office and the former Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills Committee in the Senedd found the previous SEN system to be complex, bewildering and adversarial.

- Assessment processes were reported to be inefficient, bureaucratic and costly, as well as being insufficiently child-centred and user-friendly.

- Additional needs were at times identified late and interventions were not planned or implemented in a timely or effective way.

- Families reported having to battle at each stage of the process to get the right support for their child, and that they did not know where to turn for advice and information.

1.5   The intent of the Act, which replaced the previous special educational needs legislation was to ensure children and young people had access to the support and opportunities to fulfil their potential, by ensuring that they receive the provision called for by their ALN in a timely and efficient way, enabling them to participate in and benefit from learning.

1.6   The Explanatory Memorandum noted the legislative presumption in favour of learners with ALN being educated in mainstream schools wherever possible, supporting the Welsh Government's policy of supporting a 'fully inclusive education system for learners in Wales'.[2] The Act promotes a person-centred approach and acknowledges that in some instances attending a mainstream school may not be appropriate or in the child's best interests. Section 51 of the Act enables a local authority to place a child outside of the mainstream education sector in such circumstances.

1.7   Through the ALN statutory framework the Welsh Government aims to ensure all learners with ALN are supported to overcome barriers to learning and can achieve their full potential, by creating:

- a unified legislative framework to support all children of compulsory school age or below with additional learning needs (ALN) and to support young people with ALN who are in school/PRU or further education (FE),

- an integrated, collaborative process of assessment, planning and monitoring of the support provided to ALN learners which facilitates early, timely and effective interventions,

- a fair and transparent system for providing information and advice, and for resolving concerns and appeals.

1.8   The Act replaces the terms 'special educational needs (SEN)' and 'learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD)' with the new term 'additional learning needs (ALN)'.

Individual development plans

1.9   Under the Act, all children and young people with ALN, regardless of the severity or complexity of their learning difficulty or disability, will generally be entitled to a statutory support plan called an individual development plan (IDP). Children and young people with ALN will receive support called additional learning provision (ALP) which will be set out in their IDP. The IDP will describe the child's or young person's ALN and the ALP required to meet those needs. It will also specify whether

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[2] Implementing the additional learning needs system between September 2021 and August 2024: a guide for parents and families

a child or young person should receive ALP through the medium of Welsh; where this is the case, the local authority (or NHS body where applicable) must take all reasonable steps to ensure that appropriate ALP is provided in Welsh.

1.10   IDPs will normally be prepared, maintained and reviewed by the school or FEI that the child or young person attends. In cases where determining the nature of the child or young person's ALN, or the ALP that is required, is beyond the school or FEI's capability, or where it would not be possible for them to secure the ALP required, the matter can be referred to the local authority. The local authority would then be responsible for determining ALN, preparing and reviewing the IDP and securing the ALP within it.

1.11   The Code specifies that local authorities should, in consultation with schools and other appropriate partners, establish and publish a set of principles they will apply when determining whether it is reasonable for a school to secure the ALP required by a pupil or whether the authority ought to do so.

Eleven core aims of the new ALN system

1.12   In order to achieve the three overarching objectives of the Act (see 1.7, above), eleven core aims have been established, which frame the provisions set out in legislation. These core aims comprise:

1. The term additional learning needs (ALN)

The Act replaces the terms 'special educational needs (SEN)' and 'learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD)' with the new term 'additional learning needs (ALN)'.

2. A 0 to 25 age range

There will be a single legislative system relating to the support given to children and young people aged between 0 to 25 years who have ALN.

3. **A unified plan**

The Act creates a single statutory plan – the individual development plan (IDP) – to replace the existing variety of statutory and non-statutory SEN or LDD plans for learners in schools and further education.

4. Increased participation of children and young people

The Act requires that learners' views should always be considered as part of the planning process, along with those of their parents/carers. It is imperative that

children and young people see the planning process as something which is done with them rather than to them.

5. High aspirations and improved outcomes

The emphasis of IDPs will be on making provision that delivers tangible outcomes that contribute in a meaningful way to the child or young person's achievement of their full potential.

6. A simpler and less adversarial system

The process of producing and revising an IDP should be much simpler than is currently the case with statements of SEN.

7. Increased collaboration

The new system encourages 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.

8. Disagreement avoidance and earlier disagreement resolution

The new system focuses on ensuring that where disagreements occur about an IDP or the provision it contains, the matter is considered and resolved at the most local level possible.

9. Clear and consistent rights of appeal

Where disagreements about the contents of an IDP cannot be resolved at the local level, the Act ensures that children and young people entitled to an IDP (and their parents/carers in the case of those that are under 16 years) have a right of appeal to a tribunal.

10. The ALN Code

The ALN Code provides a set of clear, legally enforceable parameters within which local authorities and those other organisations responsible for the delivery of services for children and young people with ALN, must act.

11. A bilingual system

The Act requires that services must consider whether a child or young person needs additional learning provision in Welsh. If they do, this must be documented in the IDP and 'all reasonable steps' must be taken to secure the provision in Welsh.

Statutory roles

1.13   The Act includes provisions for the creation of a number of statutory roles to support the ALN system. Under the ALN system all schools[3] and FEIs in Wales must designate a person to the role of **additional learning needs co-ordinator (ALNCo).** The ALNCo has strategic responsibility to ensure that the needs of all learners with ALN are met. The ALN Code notes that:

> 'The role is a strategic one within the education setting and should, therefore, either form part of the senior leadership team or have a clear line of communication to the senior leadership team. This will support the education setting to plan, manage and deliver its duties and responsibilities in identifying and meeting the needs of children and young people with ALN…
>
> The ALNCo will need to be involved in the strategic co-ordination of ALN resources, such as in deploying and supporting staff…
>
> ALNCos are not expected to be directly involved with the day-to-day process of supporting every learner with ALN. This is the responsibility of the class teacher, however learning support staff can aid the ALNCo in ensuring that teachers are supported and the needs of all learners are met.' (ALN Code)

1.14   The Act also requires every Local Health Board (LHB) to appoint a '**designated education clinical lead officer' (DECLO)**. The DECLO role is also a strategic one within the LHB and must be a registered medical practitioner, nurse or another health professional. The DECLO's role is to promote consistency and equity to ensure evidence-based interventions to promote better outcomes and reduce inequalities. The DECLO co-ordinates collaborative working for the health board and provides information or advice that might help learners with additional learning needs.

1.15   Finally, every local authority must designate an officer to co-ordinate functions under the Act in relation to children under compulsory school age who are not attending maintained schools. This is the role of '**Early Years Additional Learning Needs Lead Officer' ('the Early Years ALNLO').** The Early Years ALNLO is responsible for the local authority's arrangements for exercising its functions in relation to the ALNLO cohort, namely children under compulsory school age who are not attending a mainstream school. In order to support this, the role also involves developing and maintaining effective relationships with others who work with the local authority's ALNLO cohort.

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[3] Includes schools, maintained nursery school, or pupil referral unit.

Baseline research on the special educational needs system in Wales

1.16   Prior to the implementation of the ALN reforms, a study was carried out by Arad Research [to establish a baseline of the current SEN system in Wales](). This report was published in February 2019 and was intended to inform a future evaluation of the ALN system.

1.17   The study found consensus among practitioners, particularly those working in the education sector, that processes and practices within the SEN system were effective. However, challenges were reported in a number of areas, including a perception that the statutory assessment process was too protracted and that it took too long for special education provision to be put in place. Statements were seen as too broad and unclear in their objectives, not updated appropriately in many cases and insufficiently responsive to a learner's changing needs. The study also found that practitioners considered the review of statements to be a repetitious process. Findings indicated that there was scope to improve communication and information-sharing between different sectors to develop stronger working relationships and improve review and assessment processes for learners and their families. Many of the findings of this baseline study were consistent with findings of previous reviews of the SEN system conducted by Estyn, the Wales Audit Office, and the Senedd's Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills Committee.

1.18   Many of the challenges identified in the baseline study were already being tackled through the reforms, including through the focus on a person-centred approach and by creating a more timely and responsive system where learners' needs are identified early.

ALN transformation programme

1.19   The Welsh Government established and funded a ALN transformation programme to support the transition to the new system. The transformation programme was designed to manage the process of moving from the previous SEN and LDD systems to a unified system for supporting learners aged 0 to 25 with ALN. This process of implementation, supporting transition and delivering the new system was organised around five themes:

- Legislation and statutory guidance

- Workforce development

- Implementation/transition support

- Awareness raising

- Supporting policy

Legislation and guidance

1.20   The Act was passed by the National Assembly for Wales in December 2017 and came into effect in January 2018 after receiving Royal Assent. The aim of the legislation, its supporting secondary legislation and statutory guidance (including the ALN Code) are to improve the planning and delivery of additional learning provision, through a person-centred approach that ensures timely and effective support is in place.

Workforce development

1.21   The ALN transformation programme also recognised the need to develop the skills of the education workforce to be able to realise the aims of the new ALN system. This was taken forward by i) developing the core skills of practitioners in person-centred practice through grants to local authorities and further education institutions (FEIs); ii) advanced skills development among additional learning needs coordinators (ALNCos); iii) specialist skills development through funding to support post-graduate training for local authority-provided specialist support services available to education settings/schools, e.g. educational psychologists and teachers of the visually or hearing impaired.

Implementation/transition support

1.22   The Welsh Government introduced a number of measures to help partners and services develop closer multi-agency and cross-sector working in preparation for the new ALN system. ALN Innovation Funding was provided to support regional partnership projects between local authorities, schools, FEIs, specialist providers, health services, social services, the early years and third sectors. An ALN Strategic Implementation Group was established to provide advice and recommendations to the Welsh Government to support implementation of the ALN transformation programme.

1.23   A team of five ALN Transformation Leads was appointed to provide advice, support
        and challenge to local authorities, FEIs and other delivery partners in preparing for
        transition to the ALN system. They developed and delivered a range of training
        packages, including a professional learning offer targeted at additional learning
        needs co-ordinators (ALNCos). They also had a role in monitoring the impact of the
        changes, examining how partners were adapting to, and embedding new
        approaches. These roles were supported by a national steering group for ALN
        reform, attended by strategic stakeholders, including representation from local
        authorities, education institutions, the third sector and health. ALN Transformation
        Grants were also awarded to support local authorities, FEIs, LHBs, the Tribunal and
        Estyn to support their preparations.

Awareness raising

1.24   A series of awareness-raising activities was delivered as part of the transformation
        programme. These focused on engaging with stakeholders to communicate and
        clarify their new legislative duties, and promoting the system and the rights it
        confers to children and young people, and parents/carers.

Supporting policy

1.25   The Welsh Government has been committed to working closely with partners to
        ensure a smooth transition to the new system. This involved ensuring that local
        authorities and all agencies who worked with children and young people under the
        SEN system continued to comply with the duties placed on them until new
        arrangements formally came into effect. This involved managing a complex policy
        context, with two systems effectively running in parallel during the transitional
        phase.

1.26   Reports examining the progress in implementing the ALN system have been
        prepared for Welsh Government, reflecting on aspects of the transformation
        programme. These reports – some published and others unpublished – have been
        reviewed as part of the evidence synthesis exercise (see Section 3).

The timetable for implementing the ALN system

1.27   Prior to the transformation programme described above, a number of local authority areas, schools and other organisations were involved in action research and piloting activity to develop and trial new systems and approaches to help shape future policy and legislation (including developing and piloting IDPs). This included action research projects between 2009-2012 which included developing and trialling an early IDP template. Later, the Welsh Government provided grant funding to LAs (in 2015-16 and 2016-17) to promote person-centred practice (PCP) in relation to SEN, including the development and delivery of PCP training courses.

1.28   Implementation of the ALN system commenced officially in September 2021 for children, aged 0 up to Year 10, who were 'new to the system' (that is, they did not have an identified special education need). Implementation will continue in phases until 31 August 2025.[4] Therefore learners with SEN are transitioning from the previous system to the ALN system over 4 school years, with the intention that this enables nurseries, schools, PRUs and local authorities to discuss the support required and to prepare plans.

1.29   Children are moving from the SEN system to the ALN system in groups. The first group to move from the SEN system to the ALN system were children:

- who were previously supported through early years action, early years action plus, school action or school action plus[5];

- who did not have previously have a SEN statement / were not involved in a SEN statement process.

1.30   From September 2022, children with SEN not included in the first group have moved to the ALN system. In March 2023, Jeremy Miles MS, Minister for Education and Welsh Language announced an extension to the implementation timetable from three years to four years (September 2021 – August 2025). The extension aimed to give schools, PRUs and local authorities discretion and flexibility to transition from the SEN system to the ALN system over a longer period. In practice this meant that:

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[4] Following a statement by the Minister for Education and Welsh Language on 20 March 2023, the implementation timetable was extended. Children who were due to move to the ALN system between September 2023 and August 2024, are now moving to the ALN system between September 2023 and August 2025. The Minister's statement noted: '*This will create more flexibility for bodies who are responsible for moving children from the SEN system to the ALN system.*'

[5] Definitions of early years action, early years action plus, school action and school action plus can be found in the Special Education Needs Code of Practice for Wales

- Most children who were initially due to move to the ALN system between September 2023 and August 2024, can now move to the new system between September 2023 and August 2025.

- An exception to this was that children in year 6 and year 10 in the 2023/24 school year must be given an IDP or a No IDP notice during the 2023/24 school year.

- Schools, PRUs and local authorities were given additional flexibility to determine how to make best use of the additional time.

The rights for children, and their parents, to request that a child moves to the ALN system were unaffected by the extension.

1.31   The table below shows when children in the first group and children who previously had SEN statements are being moved to the ALN system based on their school year group.

Table 1. Timetable for implementation of ALN system

Transition period	Cohorts affected
Spring and summer terms of the school year 2021/2022	Nursery 1 and 2, Year 1, Year 3, Year 5, Year 7 and Year 10 during the school year 2021/22
School year 2022/2023: children with provision via school action/school action plus	Year 10 (and any children who were in Nursery, Year 1, Year 3, Year 5, Year 7 and Year 10 in 2021/22 who were not moved to the ALN system during 2021/22)
School year 2022/2023: children with provision via statements	Nursery, Reception, Year 6, Year 10 and Year 11
School years 2023/24 to 2024/25: children with provision via school action/school action plus	(2023/24) Year 6 and Year 10 (2023/24 to 2024/25) All remaining children not already moved (those in Nursery, Year 2, Year 4 and Year 8 in the school year 2023/24)
School years 2023/24 to 2024/25: children with provision via statements	(2023/24) Year 6 and Year 10 (2023/24 to 2024/25) All remaining children not already moved (those in Year 2, Year 3, Year 4, Year 5, Year 8 and Year 9 in the school year 2023/24)
September 2023	The oldest year group who will have been moved to the ALN system (which is those in Year 10 during the 2021/22 school year) will flow through to post-16 education

1.32   Detailed technical guidance on arrangements for implementing the ALN Act, including the requirements on local authorities, governing bodies of maintained schools and PRUs, was published in 2022. In addition, a practitioner guide to arrangements for moving children from the previous SEN system to the ALN system was published in 2021. This included guidance aimed at local authorities, schools and PRUs, including governing bodies, leaders, teaching staff, and ALNCos.

ALN in the early years

1.33   The Act and the ALN Code set out the duties on local authorities in relation to children under compulsory school age who are not attending a maintained school. Under the ALN system, local authorities are responsible for making decisions about whether a child under compulsory school age, who does not attend a maintained school, has ALN and, where required, for preparing and maintaining an Individual Development Plan (IDP). This work is led in local authorities by the Early Years ALNLO (see 1.15 above), working with local partners, including local early years support and inclusion teams, to provide support for children under compulsory school age who are not attending maintained schools. The evaluation will need to examine the effectiveness and impact of provision in the early years on the medium- and long-term aims of the ALN system.

Curriculum for Wales

1.34   The Curriculum for Wales (CfW) is the cornerstone of the Welsh Government's efforts to reform education in Wales and build an education system that raises educational standards for all. The CfW framework places the learner at the centre of the new curriculum's vision and long-term aspirations. Both the CfW framework and the ALN system are designed to deliver an inclusive and equitable education system in Wales. CfW provides educational settings with the scope to develop curricula and pedagogies that are flexible, appropriate and responsive to the individual needs of each learner. Schools and settings must design and/or adopt a curriculum that enables learners to realise the curriculum's four purposes, providing for appropriate progression so that learners can become:

- **ambitious, capable learners** who are ready to learn throughout their lives

- **enterprising, creative contributors** who are ready to play a full part in life and work

- **ethical, informed citizens** who are ready to be citizens of Wales and the world

- **healthy, confident individuals** who are ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society.[6]

Curriculum for Wales guidance provides further information on how schools are required to develop a vision and design a curriculum that incorporates the four

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[6] Curriculum design and the four purposes

purposes. The guidance notes that schools should ensure a 'developmentally appropriate' curriculum that enables all learners to make meaningful progress. There is recognition that the pace at which learners make progress will vary depending on the circumstances of each individual learner, including those with additional learning needs.

The evaluation of the ALN system

Aims of the evaluation

1.35   The aim of this study is to carry out a formative evaluation of the ALN system. This involves developing a theory of change for the reforms, and understanding the implementation of the system, along with emerging impacts, and the extent to which expectations are being met. The evaluation also aims to identify barriers and facilitators to implementation, and to identify measures that could be put in place to support implementation and the realisation of policy objectives.

1.36   The objectives for the research are to establish:

- a logic model and theory of change which best fit the context, approach, assumptions, and anticipated outcomes and impacts of the system

- an approach to evaluation which can address the research questions

- the extent to which the ALN Act and the ALN Code are being implemented as provided for in the ALN Act and the ALN Code

- the factors which are facilitating implementation and those which are hampering implementation

- initial experiences of children and young people and their families of the ALN system including their experiences of ALN decision making, the processes involved in the development of individual development plans (IDPs) and any additional learning provision (ALP) put in place

- initial experiences of ALN system from the perspective of those involved in the implementation of the ALN system

- an exploration of the costs and financial impacts of implementing the reforms, which will be carried out through qualitative methods

- initial impacts of the implementation of the ALN system

- early indicators of emerging evidence as to the likely effectiveness and impact of the ALN system in relation to the expected outcomes.

Overview of workplan

1.37 The evaluation workplan is organised around five phases of activity, summarised in Table 2, below. These phases include a range of methods that seek to balance breadth of engagement with practitioners, learners, parents/carers and stakeholders across Wales and in-depth research in a sample of local areas to understand, as fully as possible, how ALN system implementation is progressing. The research plan involves a longitudinal aspect, with two waves of qualitative research planned (Phases 2 and 4) and two rounds of surveys (Phases 3 and 5).

Table 2. Phases of activity planned during the evaluation

Phase
Phase 1: Theory of change and scoping phase (March-October 2023)
Phase 2: Implementation evaluation – ALN area studies (November 2023-September 2024)
Phase 3: Implementation evaluation – surveys of practitioners and parents/carers (April-November 2024)
Phase 4: Early impacts and progress evaluation – ALN area studies (September 2024-September 2025)
Phase 5: Early impacts and progress evaluation – surveys of practitioners (November 2025-September 2026)

About this report

Purpose of the scoping report

1.38   The purpose of this report is to summarise the findings of the scoping phase and also to inform and guide Phases 2 to 5 of the formative evaluation. After setting out the methodology for the scoping phase, it presents the outputs from the scoping phase of the study in three distinct sections (Chapters 3-5):

- Firstly, it explicates a theory of change (ToC) for the ALN system, drawing on desk research, interviews and workshops with stakeholders during the spring and summer of 2023. The ToC is intended to help identify the key research questions and priority areas of investigation for the evaluation.

- Secondly, it aims to inform primary data collection by synthesising existing information and evidence in relation to the implementation of the ALN system. This exercise is also valuable in identifying issues requiring particular attention during fieldwork with practitioners, stakeholders, learners and parents/carers.

- Thirdly, it examines the data sources that are currently available to enable an exploration of the inputs, activities, outcomes and impacts set out in the ToC.

1.39   Our intention is that the report will help ensure that evaluation fieldwork is sufficiently focused on those issues that are most critical to the successful implementation of the ALN system.

2. Methodology

This chapter provides detail on the research methodology employed during the scoping phase. This includes information on the desk research carried out, the fieldwork conducted, the analytical processes involved and limitations thereof. It includes separate sections summarising the research methods used to develop the theory of change, to conduct the evidence synthesis, and the data mapping exercise.

Approach to developing the theory of change

2.1　The ToC has been developed through an iterative process, based on a combination of research methods. This included desk-based research, reviewing key policy and guidance documents relating to the ALN system. This review also examined a range of research reports – published and unpublished – that focused on implementation to date. This document review sought to understand how the key activities, outcomes and anticipated impacts of the ALN system had been articulated and interpreted by the Welsh Government and various stakeholders. The evaluation team also reviewed a draft logic model for the ALN Code that had been developed previously. The documents reviewed are included in the bibliography set out in Annex B.

2.2　A series of interviews and workshops were held over a six-month period with Welsh Government officials across the education, health and early years policy areas. Scoping interviews were also held with representatives from the further education sector, local authorities, LHBs, the third sector and the National Academy for Educational Leadership. In total, 21 individual interviews or small group discussions were held at various stages of the ToC's development and two workshops with policy officials. These discussions were often semi-structured, focusing on identifying and examining the intended outcomes of the ALN system for learners, their families, schools, practitioners and society, and linking these back to the inputs and activities that are assumed to support them. As discussions progressed, the team developed, discussed and regularly revised early drafts of the ToC, both in illustrations and in written reports. Discussions frequently returned to issues around:

- the components of the ToC:
  - how accurately the ToC reflected the key components of the ALN system;

- o whether the anticipated impacts and outcomes were correctly identified;

- o whether key inputs and activities were captured appropriately;

- identifying risks and the wider context:

  - o the external factors that influence, support or help shape the implementation of the ALN system;

  - o the key enablers or, barriers to, effective implementation;

- the central assumptions on which the ToC is based:

  - o the key assumptions that underpin the ALN system and should be examined/tested during the evaluation.

2.3 This meant that a collaborative approach was taken to developing the ToC: the process was led by the evaluation team, but co-created alongside ALN policy colleagues and stakeholders, drawing on existing publications and research.

Evidence synthesis

2.4 A rapid review of available literature was carried out in order to gain insights into the implementation of the ALN system. This review was predominantly informed by documents shared with the evaluation team by the Welsh Government, including internal implementation reports and the results of a targeted search carried out by the Welsh Government library service (using key terms such as 'Additional learning needs' and 'special education needs', in the main education and social sciences indexes). Additionally, an online search was conducted, with a focus on ALN in Wales.

Data mapping

2.5 A desk-based review of data sources was undertaken to identify datasets that could be mapped against the items within the ToC. This process was supported by interviews with statisticians and data managers in the Welsh Government, conducted in September and October 2023; these focused on understanding the availability of data sources as well as any anticipated changes that could affect the future availability of data or continuity in datasets. The interviews also explored the

limitations of the data and issues for consideration in accessing or using datasets as part of the evaluation. Chapter 5 presents the findings of the data mapping process including the extent to which there is coverage of each item in the ToC, what gaps or limitations there are in the coverage of data and what the implications for the evaluation are.

3.   Theory of change

3.1   This chapter sets out the approach to developing the theory of change (ToC); outlines its function in supporting the evaluation of the ALN system; and in turn, presents the theory, explaining the different elements of the theory through illustrations and supporting narrative.

Introduction to theory of change and its use as part of the evaluation

3.2   Theory of change is an approach that explains how a programme (or in this case a system) is intended to achieve its aims and objectives, by making explicit the assumed links between inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes, and long-term effects. The approach provides an opportunity to reflect on early and medium-term changes that may result from reforms, and the factors that influence them in different contexts. The Magenta Book, the UK Government's guide to evaluation, states that understanding the ToC requires:

> 'an understanding of how the intervention is expected to work in practice, e.g. the problem the intervention aims to address; the change it aims to bring about; the causal chain of events that are expected to bring about the change; the main actors; the groups expected to be impacted; and the expected conditions required for the intervention to succeed;
>
> exposing the assumptions upon which the intervention is based and the strength or weakness of the evidence supporting these assumptions;
>
> an examination of the wider context, such as other policy changes or changes in economic, social and environmental factors;
>
> designers and implementers of the intervention have the opportunity to stress-test the intervention design and ensure they agree on how the intervention is expected to work.' (Magenta Book, HM Treasury 2020:24)

3.3   This section of the report articulates a ToC for the ALN system and presents the assumptions upon which the system is based. The development of the ToC has drawn on a range of policy and guidance documents and recognises the inter-dependencies between the ALN system and other policy developments and initiatives, notably the Curriculum for Wales (CfW).

3.4   A ToC can be applied at different points in the life cycle of a programme or project:

> 'theory of change thinking can be applied at different stages through the programme cycle [...]. These include pre-planning stages of scoping and strategic analysis, design and planning, and throughout implementation. It can be used to support [...] implementation decision-making and adaptation; to clarify the drivers,

internal and external, around an existing initiative; monitor progress and assess impact.' (Vogel 2012:12)

3.5   It is important to note that, in this case, the ToC for the ALN system will be used to inform the approach to the evaluation process over the next 4 years, to support the design of research tools and provide a reference point to frame evaluation findings. As noted in the methodology section, it has been informed principally by available documentation and by input from strategic stakeholders. It is our intention to review and refine the ToC throughout the evaluation. An important next step in this refinement process will be to test the theory and underlying assumptions through engagement with practitioners at different levels across all sectors in addition to learners, and their families.

Overview of the theory of change for the ALN system

3.6   At the centre of the reform process is the transformation to an additional learning needs system for supporting children and young people aged 0-25. This new ALN system replaces the previous special educational learning needs (SEN) system and the system for supporting young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD). The Act and ALN Code aim to support the creation of a fully inclusive education system where all learners are given the opportunity to succeed and have access to an education that meets their needs and enables them to participate in, benefit from, and enjoy learning.[7]

3.7   The statutory guidance included in the Code applies to a range of public authorities, including local authorities, schools, further education institutions, youth offending teams, LHBs, NHS Trusts, the Education Tribunal for Wales and local authority-funded non-maintained providers of nursery education.[8]

3.8   As noted in chapter 1, a new legislative framework has been created which aims to support a fully inclusive education system that delivers better outcomes for learners through:

- a unified approach to support all children of compulsory school age or below with ALN, and young people with ALN in school or further education

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[7] ALN Code
[8] A full list of authorities who must have regard to relevant provisions of the Code can be seen in sections 1.3-1.6 of the Code.

- an integrated, collaborative process of assessment, planning and monitoring which facilitates early, timely and effective interventions

- a fair and transparent system for providing information and advice, and for resolving concerns and appeals.

3.9   These overarching objectives of the Act are reinforced by the eleven core aims of the ALN system (see section 1.12). Ensuring that planning and provision meets the needs of learners with ALN is at the heart of the reforms. However, the ToC illustrates that the causal chain that leads to realisation of the aspirations for learners is long and complex. The ToC illustrates the importance of system inputs, and the targeted support provided to practitioners to enable them to deliver the provisions and duties set out in the Act and the Code. An important element of the theory is that ALN system implementation is steered by the principles of the Code and that these principles should be embedded in practice and as part of decision-making processes.

3.10   The ToC hypothesises that appropriate support is available to ensure that the majority of children and young people with ALN are able to participate fully in mainstream education, reflecting the Welsh Government's commitment to inclusive education, articulated in Objective 3 of 'Our National Mission: High Standards and Aspirations for All' (Welsh Government, 2023m), and strengthened by the professional standards for teaching and leadership which emphasise the importance of creating inclusive learning environments.[9] Further to this, the ToC assumes that there is high quality teaching and learning by teaching staff with the requisite skills and knowledge to be able to respond to the individual needs of each learner, ensuring that ALN learners are able to access a curriculum that enriches them and enables them to progress in their learning.

3.11   In this regard, the ToC recognises the inter-dependencies between the ALN system and the roll-out of CfW and it is important to consider the ToC within the context of the CfW reforms. Both reforms are underpinned by the common goal of delivering a more inclusive education system. CfW provides flexibility for schools and teachers to design their own curriculum. The 'enabling learning' section of the CfW 'designing your curriculum' guidance has been developed to support senior leaders and

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[9] Creating an effective and inclusive learning environment is one of the descriptors of effective practice for teachers in formal leadership roles within the Welsh Government's professional standards for teaching and leadership (Welsh Government, 2017).

practitioners in schools and settings in the planning, designing and implementing of a pedagogically appropriate curriculum for all learners.[10] This guidance notes that practitioners working with learners with ALN will also benefit from using this guidance to support one or more aspects of their development. Recently published research into the early implementation of Curriculum for Wales found that senior leaders in schools and settings recognised the links between the ALN and curriculum reforms .[11] They noted that the introduction of the new curriculum arrangements provides opportunities for more learner-centred and inclusive approaches.

3.12   In relation to progression and assessment the new curriculum arrangements require schools to understand whether different groups of learners are making expected progress, including those with ALN. Key to successful curriculum realisation is high-quality pedagogy and effective formative assessment processes that support learner progression. The importance of schools adopting a range of assessment approaches that enable the practitioner and the learner to understand where the learner is and what they need to do next is paramount for supporting both ALN and non-ALN learners. The ToC assumes that, as the ALN system is implemented, meeting the needs of learners with ALN becomes an important part of a school, setting or institution's improvement plan.

3.13   In terms of outcomes, the implementation and establishment of a new ALN system is assumed to contribute to a range of positive outcomes for learners, their families, practitioners and the wider education system. These include:

- a fair and transparent system

- increased collaboration and integration

- fewer disagreements and earlier disagreement resolution

- increased participation of CYP

- a bilingual system

- increased trust and public confidence in the ALN system

- a simpler and less adversarial system.

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[10] See Curriculum for Wales: designing your curriculum – enabling learning
[11] Research with schools and learners on the early implementation of Curriculum for Wales: wave 2

3.14   The theory of change also suggests that the system aims to make a positive difference to individuals' long-term outcomes and life-chances, as well as broader societal outcomes linked to the seven well-being goals included in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

3.15   The ALN system therefore sets high aspirations for learners and for society more broadly. The evaluation will examine the extent to which the activities and outcomes described in this ToC are borne out in practice, and in the experiences of individuals supported by, and organisations involved in, the ALN system.

Structure of the ToC

3.16   The ToC is structured as follows.

- **System inputs, including funding (core and grant funding), workforce development and other activities**, *supporting:*
  - **short-term outcomes** for children and young people, parents and carers, practitioners, settings (including non-maintained early years settings, schools, PRUs, EOTAS settings and post-16 providers) and the wider system.
- **ALN system delivery** (at the school and institution level in collaboration with partners across local authorities and health)
- Both of the above are supported by **system-level and contextual factors,** which collectively support:
  - **medium-term outcomes** for children and young people, practitioners, parents and carers as well as the ALN system as a whole:
    - including their experiences, progress and social and emotional development
  - **longer-term outcomes** (societal):
    - contributing towards the desired outcomes set out in the ALN code and the broader goals set out in the Well-being of Future Generations Act and the *Cymraeg 2050* strategy.

3.17   The ToC is presented in illustrated form in Figures 1, 2 and 3 on the following pages. Figure 1 provides a schematic overview of the main elements of the ToC, as

described above. This is followed by a more detailed illustration in two parts (Figures 2 and 3). The schematic overview includes arrows indicating the assumed flow from inputs to the delivery of activities, and then medium and longer-term outcomes. The schematic (and the top level of the detailed illustrations) also shows that information, knowledge and learning flows two ways as part of the theory. There is an assumption that the implementation of the ALN system cannot be a purely linear process – there will necessarily be learning from short-term outcomes and from implementation activity that will, for example, inform activity to support the workforce and the way in which funding and other resources are deployed.

Figure 1. Theory of change for the ALN system - schematic illustration
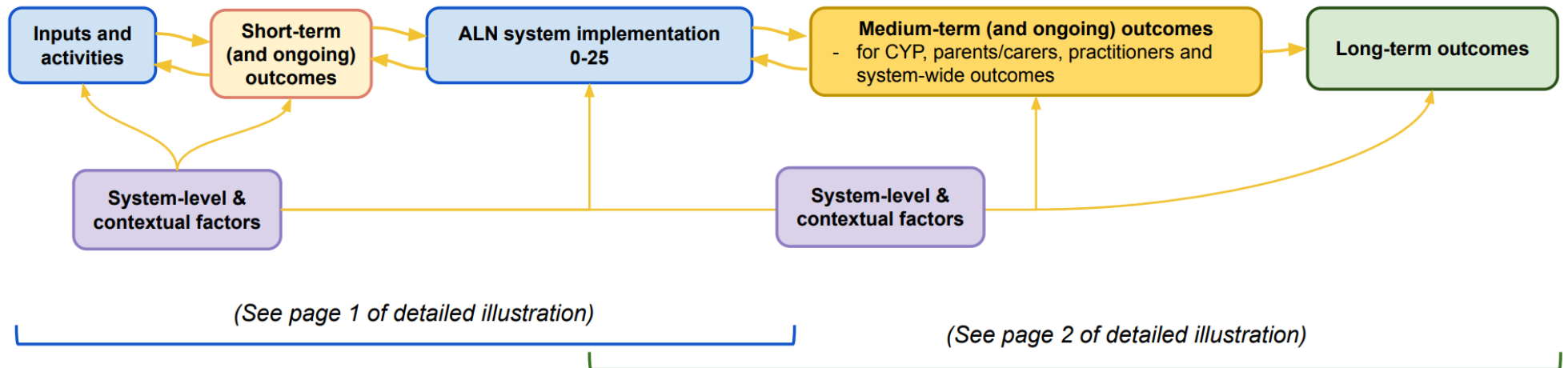
This figure provides an overview of the ToC. Further detail is provided on each of the coloured segments in the detailed illustrations on the following pages. The purpose of this tool is to serve as an aid to policy and evaluation development.

Figure 2. Theory of change for the ALN system: inputs, short-term outcomes and implementation (Page 1 of 2)[12]

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[12] The purpose of this tool is to support and inform the evaluation of the ALN system. It is not intended to be used to support planning or provision by schools and institutions.

Figure 3. Theory of change for the ALN system: implementation, medium and long-term outcomes (Page 2 of 2)

Additional Learning Needs (ALN) Act: creating a system for supporting children and young people aged 0-25

The Act aims to support a fully inclusive education system that delivers better outcomes for learners through:
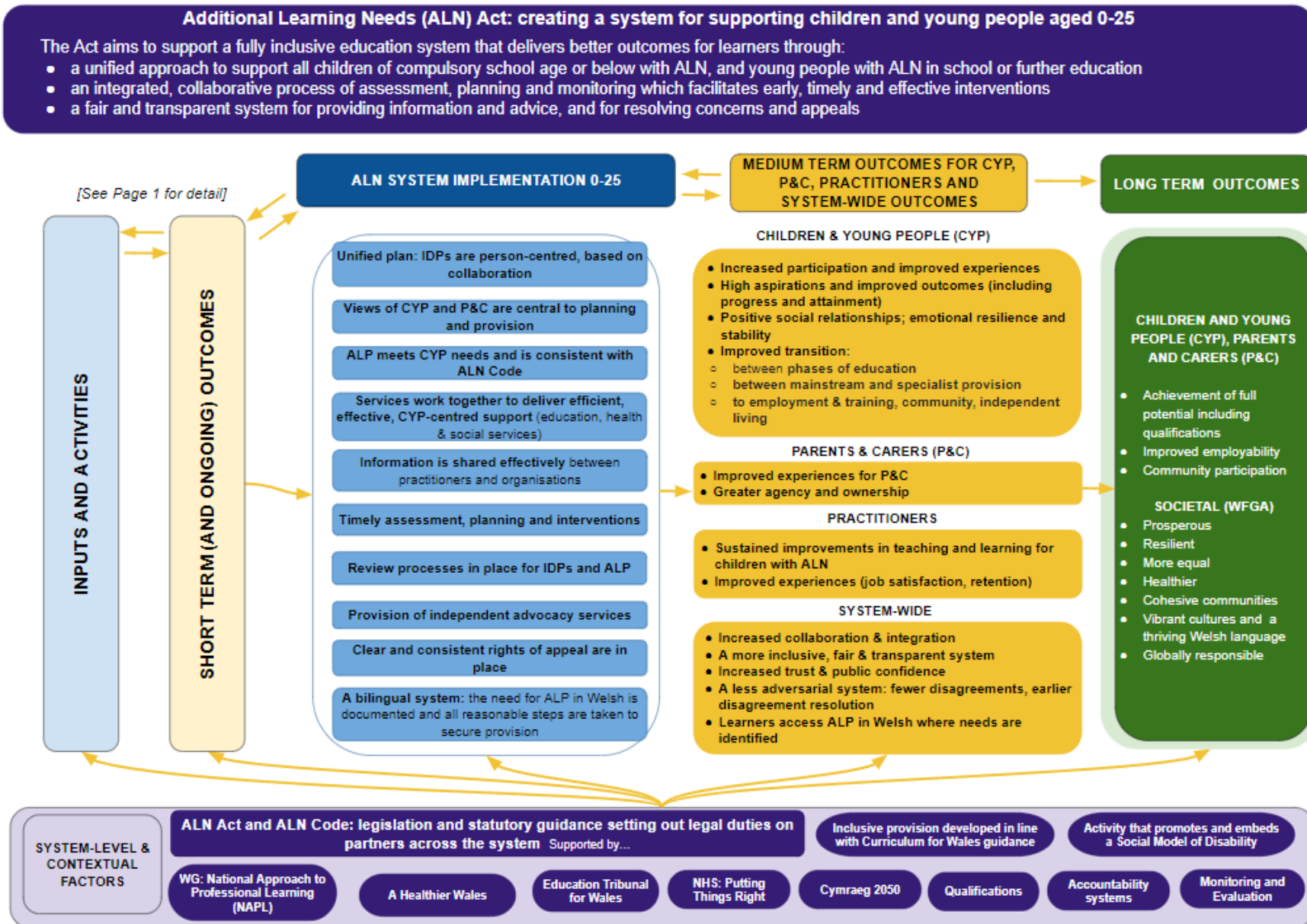- a unified approach to support all children of compulsory school age or below with ALN, and young people with ALN in school or further education
- an integrated, collaborative process of assessment, planning and monitoring which facilitates early, timely and effective interventions
- a fair and transparent system for providing information and advice, and for resolving concerns and appeals

[See Page 1 for detail]

INPUTS AND ACTIVITIES

SHORT TERM (AND ONGOING) OUTCOMES

ALN SYSTEM IMPLEMENTATION 0-25

- Unified plan: IDPs are person-centred, based on collaboration
- Views of CYP and P&C are central to planning and provision
- ALP meets CYP needs and is consistent with ALN Code
- Services work together to deliver efficient, effective, CYP-centred support (education, health & social services)
- Information is shared effectively between practitioners and organisations
- Timely assessment, planning and interventions
- Review processes in place for IDPs and ALP
- Provision of independent advocacy services
- Clear and consistent rights of appeal are in place
- A bilingual system: the need for ALP in Welsh is documented and all reasonable steps are taken to secure provision

MEDIUM TERM OUTCOMES FOR CYP, P&C, PRACTITIONERS AND SYSTEM-WIDE OUTCOMES

CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE (CYP)
- Increased participation and improved experiences
- High aspirations and improved outcomes (including progress and attainment)
- Positive social relationships; emotional resilience and stability
- Improved transition:
  - between phases of education
  - between mainstream and specialist provision
  - to employment & training, community, independent living

PARENTS & CARERS (P&C)
- Improved experiences for P&C
- Greater agency and ownership

PRACTITIONERS
- Sustained improvements in teaching and learning for children with ALN
- Improved experiences (job satisfaction, retention)

SYSTEM-WIDE
- Increased collaboration & integration
- A more inclusive, fair & transparent system
- Increased trust & public confidence
- A less adversarial system: fewer disagreements, earlier disagreement resolution
- Learners access ALP in Welsh where needs are identified

LONG TERM OUTCOMES

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE (CYP), PARENTS AND CARERS (P&C)
- Achievement of full potential including qualifications
- Improved employability
- Community participation

SOCIETAL (WFGA)
- Prosperous
- Resilient
- More equal
- Healthier
- Cohesive communities
- Vibrant cultures and a thriving Welsh language
- Globally responsible

SYSTEM-LEVEL & CONTEXTUAL FACTORS

ALN Act and ALN Code: legislation and statutory guidance setting out legal duties on partners across the system Supported by...

Inclusive provision developed in line with Curriculum for Wales guidance

Activity that promotes and embeds a Social Model of Disability

- WG: National Approach to Professional Learning (NAPL)
- A Healthier Wales
- Education Tribunal for Wales
- NHS: Putting Things Right
- Cymraeg 2050
- Qualifications
- Accountability systems
- Monitoring and Evaluation

Explanation of the ToC

3.18   The following subsections provide a narrative explanation of the individual components of the ToC, beginning with inputs and activities and covering each component in turn. In this section we present further detail on the individual items, explain how they are expected to contribute to supporting implementation and/or realising the intended outcomes of the ALN system, and also note relevant assumptions relating to each section of the ToC.

3.19   Collectively, it is assumed that the inputs and activities contribute towards the achievement of short-term outcomes for children and young people (CYP), parents and carers (P&C), practitioners and system outcomes such as an inclusive, fair and transparent system. In turn, it is assumed that these outcomes will support the implementation of the ALN system. In particular, it is assumed that practitioners with the awareness, knowledge, understanding, skills, confidence and capabilities to support the system will ensure that the principle of an inclusive education system is delivered in practice. Further to this, the ToC posits that the effective implementation of the system, as required under the provisions of the Code, will lead to a range of medium- and longer-term outcomes for learners, their families, practitioners and, eventually, for society more widely.

3.20   References to *practitioners* in this chapter include leaders (in both schools and FE institutions), teachers, support staff in schools and settings, lecturers and tutors in FE institutions. *Professionals* is used as a catch-all term to refer to service managers, officers, and others in planning, delivery and supporting roles across all sectors, including local authorities and LHBs.

Inputs and activities

3.21   The ability of schools[13], institutions, local authorities, LHBs and other partners to implement the ALN system in a way that delivers the intended benefits for learners requires the provision of appropriately deployed funding, information and guidance, workforce development programmes, and opportunities to collaborate. This section outlines a range of system inputs and describes the short-term outcomes that will derive from them. These short-term outcomes apply to children and young people,

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[13] Includes schools, maintained nursery schools, and pupil referral units.

practitioners and professionals engaged with the ALN system in schools, early years settings, local authorities and LHBs.

Funding

3.22   The ALN system in schools is supported by Welsh Government funding in the form of core funding for education services, issued to and managed by local authorities, as well as specific and special government grants (e.g. ALN innovation grant, ALN transformation grant, post-pandemic funding). Local authority budgeted expenditure on SEN/ALN provision in 2023-24 was £549m.[14] Funding provided through grants to support ALN totalled £2.1m through the Innovation Grant between 2016-2018; £20m as part of the ALN Transformation Grant between 2018-2020; and £77m in post-pandemic funding between 2021-23.[15] (Further information on sources of data relating to ALN funding is set out in section 5 of this report). Provision in FE institutions is supported through colleges' core budgets. Specialist ALP is also funded by LHBs.[16]

3.23   The Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) which was conducted to aid the scrutiny of the ALNET Bill (the Bill) concluded that 'overall, the Bill is expected to result in cost savings'. This being the case, the RIA also noted that:

> 'As well as recognising the potential savings which could be realised from the introduction of the preferred options, the regulatory impact assessment acknowledges it is unknown the extent to which the potential savings will be achieved' (Regulatory Impact Assessment, p92).

The RIA recognised that it was likely that there would be additional transition costs of £11.65m, incurred by Welsh Government and other public sector organisations.

3.24   Irrespective of the actual transition and ongoing costs of implementing the ALN system, the ToC assumes that sufficient funding is made available to all delivery partners to ensure that the necessary capacity and support are available to realise the aims of the reforms.

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[14] Budgeted Expenditure on Special Educational Needs (SEN) Provision 2023-24
[15] The new additional learning needs system: Progress of schools and local authorities in supporting pupils with additional learning needs (Estyn, 2023a)
[16] This can include support provided by speech and language therapists, occupational therapists, physiotherapists, CAMHS, community paediatrics, learning disability services, neurodevelopmental services and primary care teams.

<table>
<tr><td>Assumptions relating to funding</td></tr>
<tr><td>

o **A1:** Sufficient resource is provided to all delivery partners across the ALN system to enable local authorities, schools, LHBs and all relevant partners to fulfil the duties set out in the ALN Code and to enable the aims of the reforms to be realised.

o **A2:** Funding made available for the ALN system ensures that sufficient workforce capacity is in place to deliver consistently high-quality support and provision for ALN learners in all local areas.

o **A3:** Variations in funding arrangements at local and regional levels do not impact negatively on the quality of support and provision available for ALN learners in different parts of Wales.

</td></tr>
</table>

Information, advice and guidance about the ALN system

3.25   The preparation and dissemination of appropriate information and guidance is essential to ensure that all parties (CYP, parents/carers, practitioners, partners across the system) are clear about what they can expect from the ALN system, what their role is, and the preparations required to support implementation. This encompasses a broad range of inputs, including published guidance at a national level in a range of formats, but also advice and guidance provided through formal and informal mechanisms (e.g. information and advice provided by Transformation Leads, by strategic leaders in schools and FE institutions).

3.26   The ToC proposes that these inputs contribute to improved awareness and understanding of the ALN system among children and young people, parents and carers and practitioners and system delivery partners in education, local authorities and health.

Assumptions relating to information, advice and guidance
o **A4:** High-quality national information and guidance on the ALN system is available, accessed, and understood by professionals.
o **A5:** Local and regional information and guidance on the ALN system is aligned with national guidance and is available, accessed, and understood by professionals.
o **A6:** Information, advice and guidance contributes to clarity of expectation among all involved in the ALN system.
o **A7:** Learners and their families are made aware of the ALN system and how they will be supported under new arrangements.
o **A8:** Practical guidance is available for practitioners in education and for delivery partners across the system to aid preparations for the ALN system and to ensure that all those involved in implementing the ALN system are equipped with the knowledge and information required to implement the reforms.

ALN transformation programme and roles created to support transition to the ALN system

3.27   The ALN transformation programme and the creation of capacity to support transition is a key input in the theory. The transformation programme supported the process of transitioning from the previous SEN and LDD systems to a unified system for supporting learners aged 0 to 25 with ALN.

3.28   This element of the ToC also refers to the roles and functions carried out by Transformation Leads as a short to medium term input and also the appointment of individuals to the new statutory roles that are critical to the effective implementation of the ALN system over the longer term. As described in section 1.23, Transformation Leads played a key role in managing the transition to the new system, delivering support and challenge to delivery partners. The statutory roles of ALNCo, DECLO and Early Years ALNLO have crucial strategic functions that will shape activity and behaviour within schools, FE institutions, and among other delivery partners.

3.29   The input of individuals in these roles contributes to increased human capital that is an essential condition for the ALN system, including improved skills and confidence

among practitioners to support learners with ALN. In education settings, the work of ALNCos and senior leadership teams is critical in supporting teachers and support staff to deliver high-quality teaching and learning that supports ALP.

<div style="border:1px solid #000;">

Assumptions relating to the ALN transformation programme and the creation of roles that support transition to the ALN system

- o **A9:** The ALN Code and Act are sufficiently clear and are understood by practitioners and professionals.
- o **A10:** The ALN transformation programme reflects the principles of the ALN code and equips practitioners and leaders in all sectors with sufficient skills, knowledge and understanding of the Act and Code to support the implementation of the ALN system.
- o **A11:** The work of Transformation Leads and that of statutory roles created under the Act supports improved awareness, knowledge and understanding of the ALN system.

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Workforce development and professional learning

3.30 The ToC assumes that high-quality workforce development activity and professional learning opportunities are available to support implementation and that practitioners in schools and FEIs and professionals in health and local authorities are able to access such opportunities. High-quality professional learning is critical to the success of the ALN system. Professional learning is organised around the long-term vision for learners. It is highly differentiated and contextualised, reflecting the needs of those working in schools, in FE and in other sectors. It uses expertise alongside peer support and involves exploration of the impact of practice on learners. Professional learning can help challenge and change the status quo. It can also promote networking opportunities and encourage the use of evidence and experiences to explore practitioner behaviours and beliefs.

3.31 The ToC proposes that high-quality professional learning increases practitioners' and professionals' knowledge, understanding, skills, confidence and capabilities in ways that enhance professional practice. There is a strong culture of professional learning across the system, driven by practitioners who frame their own development in the context of the ALN system.

Assumptions relating to professional learning for practitioners
o **A12:** There is sufficient support for implementation and high-quality professional learning relating to the ALN system as well as equitable opportunity to access these.
o **A13:** In schools and FE institutions, high-quality professional learning is delivered, sustained and has an appropriate level of focus on ALN learners. Professional learning to support practitioners' and professionals' to understand the requirements of the ALN system is adequately embedded in school or institution improvement plans. Professional learning is designed to take account of the context in which practitioners work. It uses specialist expertise alongside peer support and involves exploring evidence of the impact on learners.
o **A14:** Professional learning (e.g. NPLP ALN) equips practitioners and leaders in all sectors with the skills and knowledge to support the implementation of the ALN system, including identifying, planning and meeting the needs of learners.
o **A15:** Professional standards support practitioners who understand, are committed to, and sufficiently prepared to identify ALN, meet the individual needs of learners in the classroom and deliver ALP.
o **A16:** Inspection arrangements provide appropriate support and challenge to ensure that professional learning programmes are of high quality and support the ALN system.

Professional learning for leadership across the ALN system

3.32   The ToC underlines the importance of high-quality professional learning to support leadership. Professional learning should focus on the capabilities needed to lead the implementation of ALN system in a way that supports the vision and requirements set out in the ALN Code. These capabilities include deep knowledge of the requirements set out in the ALN legislation and code, and characteristics that all leaders would require, namely strong interpersonal and problem-solving skills, and capabilities to develop networks and strengthen trust within and across schools.

3.33 This activity will support a range of outcomes that are important to the successful implementation of the ALN system. Firstly, the support will deliver improved capability among leaders to support developments in practitioners' knowledge, skills, understanding and confidence. Leaders will be better able to foster an environment, culture and conditions conducive to the successful implementation of the ALN system. This includes supporting a culture of continuous improvement among practitioners. Leaders will be better equipped to support engagement with research and evidence-informed practice.

Assumptions relating to professional learning for leadership
o **A17:** There is sufficient professional learning for leadership that is quality-assured and focused on the principles and duties set out in the Act and ALN Code.   o **A18:** Formal and informal professional learning to ensure understanding of statutory roles and responsibilities, and to support management and delivery of the ALN system is accessed by all leaders.

Initial Teacher Education (ITE), induction and early career support

3.34 The ToC hypothesises that ITE and early career support equip new entrants to the teaching profession with the necessary knowledge and understanding to support the implementation of the ALN system. ITE programmes focus on developing trainee teachers' skills, knowledge and behaviours (in relation to pedagogy, collaboration, innovation, professional learning, and leadership) that are consistent with the principles of the ALN code. Induction programmes and early career support embed working practices that ensure high standards among practitioners and are consistent with the principles of the ALN Code.

3.35 The ToC underlines the need for practitioners to recognise from the beginning of their careers that they are a significant part of implementing the ALN system and that they can contribute in meaningful ways to the mission to build a world class education system in Wales. New entrants to the profession have the skills and dispositions they need to support the ALN system, and meet the induction level descriptors for teaching set out in the professional standards for teaching and leadership.

Assumptions relating to ITE and early career support
o **A19:** Professional learning programmes for new entrants (including ITE, induction and PCET) includes sufficient learning on principles of the ALN code and programme content is aligned with national guidance.
o **A20:** Initial Teacher Education (ITE) partnerships, Post Compulsory Education and Training (PCET) providers, practitioners and mentors develop new entrants to the teaching profession who understand and are committed to the ALN system.
o **A21:** Initial Teacher Education (ITE) partnerships, Post Compulsory Education and Training (PCET) providers, practitioners and mentors develop new entrants to the teaching profession with the skills to identify, plan for and meet the needs of ALN learners.

Collaboration between schools/settings and with external partners such as health professionals

3.36   Effective collaboration is a fundamental part of the ALN system, where services work together to ensure ALN are identified early and co-ordinated support is put in place to enable children and young people to gain positive experiences and achieve good outcomes. During initial years of implementation collaboration between schools, FEIs, local authorities and health partners is critical so that experiences of transitioning to the new system can be shared and any challenges identified and addressed. The ToC assumes that local, regional and cross-sector networks are facilitated to provide opportunities to discuss experiences and share knowledge.

3.37   Collaboration will support an understanding across the wider education system of progress being made in implementing the ALN system, along with an understanding of the challenges faced and responses to these challenges. Collaboration between settings that involves senior leaders, middle leaders and practitioners as well as external partners will mean that implementation is supported and driven at all levels.

Assumptions relating to collaboration between settings and with external partners such as health professionals
o **A22:** There is commitment among settings at all stages of implementation to working collaboratively and they can do so. There are opportunities for delivery partners to engage in networks to share learning and experiences of the ALN system.
o **A23:** There is appropriate balance between challenge and support, resulting in collaborative activity that is productive, and does not undermine settings' activities
o **A24:** The ALN system supports transition between settings and between mainstream and special education, and progression to education, training and employment post-16

Short term and ongoing outcomes

3.38　The ToC suggests that the inputs and activities outlined above will contribute to a range of short-term outcomes that should become embedded as the ALN system is implemented. In the case of **children and young people, and their parents/carers**, the provision of information and guidance nationally and locally will lead to improved awareness and understanding of the ALN system. Parents and carers will also be supported to understand their rights and their involvement in decisions about ALP, person-centred practice and dispute resolution process under the ALN system.

3.39　**Practitioners and professionals** will also develop improved awareness, knowledge and understanding. Workforce development and professional learning opportunities should contribute to greater confidence to support the ALN system and enhanced skills to be able to support learners with ALN. In schools and FE institutions, leadership teams have an important role to play in ensuring that planning and provision is learner-centred and in overseeing the quality of teaching and learning in the classroom. The theory also proposes that collaboration and professional learning (including professional learning targeted at leaders) will instil a commitment to the principles set out in the ALN Code and a desire among leaders to ensure that there is a whole school/institution approach to high-quality ALP. Clear and informed leadership is essential to ensuring that practitioners understand and

are committed to the new ways of working required by the reforms. In particular school leaders will ensure that there is strategic alignment between the implementation of the ALN system and the new curriculum arrangements, ensuring that learners with ALN have appropriate access to the curriculum.

3.40   The ToC illustrates that the range of activities for practitioners will support **system-wide outcomes** in the short-term. Appointing individuals to the statutory roles of ALNCo, DECLO, and Early Years ALNLO will ensure that a strategic approach is taken to planning and delivering ALN, guided by the provisions of the Act and Code. These roles will also help facilitate improved collaboration, knowledge-sharing and trust among practitioners, settings and delivery partners.

System-level and contextual factors

3.41   The ToC illustrations (Figures 1-3) refer to system-level factors that contribute towards, or influence, the implementation of the ALN system. These include features of the wider education system, specific policies, reforms and commitments across education and health that will affect practice, behaviours and also outcomes. This section lists a range of system-level factors that provide additional context to the ALN system and, in theory, support implementation and outcomes. These are:

- **The ALN Act and Code:** legislation and statutory guidance setting out legal duties on partners across the system

- **Curriculum for Wales:** the Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Act 2021, and national CfW legislation and guidance. The ToC hypothesises that, alongside ALP, inclusive provision is available to learners, developed in line with CfW guidance. Guidance sets out the need for schools to 'plan engaging and developmentally appropriate learning opportunities informed by regular observation and ongoing assessment of learning and the learner's stage of development'.[17] This requires that practitioners, settings and those supporting them collaborate effectively to ensure that high-quality pedagogy is in place that ensure all learners make progress towards achieving their potential.

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[17] Curriculum for Wales guidance (Pedagogy)

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- **National approach to professional learning** (NAPL): including the national professional learning entitlement, professional learning programmes, national professional enquiry project (NPEP), National Masters in Education, ITE, and workforce development strategies across all relevant sectors, which will impact on the development of those undertaking statutory roles under the Act.

- **A Healthier Wales**: the Welsh Government's long term plan for health and social care, and the associated workforce strategy for health and social care

- **NHS: Putting things right** - the process for raising concerns or complaints in NHS Wales

- **the qualifications framework** for learners

- **accountability** systems, including inspection arrangements and school improvement activities.

- **statutory right to appeal** through the Education Tribunal for Wales

- **monitoring and evaluation activity** (e.g. implementation and research reports, Estyn thematic reviews) and activities to support an evidence-informed system (e.g. the activities of the ALN reform steering group).

- **social model of disability:** the Welsh Government is committed to the social model of disability, a guiding principle in policy considerations which says that people are disabled by barriers in society, not by their impairment or difference. As noted in the ALN Code, the social model is a positive approach to disability, which focuses on removing barriers to equality – and is consistent with the commitment to inclusive education that underpins the ALN system.

- **Cymraeg 2050** and the Welsh in Education Workforce Plan, which includes actions to support practitioners to develop expertise in supporting learners with ALN in mainstream Welsh-medium and bilingual settings.

3.42   It should be noted that this is not an exhaustive list and there are also other local, regional and national initiatives and strategic plans that will influence aspects of the ALN system.

ALN system delivery

3.43　This section describes features of ALN system implementation that are central to the theory of change. These activities correspond to core elements of the ALN Code and are framed by a policy commitment to an inclusive ALN system where the majority of children and young people are supported to participate in mainstream education. Many of these facets of the ALN system are inter-dependent – early identification, person-centred planning, collaboration between services, clear and robust review processes. Effective implementation in each area of practice both informs and draws on practice in other areas. Throughout all aspects of the system, it is assumed that processes are delivered in line with the principles of the ALN code, namely:

(a) **A rights-based approach** where the views, wishes and feelings of the child, child's parent or young person are central to the planning and provision of support; and the child, child's parent or young person is enabled to participate as fully as possible in the decision-making processes and has effective rights to challenge decisions about ALN, ALP and related matters.

(b) **Early identification, intervention and prevention** where needs are identified and provision put in place at the earliest opportunity and where possible interventions are put in place to prevent the development or escalation of ALN.

(c) **Collaboration and integration** where services work together to ensure ALN are identified early and appropriate co-ordinated support is put in place to enable children and young people to achieve positive expectations, experiences and outcomes.

(d) **Inclusive education** where the majority of children and young people with ALN are supported to participate fully in mainstream education and a whole setting approach is taken to meeting the needs of learners with ALN.

(e) **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.

IDPs are person-centred based on collaboration

3.44   A rights-based approach is set out as a key principle in the ALN code. The ToC sets out that, in theory, learners are at the centre of the IDP development process, and that the views, wishes and feelings of learners, parents and carers are central to the planning and provision of support. As part of this, the ToC hypothesises that learners, parents and carers are enabled to participate as fully as possible in the decision-making processes and have effective rights to challenge decisions about ALN, ALP and related matters. Collaboration is central to the process, with appropriate partners, including health professionals, involved in the planning process.

Views of children and young people and parents and carers are central to planning and provision

3.45   The Act requires that the views of children and young people, their parents and carers should be considered as a core part of the planning process. The ToC proposes that children and young people are engaged in the planning process and view it 'as something which is done with them rather than to them'. They and their families will, therefore, be supported to participate through the provision of clear and impartial information, advice and advocacy. The Act provides children and young people with various rights to receive information in relation to ALN and decisions being taken about them, and to make their own decisions in certain circumstances.

Provision meets needs and is consistent with the ALN Code

3.46   The ToC hypothesises that, where required, ALP is put in place at the earliest opportunity and meets the needs of the learner. In planning provision, relevant partners are engaged and are involved in decision-making, ensuring co-ordinated support so that learners have positive experiences and outcomes. The ToC assumes that reasonable steps are taken to provide ALP through the medium of Welsh, where need is identified, in keeping with the principle of a bilingual system.

Services work together to deliver child-centred support and share information effectively

3.47   All services involved in working with children, young people and their families, including education, health and social services, will have a crucial role to play in working together to deliver efficient, effective, child-centred support for learners with ALN. Where relevant and necessary, health professionals work with other services to provide advice and assistance in a timely way. The ToC assumes that the ALN system will encourage 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 the best possible outcomes.

Timely assessment, planning and interventions

3.48   The ToC hypothesises that processes are in place to ensure timely assessment, planning and interventions for learners with ALN. This also depends on the skills, understanding and resources of practitioners to be able to deliver this. The successful implementation of the ALN system requires that learners' needs are identified at the earliest opportunity – whichever stage of their education a learner has reached – so that appropriate provision and, where needed, interventions can be put in place to prevent the development or escalation of ALN. As noted above, collaboration and joint-working are key to ensure ALN are identified early.

Review processes

3.49   The ToC hypothesises that review processes are effective in ensuring that children and young people, parents and carers, practitioners and appropriate partners are enabled to participate as fully as possible in the review processes and have effective rights to challenge decisions about ALN, ALP and related matters. Collaboration is central to the process, with appropriate partners, including health professionals, involved in reviews and revisions to IDPs.

Rights of appeal

3.50   The ToC hypothesises that rights of appeal are enshrined in the ALN system, that learners, parents and carers are aware of these and supported to exercise their

rights appropriately. These rights of appeal were extended under the Act. The Act has children's rights at its core and the principles of the UNCRC and CRDP are given effect in the Act and the Code. The Act includes specific provisions that require local authorities and health bodies to have due regard to these conventions.

3.51   Where disagreements about the contents or provision of an IDP cannot be resolved at the local level, the Act ensures that children and young people entitled to an IDP, or those who believe that they should have an IDP have a right of appeal to the Education Tribunal for Wales. The theory assumes that these rights of appeal are communicated, promoted and understood across the system.

A bilingual system

3.52   Services are required to consider whether the child or young person needs ALP in Welsh. The ToC assumes that this duty is understood and acted upon by all relevant delivery partners. Where there is a need for ALP in Welsh, this is documented in IDPs and 'all reasonable steps' must be taken to secure appropriate provision. A mechanism is included in the Act to remove by regulations the 'all reasonable steps' test, if and when this is deemed appropriate, so that the duties to provide ALP through the medium of Welsh become absolute over time. A series of strategic duties are also aimed at driving progress towards a truly bilingual ALN system.

Assumptions relating to the implementation of the ALN system
o **A25:** Practitioners have sufficient time and resources to think about and engage with the ALN system.
o **A26:** Practitioners have the skills and capability to implement the ALN system in line with the requirements set out in the ALN code and in legislation.
o **A27:** There is clarity about the roles, responsibilities, and functions of each partner and how they are expected to work together across settings and separate services to identify ALN and plan for and deliver ALP. This includes the roles of early years, schools, PRU and post-16 setting leaders, practitioners, ALNCos, DECLOs, early years ALN lead

officers and key roles in other partner organisations including health and local authorities.

- o **A28:** Practitioners understand how to make decisions on ALN, and plan for ALP.
- o **A29:** There is a continuation and mainstreaming of cluster working and implementation support beyond the initial transformation phase.
- o **A30:** Practitioners have opportunities to engage in effective cluster working.
- o **A31:** Dispute resolution services are available in all local authorities, with clear routes for escalation.
- o **A32:** Each partner supporting an individual learner with ALN understands their role in supporting the intended short and medium- and longer-term outcomes.
- o **A33:** The provisions and requirements set out in the Act and the ALN Code are understood by all relevant partners and are implemented in practice.
- o **A34:** There is effective collaboration within and between settings as well as between settings and partners such as local authorities and health professionals.
- o **A35:** Learners, parents and carers are aware of their rights and are supported to participate in identification, planning and review processes.
- o **A36:** Provision, including ALP, is underpinned by high-quality teaching and learning and continuously improving classroom practice.
- o **A37:** Professional practice is informed by relevant professional standards in each sector.
- o **A38:** Settings develop high-quality and fit-for-purpose assessment approaches that are focused on supporting the progression of each individual learner.
- o **A39:** There is equitable opportunity to engage in training to understand different types of ALN, and to develop effective pedagogic approaches to meet the needs of ALN learners.

> o **A40:** There is system-level understanding and application of the social model of disability and public sector equality duty. Settings make reasonable adjustments and remove barriers for all learners.

Medium-term outcomes for learners, parents/carers, practitioners, and system-wide

3.53 Collectively the activities of practitioners and system-level and contextual factors will support a range of medium-term outcomes for learners, parents and carers, practitioners and the system as a whole.

3.54 For **learners, parents and carers** the ToC hypothesises that the ALN system supports the following medium-term outcomes:

- Improved experiences of system delivery for learners, parents & carers, including:

  - perceptions that early identification and assessment, planning, provision, review and appeal processes are effective and delivered in a way that is consistent with the principles of the ALN code

  - satisfaction with learning

  - perceptions that learners' needs are being met and the system is inclusive and equitable

  - learners are involved in and recognise the role they can play in decisions about their own learning.

- Improved learner aspirations, progress and attainment;

- Improved transition for learners between phases of education;

- Learners develop positive social relationships;

- Learners develop their well-being, emotional resilience and stability.

3.55 The ToC asserts that the ALN system leads to a series of outcomes for **practitioners and settings**. These include:

- Sustained improvements in teaching and learning delivered to learners with ALN;

- Practitioners' experiences of system delivery, including:

o perceptions that early identification and assessment, planning, provision, review and appeal processes are effective and delivered in a way that is consistent with the principles of the ALN code

- Practitioners' sense of job satisfaction and wellbeing

- Settings' approaches to assessment for learning help practitioners' understand whether their learners with ALN are making progress.

Learner progress

3.56 The ToC hypothesises that the implementation of the ALN system will contribute to learners making progress in a range of ways. This will include enabling learners to increase their breadth and depth of knowledge, and develop their skills. The ALN code identifies other desired outcomes relating to learner progress including learners developing positive social relationships as well as their emotional resilience and stability.

System-wide outcomes

3.57 The ToC proposes that the ALN system supports a number of important ongoing system-wide outcomes.

- Increased collaboration and integration

- A more inclusive, fair and transparent system

- Increased trust and public confidence

- A less adversarial system – few disagreements and improved dispute avoidance and resolution processes.

- Attainment is improved across the education system for learners with ALN.

- Increased equity in the education system.

- Learners access ALP in Welsh, where need is identified.

Longer term societal outcomes

3.58 The outcomes for learners and the system-wide outcomes noted above are hypothesised to contribute towards a range of longer-term outcomes at the wider

societal level. The ALN code sets out several examples of a young person's desired outcomes including:

- preparing for work

- community participation

- progressing to other education, including higher education, or training

- developing independent living skills or other useful skills or qualities for adulthood.

3.59   The ALN system also has the potential to contribute to the long-term aspiration to integrate the social model of disability, helping to transform attitudes and promoting an understanding of ableism in Welsh society.

3.60   The ALN system also contributes to wider societal goals set out in the Welsh Government's *CfW implementation plan* which notes that *'education reforms connect and contribute to our goals as a nation, set out in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015'* (Welsh Government, 2021b). It is assumed that realising the shared goals of education reforms will, in the long term, have 'deep and far-reaching impacts on Welsh society'. This includes supporting the national well-being goals to ensure:

- a prosperous Wales,
- a resilient Wales,
- a more equal Wales,
- a healthier Wales,
- a Wales of cohesive communities,
- a Wales of vibrant cultures and thriving Welsh language
- a globally responsible Wales.

3.61   The national indicators and national milestones for Wales associated with the well-being goals will help support an understanding of progress over time. Progress in relation to many of the indicators and milestones will be influenced by the support provided by the ALN system. Examples include:

- Increasing the percentage of adults qualified to level 3 or higher by 2050
- Eliminating the pay gap for gender, disability and ethnicity by 2050

- Reducing the poverty gap between people in Wales with certain key protected characteristics and those without those characteristics

- Eradicating the gap between the employment rate in Wales and the UK by 2050, with a focus on fair work and raising labour market participation of under-represented groups

- Increasing the number of 16-24 year-olds in education, employment, or training by 2050

- Improving adult and children's mean mental wellbeing.

3.62 In addition, by seeking to ensure the availability of Welsh language provision and support, the ALN system also supports aspects of the Cymraeg 2050 Strategy which includes targets to increase the use of Welsh.

3.63 The extent to which ALN system contributes to wider outcomes over time will be tested as part of the programme of research and evaluation.

4. Evidence review

4.1 This chapter provides a synthesis of existing evidence on ALN system implementation. It explores what the emerging evidence tells us about how implementation is progressing and identifies gaps in the existing evidence base. Finally, this chapter of the report outlines emerging issues and themes that should be the focus of further research as part of this evaluation. This evidence review has drawn on various sources (set out in Annex A) including academic papers, research reports and key policy documents, all specific to the Welsh context.

4.2 The main documents reviewed were:[18]

- Estyn's (2023a) thematic report on the new ALN system, published September 2023: this is the first of at least two reports on the ALN system produced in response to a request for advice from the Minister for Education and the Welsh Language. It focuses on the progress in schools in implementing key aspects of the ALN system, based on **discussions with 15 primary schools, eight secondary schools and two all-age schools.**

- National Academy for Educational Leadership Wales (NAEL) (2023) report, published May 2023: a research report based on the findings of an **online survey of 730 school leaders and 12 semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders** including DECLOs, local authority ALN Officers and Early Years Leads and Advisory Teachers.

- The Children, Young People and Education (CYPE) Committee is conducting an inquiry into the implementation of education reforms, which includes examining the ALN reforms. Its second 'check-in' with educational practitioners involved **focus groups and interviews with 24 participants from 20 secondary schools.** The results outlined in a summary note (May 2023) have been included as part of this synthesis. Further evidence provided to the CYPE Committee by other bodies and stakeholders has also been referenced in this chapter, where relevant.

- Other position and update papers (including unpublished reports) prepared by stakeholders including TSANA (November 2022), SNAP Cymru (January 2023 & April 2023), Colegau Cymru (September 2022), and ALN

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[18] See Annex A (for a breakdown of the papers, detailing their methodologies and limitations.

transformation leads (Jones, September 2022). These papers and reports do not all provide clear information on the sample sizes involved, and this has been taken into account when considering how much prominence to attach to the findings of these sources during this synthesis. We have tended to give less prominence to findings from research and papers where information about the evidence base is more limited or is unknown.

4.3   It is important to set out the limitations of the evidence on which this synthesis is based so that any interpretation of the findings is informed by an understanding of the strength of, and gaps in, current evidence. Firstly, the sources reviewed principally examine ALN system implementation from the perspective of schools and settings. Evidence of how partners across the wider system – including in local authorities, health and early years settings – are adapting to the new requirements is more limited. In addition, the evidence reviewed does not fully explore the experiences of learners, parents, and carers of the new ALN system. Consequently, the evidence currently available does not enable a full understanding of ALN implementation at a whole-system level. Further detail of limitations is set out in Annex A.

4.4   As can be seen from the information provided in section 4.2, the sample sizes involved in many of the key sources of evidence are relatively small, limiting the ability to generalise findings and draw definitive conclusions about ALN system implementation to date. Instead, the findings set out in this chapter should be viewed as being illustrative of issues requiring further exploration as part of the evaluation.

4.5   The approach to organising and presenting themes in this chapter has been guided by the issues identified in the main sources of evidence reviewed. Researchers explored the key points raised in the documents outlined above, which are presented in this chapter under a series of themed sub-headings. When examining the findings of the available evidence, consideration was also given to how these topics relate to sections of the ToC. This process of cross-referencing existing evidence against the ToC will be used to help inform areas of focus for the subsequent phases of this evaluation.

4.6   This chapter is split into two parts, distinguishing between i) evidence relating to inputs and preparations for the ALN system and ii) evidence relating to system implementation.

4.7   Part One of this chapter explores evidence concerning the work undertaken to lay the foundations for ALN reform. Part One also explores evidence relating to items included in the inputs, activities and short-term outcomes sections of the ToC illustration, this includes activities taken forward as part of the Transformation Programme.

4.8   Part Two provides a synthesis of emerging evidence in relation to how the ALN system is being implemented. Part Two therefore relates to components of ALN system implementation set out in the ToC as well as some emerging findings which relate to the medium-term outcomes.

4.9   It is anticipated that further literature and evidence will become available in due course. For example, Estyn's recent thematic report noted that it was the first of at least two reviews focused on the implementation of ALN reform (Estyn 2023a, p.1). Qualitative research with stakeholders as part of the next phase of the evaluation will also provide an opportunity to explore issues relating to ALN implementation where there is limited current evidence.

Part One: Activities to support ALN reform

4.10   Part One explores evidence relating to laying the foundations for the ALN system, focusing on the inputs, activities and short-term outcomes set out in the ToC. As noted in 4.5, the selection of sub-headings has been guided by the issues identified in the evidence reviewed and grouped into three themes: i) workforce development and professional learning; ii) information, advice, and guidance; and iii) funding. The conclusions drawn in relation to these topics will inform the design of research tools to be used in subsequent phases of this evaluation.

Workforce development and professional learning

4.11   As outlined in Chapter 3, the ToC assumes that high-quality workforce development activity and professional learning opportunities are available to support implementation and that practitioners and professionals are able to access such opportunities. This section seeks to explore the extent to which the emerging evidence on ALN system implementation supports this assumption. However, it is important to note that the literature available at the time of this review focused on

the opportunities for education practitioners. Consequently, this section relates only to workforce development and professional learning aimed at those working in schools and other education settings, and the effectiveness thereof. Given the limited literature available on workforce development opportunities for practitioners in health and local authorities with respect to the ALN system, there is a clear need for this to topic to be explored as part of the next phase of this evaluation.

4.12   The ALN transformation programme (Welsh Government, 2018a, p.4) includes a programme of workforce development for education practitioners focused on three levels:

- **core skills** for all practitioners to deliver the new ALN system;

- **advanced skills** through the development of the role of ALNCos;

- **specialist skills** development through funding to support post-graduate training for local authority-provided specialist support services (e.g. educational psychologists) available to education settings/schools.

4.13   In 2021, the Welsh Government published the National Professional Learning Pathway for Additional Learning Needs (NPLP ALN). The NPLP ALN is a programme of online learning which aims to support practitioners and leaders in developing their skills and knowledge to help them realise the aims of the ALN legislation. The NPLP ALN comprises 20 chapters covering four cross-cutting themes: leadership and management, communication and joint working, evidence-informed practice and supporting learners with ALN. Estyn (2023a, p.46) note that the NPLP core level materials (published in October 2021) had been viewed 8928 times, with the intermediate level materials (published in September 2022) and advanced level materials (published in April 2023) viewed 1,000 and 800 times respectively.[19]

4.14   The evidence considered as part of this review (Estyn, 2023a; NAEL, 2023; Jones, 2022) reports that education practitioners have access to, and indeed are accessing, professional learning opportunities. The Welsh Government's ALN National Implementation Lead produced a national overview report of how delivery partners were managing the implementation of the Act in 2022 (Jones 2022). The report notes that '[a]ll local authorities have provided comprehensive professional

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[19] Estyn's report was published in September 2023.

learning opportunities to schools to ensure that Additional Learning Needs Co-ordinators (ALNCos) have the necessary knowledge and skills to carry out the new duties' (ibid., p.2). This report also found that most ALNCos have engaged in a raft of cluster-led activities to share good practice (Jones, 2022, p.3). Estyn (2023a) and NAEL (2023) both indicate that professional learning activity has been accessed by education practitioners; however, these sources do not enable conclusions to be drawn on the extent to which practitioners in different roles (e.g. senior leaders, ALNCos, teachers) and professionals in local authorities, early years settings and the health sector have accessed professional learning opportunities.

4.15   School leaders surveyed by NAEL (2023) generally reflected positively on professional development opportunities. They found the training on person-centred IDPs to be particularly beneficial, and found the examples and templates shared at training events to be useful. Estyn (2023a, p.11) also note that 'many participating schools spoke confidently about the positive impact that professional learning has had on both staff and pupils'. However, they also report that 'supporting the professional development of all school staff, including those entering the profession, in teaching and meeting the needs of pupils with ALN, was less well developed' (ibid). Estyn (2023a, p.12) also recommend that schools should 'ensure that the professional learning of school staff has a sufficient focus on high quality teaching for pupils with ALN'. This suggests a need for the evaluation to explore whether practitioners feel there are sufficient professional development opportunities available, both in relation to ALN system implementation and the pedagogical practices that support the teaching and learning of children with ALN.

4.16   There is limited evidence regarding workforce development for early years practitioners in relation to ALN, although the NAEL report (2023) presents some evidence collected through semi-structured interviews with stakeholders, including those involved in early years.[20] According to those interviewed as part of their research, NAEL report:

> 'most Early Years ALN teams are offering a range of support within maintained and non-maintained settings and bespoke training opportunities are common practice. Local authority leads and officers regard this as a very supportive process that includes access to drop-in sessions, training menus and informal consultations and discussions for support' (NAEL 2023, p. 35).

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[20] NAEL conducted a total of 12 interviews; however, the report does not provide details on how many of these interviewees held early years roles.

However, as discussed, it must be emphasised that the evidence base with regards to workforce development and professional learning opportunities for early years practitioners in relation to ALN is very limited. Further research will therefore be required in order to explore the availability of such opportunities and their effectiveness in supporting implementation of the ALN system.

4.17   Some challenges in relation to training are also evident in the report by the CYPE Committee (CYPE Committee, 2023a). More specifically, the ALNCOs and school leaders participating in the research highlighted access to training as an issue across the education sector, with a lack of consideration for teacher availability. Moreover, participants in the research felt that training was inaccessible due to a lack of staff cover. ALNCOs also highlighted that training was 'either offered at the start of the reform but stopped at the very point support was needed or there was just no time to attend' (p.4).

4.18   In conclusion, the current evidence shows that professional development opportunities relating to the ALN system are available, have been accessed by education practitioners and that some practitioners have positive views on the professional learning that they have accessed. However, the evidence does not show the extent to which practitioners in various roles (including senior leaders, ALNCos, teachers, support staff) have been able to access professional development opportunities, and whether the content and quality of these opportunities meets their needs. Findings indicate that there may be a need for further professional development opportunities, particularly aimed at those entering the education profession and continuing professional development relating to pedagogy. Finally, there is also some evidence to suggest that education practitioners may be facing some barriers to accessing training, such as time constraints and being able to arrange staff cover. Overall, the evidence considered in this section underscores the need for the evaluation to explore workforce development and professional learning in more detail. Furthermore, it should be noted that the current evidence lacks information about professional development opportunities linked to the ALN system across the health sector, in early years settings and local authorities, including its effectiveness and scope. Therefore, it is essential to explore this as part of planned fieldwork with representatives from local authorities and the health sector during the evaluation.

Information, advice and guidance

4.19   The ALN Act is accompanied by the ALN Code, which provides statutory guidance and necessary instructions to aid compliance with the law. The Welsh Government has published various resources, such as factsheets and guides, which are available to both professionals, parents and local authorities (including consortia of local authorities) and local health boards. Some third sector organisations working directly with children with ALN have also published information and resources in relation to the ALN system. To support preparation for the new system, the Welsh Government funded five ALN transformation leads to provide advice, support, and oversight to local authorities, further education institutions (FEIs), and other stakeholders (see also 1.23). The ToC notes that appropriate and targeted information, advice and guidance are essential in creating the conditions for effective implementation of the ALN system; this section provides insights into successful practices as well as challenges as documented in the current literature.

4.20   NAEL (2023) report that its survey respondents felt generally well supported by their school and local authority. Furthermore, the respondents highlighted 'the comprehensiveness of the support received, the quality of information on issues such as the processes involved, the usefulness of the examples and templates shared at training events, the information and sharing of good practice, the opportunity to network and to ask questions and receive advice' (p.10).

4.21   Estyn (2023a) also report on some effective practices in the provision of support and guidance, drawing particular attention to the effectiveness of regional transformation leads and local authorities in providing schools with clear, consistent, accurate, and timely advice. However, while Estyn (ibid.) note that the materials on ALN reform have been accessible and informative for professionals and other stakeholders, they highlight that the use and sharing of these resources has been variable.

4.22   Some of the evidence reviewed raises concerns regarding the consistency of messaging included in guidance published on the ALN system, specifically questions regarding to what extent the guidance aligns with inclusive educational practices. According to Knight and Crick (2021, p.274), there is 'relatively little consistency about how issues of inclusion are understood and communicated within the policy and guidance documents'. Conn and Davis (2023) refer to gaps in the

guidance, noting that although the ALN Code references 'differentiated teaching' there is no specific explanation of what this means in practice.

4.23   In summary, Welsh Government and other organisations have published information and guidance to support awareness-raising and understanding of the implementation of the ALN reforms. Evidence indicates that this guidance is being used by practitioners, however as noted in previous sections of this chapter, this evidence relates to the experiences of education practitioners and offers very limited insights into the perspectives of other stakeholders across the system. Whilst the current evidence shows there have been examples of effective practice in the provision of information and guidance, there is also evidence pointing to variability in the use and dissemination of guidance materials. The evidence suggests that this variability could lead to limited awareness among some professionals and parents about the rationale for the ALN reforms and what will change in practice under the new system. In addition, the literature suggests there is some lack of coherence in the guidance regarding approaches to inclusion, as well as gaps in the guidance related to understandings and interpretations of 'differentiated teaching'. This has the potential to result in variations in the approach to implementing aspects of the reforms and is an area that the evaluation will need to explore in more depth.

Funding

4.24   Funding (core and grant) is a key input in the ToC. The existing literature also emphasises the significance of funding concerns, especially regarding sufficiency and transparency, as an important emerging issue in relation to ALN system implementation. This section therefore explores emerging evidence concerning funding and its impacts on the delivery of the reforms.

4.25   The ALN system in schools is supported by Welsh Government funding.[21] Estyn note that there has been a significant year-on-year increase in funding for SEN and ALN 'for at least the past eight years' (Estyn 2023a, p11) and also highlighted the Welsh Government's allocation of £67 million to support ALN reform since the pandemic. However, Estyn (2023a) also state that all local authorities, and nearly all schools in their sample, reported significant additional costs in implementing the

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[21] See Budgeted Expenditure on SEN Provision: 2023-24 (Welsh Government, 2023a)

ALN reforms. Notably, these additional costs were reported to be greater than the additional grant funding they have received.

4.26   Further insights into funding challenges reported by schools are explored by NAEL (2023). Two-thirds of those surveyed by NAEL did not think that their educational setting would have the necessary funding to fulfil the requirements of the legislation. Furthermore, whilst respondents to the NAEL school leaders survey generally believed that their settings had skilled workforces to meet ALN requirements, several highlighted that budget constraints often lead to a shortage of experienced support staff. Furthermore, several school leaders argued that the level of funding to release ALNCos from class is 'currently insufficient and that this, coupled with a lack of supply staff, makes it challenging to implement ALNET' (p.32).

4.27   Estyn (2023a) also report that 'there is a lack of transparency and understanding [among] senior leaders in schools in the sample, as to how local authorities determine their budgets for ALN, including those allocated to schools' (Estyn, 2023a, p11). NAEL (2023) also report that only about half of headteachers had been informed of the funding allocated to their settings for ALN, and a majority of the headteachers who provided feedback did not believe that their local authority's funding formula for ALNET allocation is fair. The NAEL report did not include details on local authority funding allocations and these findings reflect senior leaders' perceptions of funding arrangements.

4.28   The CYPE Committee (2023a) summary note, informed by focus groups and interviews with a sample of secondary schools in Wales, also highlights concerns expressed by schools relating to levels of funding and transparency of arrangements. Of particular note was the concern that IDPs may not fully capture the range of support needed to assist an ALN learner, because of funding decisions.

> 'The risk of not receiving adequate funding has created a nervousness to ask for too much on IDP's in case they [schools] aren't able to get the funding to offer these requirements, leaving schools in a difficult position because they can't self-fund this resource if the local authority deem it to be unnecessary'. (CYPE, 2023a, p.2).

4.29   In conclusion, based on the sources examined as part of this review, transparency around funding emerges as a key theme that requires further exploration, as do potential issues relating to funding challenges and their impacts on ALN system implementation. The emerging evidence therefore points to the need for a

comprehensive assessment of the transparency of funding allocations for ALN. In spite of the limitations of the evidence base, and the fact that available evidence draws largely on perceptions of the sufficiency of funding from school leaders, it is clear that the evaluation should explore views from across the system on the efficacy of funding allocations for ALN. This should include an exploration of how perceived or actual funding constraints are impacting on the successful implementation of the ALN system.

Part Two: ALN system implementation

4.30   Part Two explores the evidence relating to components of ALN system implementation, including emerging evidence relating to the medium-term outcomes set out in the ToC. It presents findings under the following sub-sections: the role of the ALNCo; interpretation of ALN and ALP; IDPs; engaging with parents, carers, and learners; collaboration and cluster-working; post-16 learners; and Welsh-medium provision. It concludes with implications for the evaluation. As noted in 4.3, these themes have been guided by the issues identified in the evidence.

The role of the ALNCo

4.31   ALNCos have the responsibility for co-ordinating provision for learners with ALN. It is a statutory role, as detailed in the ALN Code (see also 1.13) and includes an extensive list of duties. The available evidence, set out in this section, indicates that ALNCos understand their role and the provision available to support learners with ALN. However, it is also apparent from the literature that there are some instances where the support for ALNCos from school leaders and local authorities is lacking, and that there are issues around ALNCo workload.

4.32   Estyn (2023a) report that ALNCos participating in its thematic review showed enthusiasm and commitment and had planned well for ALN reform. They also had a very clear understanding of provision for pupils in their school. Estyn further observed that while many ALNCos felt adequately supported by their local authority, facilitated through well-established ALNCo forums, a few secondary schools had not received support and advice from their local authorities in a timely enough manner.

4.33   The NAEL (2023) survey results showed that school leaders, some of whom also hold the position of ALNCo, generally believed that they have a good understanding of the role. According to Estyn (2023a), ALNCos in senior leadership roles had influenced strategic decisions and used their positions to champion ALN across their schools, but a few ALNCos, who were not part of the senior management, reported limited support from school leaders which hindered their ability to influence school-wide initiatives.

4.34   Converging lines of evidence point to concerns about the workload of ALNCos. Estyn (2023a) note that 'school ALNCos have seen considerable change to their role, not only in relation to workload but also in relation to responsibility' (p.27). The report also outlines that 'many participating ALNCos felt that they do not have sufficient time to carry out their role as effectively as they would like' (p.28). Finally, the report further notes that local authorities similarly report increased workload and responsibility of the ALNCo. Echoing these findings, respondents to the survey conducted by NAEL (2023) raised concerns about the additional workload and responsibility associated with the role of the ALNCo, and the impact on personal well-being. The CYPE Committee report (2023a) also notes that ALNCos participating in focus groups expressed that 'a lack of sharing of best practice or peer supporting has resulted in a lack of self-confidence for some' (p.4).

4.35   Alongside the introduction of the new ALNCo role, additional statutory roles have been established: the early years additional learning needs lead officer (Early Years ALNLO) and the designated education clinical lead officer (DECLO). Although these roles are in place and are playing a key part in implementation, there is currently limited literature available on these roles in practice, however, Estyn (2023a, p.3) report that they intend to explore these roles in the subsequent thematic review stages, which will inform future phases of this evaluation.

4.36   In summary, this section explored the role of the ALNCo. From the review of available evidence in relation to ALNCos, it is clear these roles are vital to the delivery of the ALN system, both in terms of the ALNCo's own statutory duties and responsibilities, but also as a source of guidance and support to other practitioners. Senior leaders and ALNCos appear to be clear on the core elements of the role, however questions remain over the strategic influence and support received by ALNCos who do not hold positions in senior management teams. In addition, the literature suggests there are concerns about the ALNCo workload, which could

impact negatively on the personal well-being of ALNCos as well as present challenges to the successful implementation of the reforms. These considerations, and their potential impacts on implementation will be a key focus of the next stage of the evaluation.

Interpretation of ALN and ALP

4.37   Whilst definitions of ALN and ALP are outlined in the legislation which underpins the ALN reforms and the ALN code, the literature highlights that, in practice, there may be a lack of consistency in the interpretation of these definitions. In addition, the evidence considered as part of this review suggests that terminology may be being utilised and applied by practitioners without a common and shared understanding. This section seeks to explore the nature of this lack of consistency and clarity, and to draw attention to the implications of this in practice for the ALN reforms.

4.38   There is evidence of inconsistency in the interpretation and application of definitions of ALN and ALP. Estyn (2023a, p.15) report that overall schools understood the definition of ALN, and 'understood that, for a child to have an ALN, they need additional learning provision (ALP), which is provision that is 'additional to, or different from, that made generally for others of the same age'. However, a few local authorities and schools reported to Estyn that they were unclear of the legal definitions and what this meant in practice and were waiting for clarification from Education Tribunal for Wales outcomes (Estyn 2023a).

4.39   Further evidence of potential inconsistencies in the understanding of the definitions is also evident in the thematic report by Estyn (Estyn 2023a). For example, the report notes that many local authorities had recently provided advice to schools on their ALN registers, including whether provision is recorded as ALP, however, a small number of schools reported that they had challenged their local authority on its advice and interpretation of the definition of ALP. Estyn also reported instances where certain ALNCos mistakenly believed that a medical diagnosis was a prerequisite for appropriate ALP. SNAP Cymru (2023a, p.1) also report that 'too many [parents] are still telling us that they can't get the support their child needs as they are being told they have to wait for a diagnosis'.

4.40   From the available evidence, there also appears to be some variability in the interpretation and application of a 'graduated response' under the new ALN system.

As outlined in the ALN Code, '[m]aintained schools, FEIs and local authorities should adopt a graduated response in relation to children and young people with ALN, making use of a wide range of strategies. This means that the ALP made should be at the lowest level necessary to meet the child or young person's identified needs' (Welsh Government 2021, p231). Implicit in this statement, is the fact that all levels of the graduated response should now be captured in an IDP (statutory plan). However, it is important to recognise that this represents a key change from the previous SEN system, under which not all levels of a graduated approach were put in a statutory plan. Under the SEN system, only high-level support needs or complex support needs were put in a statement. Conversely, low-level (school action) and medium-level (school action plus) support needs were put in an individual education plan, which does not constitute a statutory plan.[22] In contrast to this, under the new ALN system, all levels of the graduated approach (high, medium and low-level support needs) should be put in a statutory plan (an IDP). In the context of the ALN system, the graduated approach therefore relates to the level of support that is set out in an IDP.[23]

4.41 Estyn (2023a) highlight the fact that the schools and local authorities they spoke to as part of their review 'had been advised and supported in considering and classifying the curriculum and support and, by implication, the graduated response, that they make for pupils' (2023a, p.23). As a consequence of this, Estyn note that 'terms such as universal, universal plus, targeted, specialist and, specialist including multi-agency provision are increasingly understood by local authorities and used by schools' (p.23). These terms are not explicit in the ALN Code, thus allowing local authorities and schools, according to Estyn, to classify their provisions and graduated response 'as they see fit'. Estyn further report that this has led to 'widespread confusion' and a lack of a common understanding of the terms, which 'impacts directly on whether a pupil is considered to have an additional learning need or not' (Estyn 2023a, pp.23-24). NAEL (2023, p.36) also touch on this issue briefly in their report, explaining that, around transition, there is a 'lack of consistency and variation is acknowledged in provision from county to county, setting to setting and school to school, particularly around what universal provision means.'

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[22] The additional learning needs transformation programme: frequently asked questions
[23] Ibid.

4.42   Limited evidence exists with respect to parents' and carers' experiences and perceptions of the ALN system. However, feedback from parents collected by SNAP Cymru[24] from November 2022 to March 2023 (SNAP Cymru 2023b)[25] does provide some emerging evidence in this regard. Of note, the feedback collated by SNAP Cymru points to concerns, amongst some parents and carers, about the consistency and parity of provision. For example, referring specifically to universal provision, SNAP Cymru (2023b)[26] describe how 'parents and carers reported being concerned that it was too open to interpretation when considering ALN and ALP and whilst in one school a pupil may not have an IDP, in another pupil with very similar needs would' (SNAP Cymru, 2023b, p.5). Furthermore, different methods of monitoring pupils were also described by parents, including the use of terms such as universal and targeted universal provision by some settings, as well as other interpretations of the Code, which parents found confusing (SNAP 2023b).

4.43   In conclusion, the evidence considered as part of this review highlights that, in practice, there may be a lack of consistency in the interpretation of the definitions of ALN and ALP. In addition, the evidence also points to the emergence of terminology, not explicitly defined in the ALN Code (e.g. 'universal provision') that is being utilised and applied by practitioners without a common and shared understanding, and furthermore that parents and carers may find such terms confusing. The evaluation will therefore seek to explore the factors underpinning the reported lack of consistency in the interpretation of the definitions and the implications of this in practice. This will be explored with a view to providing recommendations on how these challenges can be overcome to ensure that there is clear and consistent understanding of ALN and ALP definitions among practitioners.

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[24] Snap Cymru website
[25] SNAP Cymru were commissioned to deliver 14 events across Wales to engage with parents and carers of children and young people with ALN and/or a disability on behalf of Welsh Government. The primary aim of these events was to facilitate the sharing of information in relation to ALN reform with parents and carers. These events also provided an opportunity to gather feedback from families about their experiences of ALN reform, in addition to their views on the ALN Code and its implementation.

SEN/ALN numbers

4.44   In the context of the converging lines of evidence pointing to the existence of inconsistences in the interpretation of the definitions of ALN and ALP, it is important to consider that the introduction of the ALN reforms has also been accompanied by an apparent drop in the number of children identified as having SEN or ALN.

4.45   The Welsh Government publishes annual data on the number and percentage of learners with SEN/ALN based on the Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC). As reported in the PLASC results[27], in January 2023, there were 63,089 pupils with ALN or SEN in maintained schools (13.4% of all pupils), down from 74,661 (15.8%) in February 2022. Figures 4 and 5 show the percentage of pupils with SEN/ALN by type of SEN or ALN provision from 2018 to 2023. When interpreting these figures, it should be noted that they are based on data collected via PLASC, an electronic collection of pupil and school level data provided by all maintained schools, open on census day, in January each year. Therefore, any changes in the number of pupils on the Special Educational Needs (SEN) or Additional Learning Needs (ALN) systems since January 2023 are not accounted for in this data, and the figures should be interpreted with this caveat in mind.
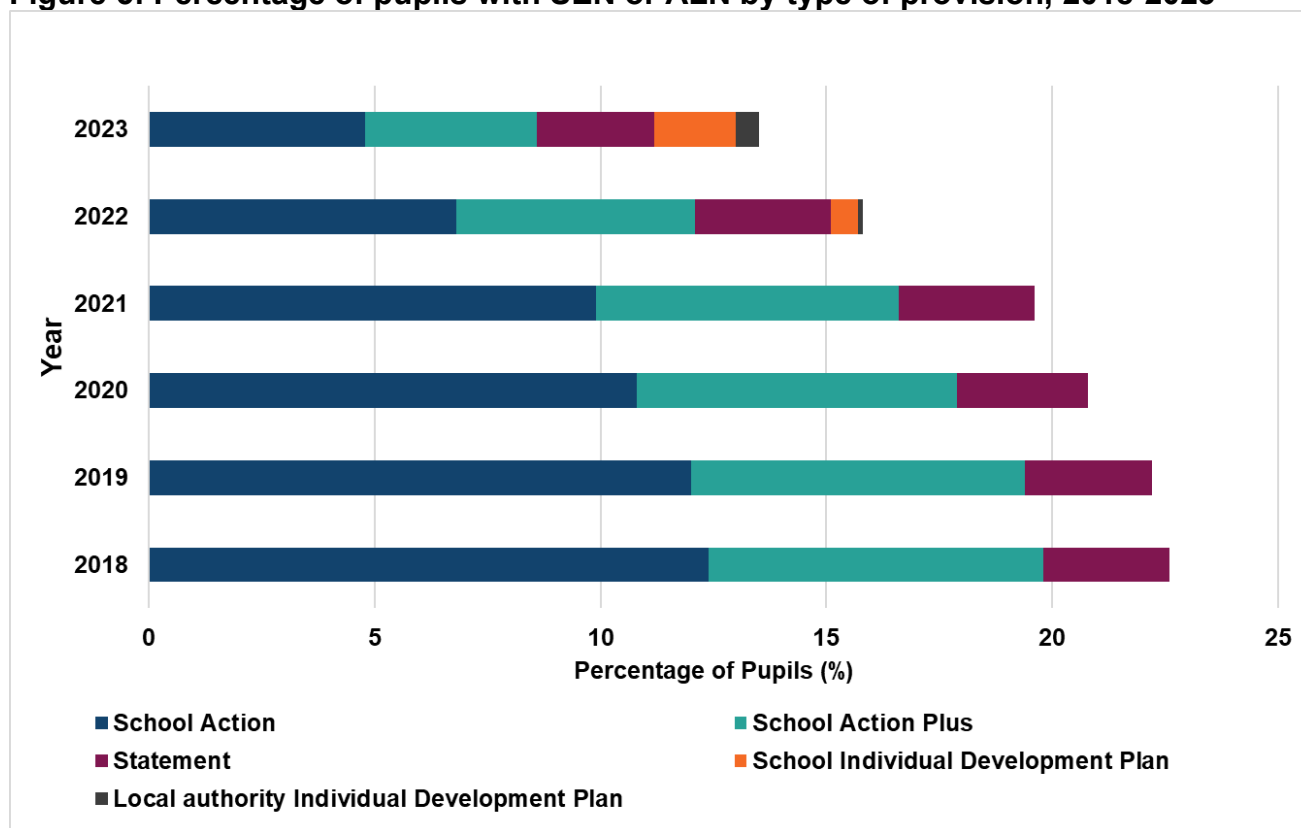
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[27] Schools' census results: January 2023

Figure 4. Percentage of pupils with each type of SEN or ALN provision, 2018-2023
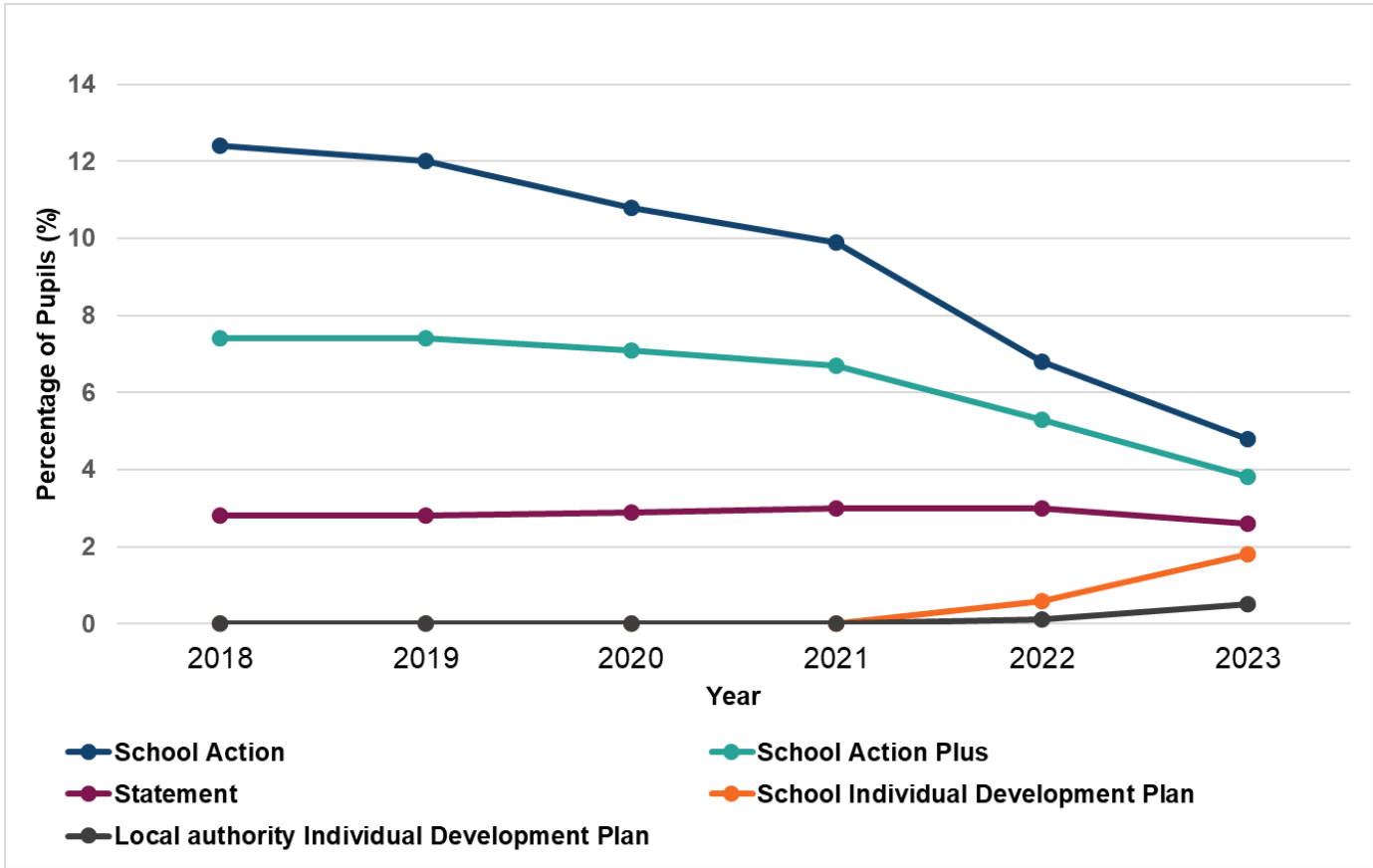
Source: StatsWales

Figure 5: Percentage of pupils with SEN or ALN by type of provision, 2018-2023

Source: StatsWales

4.46   A decrease in the percentage of pupils with all types of SEN provision is expected as children are moved from the SEN to the ALN system and, as shown in Figure 4, the largest decrease can be observed in the percentage of pupils with the following types of SEN provision: school action (SA) and school action plus (SA+). The PLASC data also shows that, as anticipated, the number of IDPs (both school and LA maintained) has increased since the introduction of the ALN Code in 2021. However, notably, the increase in IDPs is not proportionate to the decrease in the percentage of pupils with school action and school action plus provision.

4.47   A number of factors have been highlighted as potentially contributing to the observed decrease in the number of pupils with ALN/SEN over the last two years, including a systematic review by schools of their ALN/SEN registers in readiness for the rollout of the ALN system. As reported in the publication of the January 2023 school census results[28], 'analysis of the data, along with feedback from local authorities suggests that the fall in ALN/SEN pupils over the last two years is due to

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[28] Schools' census results: January 2023 (p.16)

a systematic review by schools of their ALN/SEN registers in readiness for the rollout of the ALN system. Those pupils with low level needs, who were not identified as having a recognised ALN/SEN, were removed from the register'.[29] In support of this, Estyn (2023a) also report that the past 'oversight of SEN registers at both a school and local authority level has not been strong. As a result, pupils may have remained on SEN registers for many years' (p.20) Furthermore, Estyn go on to highlight that owing to the ALN reforms, many schools have conducted a review of their SEN/ALN registers, leading to some changes.

4.48   A further factor that may have influenced ALN/SEN numbers, also highlighted in the publication of the January 2023 schools census results, is the removal of the 'General learning difficulties' category. For the 2023 schools census, 'schools were […] asked to stop using the *General learning difficulties* category and to reassess an appropriate category of need for such pupils.'[30] This category had become a catch-all for those requiring catch up support, with minor needs and/or where multiple needs existed, instead of its original intent, which was to capture learners awaiting assessment'[31]. This has reportedly[32] led to some pupils being removed from the register if they were identified as not having ALN/SEN. Estyn (2023a) also note that 'It was not uncommon that pupils who received short-term catch-up interventions for literacy and/or numeracy were categorised as having a general learning difficulty and entered on the school's SEN register as school action' (p.18).

4.49   However, it is important to note that the factors highlighted in the January 2023 school census results as potentially underpinning the fall in ALN/SEN pupils over the last two years appear to have been identified on the basis of largely anecdotal evidence (feedback from LAs) during the early implementation period. Overall, therefore, further research will be required to explore the potential contribution of these factors to the observed changes in SEN/ALN numbers.

4.50   Of note, a key assumption underpinning the ALN reforms, outlined in the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act Explanatory Memorandum was that:

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[29] Ibid.
[30] Ibid. (p.16)
[31] Ibid. (p.17)
[32] Ibid.

'The proposed definition of ALN is similar to current definitions of SEN and LDD. Thus, the number of learners who would be defined as having ALN should be the same as those who currently have SEN or LDD'.

However, the emerging evidence in relation to ALN system implementation suggests that this assumption may not be correct. More specifically, in light of the evidence presented in the previous sub-section (4.37 onwards), it is possible that, in practice, there may be inconsistences in the interpretation of the definitions of ALN and ALP, in addition to variations in how schools classify their provision. Notably, Estyn (2023a) conclude that:

'Overall [ ] despite local authorities and schools being generally clear about the provision that they make for pupils, the extent to which such provision is classed as ALP varies. 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' (Estyn 2023a, p.23).

One potential hypothesis might therefore be that this variability in the interpretation of the definitions could also be influencing SEN/ALN numbers to some extent. However, it must be emphasised that this hypothesis remains untested at present and requires thorough investigation and exploration in order to determine its validity. Nevertheless, it should be noted that concerns about the impact of the application of the ALN definition and what this might mean for IDP numbers in practice were highlighted during the consultation process for the ALN Code. More specifically, when summarising the views of the stakeholders they had engaged with to inform their response to the Welsh Government consultation on the draft ALN Code, the CYPE committee (2019) highlighted that there was some concern:

'regarding the application of the ALN definition more generally with some suggestions that resource pressures will mean pupils have to exhibit a higher level of need to be judged as having ALN and qualify for an IDP'.[33]

In light of this concern, The Committee called upon the Welsh Government:

'to unequivocally clarify in the ALN Code that there is no change to the threshold of what constitutes ALN under the new system, compared to SEN at present'.[34]

The CYPE committee's concerns therefore reinforce the need for the evaluation to investigate the extent to which variability in the interpretation and application of the definitions of ALN and ALP and resource pressures might be impacting upon

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[33] Committee Response to the Welsh Government Consultation 22 March 2019 (page 6) available at Children, Young People and Education Committee: Draft Additional Learning Needs Code
[34] Ibid (page 6)

implementation of the ALN system and by extension the number of pupils identified as having SEN/ALN.

4.51   However, it is also important to note that the education policy landscape in Wales has changed significantly since the ALN legislation was first conceived 10 years ago. Indeed evidence considered as part of this review highlights that in recent years, the educational landscape of Wales has witnessed a shift in policy focus (Conn and Davis, 2023; Knight et al., 2022; Knight and Crick, 2021; Conn and Hutt, 2020) with an increased focus on children's rights and inclusive education and moves towards inclusive education that 'prioritise the development of practices to support the inclusion of all learners'(Conn and Davis, 2023, p.4). Of particular note, the ALN system is also being implemented alongside the CfW and, importantly, both these reforms are designed to deliver an inclusive and equitable education system in Wales. Significantly, the CfW provides educational settings with the scope to develop curricula and pedagogies that are flexible, appropriate, and responsive to the individual needs of each learner and aims to enhance teaching quality so that mainstream classrooms can effectively support the progress of all students, including those with ALN.

4.52   Interestingly, research into the early implementation of CfW (Welsh Government, 2023i; Welsh Government, 2023j) reported that senior leaders in schools noted that CfW allows them to promote and focus on inclusivity. Changes in the ways that educational practitioners support ALN learners were highlighted by senior leaders in these two early CfW studies, with more strategic oversight to embed inclusivity within the class environment being brought in alongside individual supported sessions for ALN learners.

4.53   In light of the parallel implementation of the CfW and ALN reforms, and the opportunities this affords, it will be important for the evaluation to consider this wider context and explore the implications for ALN system implementation. For example, the evaluation will need to explore the effect of CfW and related changes to pedagogical practices on the number of learners identified as requiring ALP.

4.54   Whilst the data presented in Figures 4 and 5 relates to the number of pupils with SEN/ALN at a national level, from the January 2023 PLASC Data[35], it is also evident that variability in SEN/ALN numbers also exists at a regional level. Of

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[35] Pupils with additional learning or special educational needs by local authority, region and type of provision

particular note, when looking specifically at IDP numbers, the PLASC data shows that the percentage of learners with IDPs (including IDPs maintained by schools and local authorities) varies considerably across local authorities. It is important to acknowledge that this data reflects the number of IDPs in place in January 2023, and therefore the situation may have changed since then. Furthermore, several factors create challenges in comparing data between local authorities, including variations in the percentages of learners that local authorities previously had on their SEN registers and the involvement of some local authorities, but not others, in pilot activity which informed ALN policy. Nonetheless, it will be important for the evaluation fieldwork to explore the potential factors influencing the apparent regional variation in the percentage of learners with IDPs and to take this into account when selecting samples for fieldwork.

4.55   In summary, the current data available with respect to the number of learners identified as having SEN/ALN appears to contradict the original policy assumption that there would not be a significant change in the number of learners identified as having SEN/ALN following the introduction of the ALN system. It is important to note that implementation is still currently underway and thus the number of IDPs is anticipated to increase further as implementation progresses. However, a key priority for the evaluation should be to explore the potential factors influencing the observed changes in SEN/ALN numbers and regional variability thereof. There are likely to be a complex array of interconnecting factors underpinning this, and it is not possible to draw conclusions on the basis of the current evidence base. However, considering the evidence pointing to potential inconsistencies in how ALN and ALP are understood, the extent to which this is potentially impacting upon SEN/ALN numbers, including regional variation in the percentage of learners with IDPs, should be a key line of investigation for the evaluation. Finally, in light of the parallel implementation of the CfW and ALN reforms it will also be important for the evaluation to have due consideration for this wider context and to consider the implications of this for ALN system implementation.

Individual Development Plans

4.56   Person-centred IDPs, with the learner and their parent/carer at the centre of decisions, are an important part of the reformed ALN system, as illustrated in the ToC. As outlined in the ALN Code, learners with any level of additional learning

need, who require ALP to be made available to them, will be entitled to an IDP outlining their support needs. IDPs have replaced the previous SEN Statement, Individual Education Plan or Learning and Skills Plan. This section examines existing evidence that focuses on IDPs, including challenges associated with preparing plans whilst meeting statutory timescales, as well as a reported lack of clarity over who holds responsibility for IDPs.

4.57 According to Estyn (2023a) the move from statements of special educational needs to IDPs has been associated with challenges in terms of clarity and consistency. While IDPs are viewed as being more personalised and reflective of students' strengths and additional support needs, the process of developing and maintaining them takes time, and has led to a substantially increased workload for ALNCos (Estyn 2023a; Jones 2022; NAEL 2023). Jones (2022) further notes that preparing Individual Development Plans (IDPs) as required under the Act demands more time than initially anticipated, exceeding the time available for SEN Coordinators in the previous system. This has led to increased demands on ALNCos, necessitating ongoing support and resource allocation.

4.58 Both local authorities and schools have advised Estyn that there are significant pressures in meeting the statutory timescales for issuing IDPs, with the delays primarily attributed to difficulties in obtaining timely input from external agencies, particularly health. Estyn (2023a) also report that there is limited data available to indicate whether there is compliance with statutory timescales.

4.59 Similar challenges associated with IDP implementation are further discussed in the NAEL report (2023). Although the majority (73 per cent) of the school leaders who responded to the survey indicated that their school was fairly well or very well equipped to prepare and maintain an IDP, and despite respondents acknowledging the usefulness of training and support on IDPs, the NAEL report (2023) refers to challenges in working with external agencies to prepare IDPs. Other issues raised by NAEL relating to preparing IDPs include delays in information sharing, financial stress on educational institutions, staffing and capacity challenges, difficulties in managing parental expectations, and inconsistencies in IDPs. Transferring information between school-based and local authority-based IDPs was also reported as problematic which could result in inadequate support for students.

4.60 Estyn (2023a, p.26) note that 'parents and schools are not always clear on those IDPs that are to be maintained by local authorities'. Their report highlights that

schools tended to be clear that local authorities maintain the IDPs for children that are looked after and those that are dually registered, for example pupils that attend pupil referral unit. However, aside from these groups of learners, the reports notes that there appears to be 'a lack of clarity and transparency regarding those IDPs that will be maintained by local authorities. In addition, there are inconsistencies in practice. Pupils that attend local authority specialist classes may have their IDP maintained either by the local authority or the school that they attend' (Estyn, 2023a, p33). The CYPE Committee (2023a) highlighted variation across local authorities in that:

> 'there appeared to be different sets of criteria for different participants to follow when deciding who should be responsible for writing and holding the IDPs, should it be the school or the local authority? This varied in different areas fuelling frustration but also creating a lack of trust for some of the local authorities.' (CYPE Committee, 2023a, p5).

4.61   The Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA, 2023) notes that local authorities have engaged in discussions with stakeholders, including schools and ALNCos, regarding their IDP processes and that, subsequently, local authorities generally feel that ALNCos, schools, parents and learners, were clear as to whether the school or the local authority is responsible for holding (maintaining) an IDP. However, the WLGA (2023) goes on to note that some operational challenges remain and outlined the need for further support/training to be provided to schools that are experiencing difficulties with local authority IDP referrals, with a view to avoiding late referrals which might result in escalation and an increase in Tribunal work.

4.62   In summary, the evidence reviewed as part of this study indicates that the work to prepare IDPs in line with statutory timescales places significant demands on resources, most notably impacting significantly on ALNCos. Further research, as part of this evaluation, will be required to explore this issue in more depth. The literature identifies some cases in which there also appears to be a lack of clarity among practitioners over who holds responsibility for maintaining IDPs: the evidence suggests a need to explore the different approaches taken by local authorities to determine who maintains an IDP as part of this evaluation, including a focus on the communication of these different approaches to schools, parents, carers and learners.

Engaging with parents, carers and learners

4.63   The ALNET Act requires that learners' views should always be considered as part of the planning process, as well as the views of their parents and carers. The ToC also outlines the importance of involving children, young people, and their parents and carers in the ALN system. This section seeks to explore evidence regarding how this is being achieved in practice. However, it should be noted, that there is currently limited evidence available on how learners are involved in the ALN system, emphasising the need for more research on this key aspect.

4.64   The Welsh Government has long supported the use of person-centred planning approaches. In this context, the transition from the previous SEN system to the more person-centred approach introduced by the Act has been met with enthusiasm in schools and local authorities (Estyn 2023a; Jones 2022). Estyn (2023a) also observe that this has led to strengthened relationships between schools and parents. Practitioners, particularly ALNCos, commend the person-centred practice as a significant improvement in supporting ALN learners and their families. Jones (2022) notes that person-centred meetings with learners and their families foster higher levels of trust, leading to more meaningful information that informs tailored support strategies.

4.65   Concerning the information available to parents Estyn (2023a, p.10) note 'the quality and accessibility of information for parents on both council and school websites are too variable', potentially leading to confusion for parents. However, the report points to improved working relationships between schools and parents, resulting in lower levels of challenge. The report also explains that the majority of the appeals lodged with the Education Tribunal have either been conceded by local authorities or withdrawn 'which suggests that there is still much work that needs to take place between local authorities, its schools, and parents in avoiding disputes at an earlier stage' (ibid. p.10). Currently, there is no additional evidence published regarding parents' perspectives on the Education Tribunal process.

4.66   According to the NAEL (2023) study, most of the school leaders surveyed indicated that they believed their setting was well equipped to involve pupils and their parents/carers in the decision-making process. However, NAEL (2023) also reported ongoing challenges in managing parents' expectations related to provision, ensuring continuity of provision and addressing inconsistencies within IDPs. Nonetheless, it is felt that the adoption of person-centred planning has contributed

to a better understanding of the system among some parents and is supporting greater inclusivity (NAEL, 2023).

4.67   Although limited, emerging evidence in relation to parents' experiences of the ALN system was also considered as part of this review. Feedback from parents collected by SNAP Cymru[36] from November 2022 to March 2023 (SNAP Cymru 2023a, 2023b) points to concerns about delayed decision-making due to schools not adhering to timescale requirements as set out in the ALN Code. Parents also expressed unease about vague descriptions in IDPs regarding ALN and ALP and concerns about the inconsistencies between schools and local authorities in terms of their ALN provision. Challenges in gaining access to educational psychologists and in using local authorities' ALN helplines were also raised. Finally, whist some parents reported having positive relationships with schools, significant concerns were raised about access to impartial, independent information, especially for vulnerable families.

4.68   In conclusion, the evidence outlined in this section suggests that many education practitioners believe that the increased use of person-centred planning approaches has contributed to strengthened relationships between educational institutions and the parents of children with ALN. Furthermore, there is evidence to suggest that school leaders believe that they are well equipped to involve both learners and their parents or carers in decision-making processes. However, the available evidence from schools and emerging evidence from parents also points to the existence of persistent challenges, including variability in the quality and accessibility of information for parents, underscoring the need for better communication and transparency. Importantly, the fieldwork planned as part of the next phase of this evaluation (particularly the ALN area studies) will provide further opportunities to explore parents', carers' and learners' experiences of the ALN system from the perspective of these groups.

Collaboration and cluster-working

4.69   Collaboration and multi-agency working have emerged as vital components of ALN implementation. As noted in the ToC, the ALN system requires that services work together to ensure ALN is identified early, and that co-ordinated support is put in

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[36] [Snap Cymru website](#)

place to support children and young people. This section reviews current evidence, particularly found in the recent reports by Estyn (2023a) and NAEL (2023) relating to the extent to which agencies collaborate and share information. Drawing on the available evidence, this section goes on to highlight developments as well as ongoing challenges to fostering effective collaboration between practitioners and partners across the system.

4.70 According to Estyn's (2023) thematic report, many schools have developed positive collaborative approaches with local authorities. The report also highlights notable progress in collaboration between local authorities and early years providers since the introduction of the early years additional learning needs officer role. Additionally, the schools in the thematic review appreciated the support they receive from special schools. However, the report notes that collaboration and information sharing between agencies is too variable overall. Challenges persist in accessing timely support from health services, and school reported to Estyn that accessing support from speech and language services, neurodevelopmental teams and child and adolescent mental health services is a challenge. Estyn also report that it is not clear whether local authorities' social services departments, in their role of supporting looked after children, have a secure enough understanding of ALNET.

4.71 The NAEL (2023) report also identifies some challenges related to multi-agency working. While local authority services have generally become more engaged since the introduction of ALNET, respondents to the NAEL (2023) survey reported on other services, such as health, not having the capacity to engage with educational settings. Challenges reported include shortages of professionals, and the need for upskilling. Expanding on the challenges in working with health, participants in the NAEL study wanted to find out more about the roles and responsibilities of the DECLOs. All of the DECLOs interviewed as part of the NAEL study identified the need for health and education to work together and for there to be a shared understanding of roles and processes. The Welsh Government also report that local authorities have concerns around the capacity of health professionals to engage consistently in the IDP process, noting that 'the effectiveness of partnership working between LAs and health boards is variable but is continuing to improve' (Welsh Government 2023k, p.8).

4.72 Estyn (2023a, p.10) also reports that collaboration with health services can be challenging and that 'colleagues in other agencies, particularly health, have greatest

difficulty in providing advice and information [for IDPs] within the given timescales'. In addition, it was also noted in this report that the commitment health authorities make to additional learning provision was too variable. The introduction of the DECLO role was welcomed by those interviewed for the thematic report although its impact remains somewhat unclear. (Estyn plans to examine the role of the DECLO in the second phase of its thematic review).

4.73   Estyn (2023a) also report on challenges in coordinating with education and child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) which could potentially compromise support for students with ALN, particularly concerning timely access to services. Furthermore, ongoing funding pressures in the NHS were noted, which could create resource allocation challenges, particularly concerning the increasing number of pupils in PRUs since the pandemic. Respondents to the NAEL (2023) research highlight the need for a better understanding of the role of health services in constructing IDPs, when a medical or health need impacts on learning. Welsh Government (2023k, p.8) also note that there are challenges in working consistently across health boards given that each one serves multiple local authorities and that 'typically, each LA has different operational practices, different information management systems and have different ways of supporting ALN. Both health boards and LAs will need to look for ways to adjust their approaches to ensure cooperative working.' However, it is important to reiterate that the current evidence on the perspective of health practitioners regarding multi-agency collaboration (and more generally) is limited and will need to be explored further in this evaluation.

4.74   Collaboration and information sharing also takes place between educational settings, particularly as learners transition between settings. Challenges in this area were highlighted in the NAEL (2023) report, with just over half of the school leaders surveyed reporting difficulties when accommodating ALN learners from other educational settings. Responses emphasised the issue of delayed or missing paperwork, which consequently impacts on both transitions and IDPs. The feedback referred to the inadequacy of information provided by previous educational settings, including during transition from pre-school to primary, from primary to secondary, and from secondary to further education. The report also noted concerns about the scarcity and quality of the paperwork to enable assessments to be carried out effectively.

4.75   Evidence indicates that school cluster-based working has facilitated successful collaboration, supporting the implementation of the ALN reforms. The NAEL (2023) report highlights the positive impact of cluster group support and training, drawing on survey responses from senior leaders. This report also found that practitioners value the supportive environment provided by clusters and the opportunities to share resources in cluster meetings. Based on survey responses from a sample of senior leaders NAEL report that cluster working is valuable to support problem-solving, networking, and staying updated on the latest ALN implementation guidance. Participants in the CYPE Committee (2023a) research also felt that there have been stronger connections and support within clusters around ALN reform. While acknowledging the benefits that cluster work has afforded schools within their sample, Estyn (2023) raise concerns that funding for the continuation of this coordinated approach is insecure however: '[Schools] appreciate the advice and guidance provided by cluster leads and the opportunities to work with colleagues in their school cluster. However, the longer-term funding of the co-ordinated approach to cluster working is unclear and this threatens the sustainability of this approach (Estyn, 2023, p.29)'.

4.76   To summarise, the evidence indicates that, while there are examples where schools have developed positive collaborative approaches with local authorities, collaboration and information sharing between agencies is too variable overall. The introduction of key roles, such as the early years additional learning needs officer role and DECLOs appear to have been welcomed by education practitioners but evidence suggests that there are ongoing issues of capacity and that this may be hindering the ability of health partners to engage fully with education settings. Additionally, evidence indicates that, while cluster working between education settings is valued by practitioners (e.g. for resource sharing, training, and being a supportive environment), there are challenges in the sharing of information during transitions from one educational setting to another. Based on the current evidence available, there is a need for the evaluation to examine how partners across the ALN system collaborate and share information to ensure effective planning and provision that meets learners' needs. The evaluation should prioritise understanding the features of effective collaboration and identifying what factors facilitate and inhibit effective joint working, including between education and health professionals.

Post-16 learners

4.77   While many of the challenges and considerations discussed in this chapter are relevant across all educational settings and age groups, there are distinct issues reported in the literature specific to implementation in the post-16 phase of education which are explored in this section.

4.78   Welsh Ministers currently secure and fund post-16 specialist placements for young people whose needs cannot be met by local mainstream provision in accordance with their duties under the Learning and Skills Act 2000. Under the ALNET Act, this responsibility will transfer from Welsh Ministers to local authorities. This transfer of responsibility is underway, with a phased transition process expected to be completed by the end of the 2024/2025 school year. Under the new arrangements, local authorities will now be responsible for making informed decisions about funding placements for learners with the most complex needs attending independent specialist post-16 institutions (ISPIs). According to Estyn's thematic report (2023), local authority strategies for post-16 learners with ALN are still in the early stages of development. There is also limited knowledge about ISPIs among those local authorities, resulting in a lack of engagement with them.

4.79   The ALN Code notes that a young person is entitled to up to two years of further education or training. Beyond this, where a young person wishes to continue in further education beyond two years, the local authority must decide whether the young person has reasonable needs for further education and training, taking into account the factors set out in Schedule 1 of the Additional Learning Needs (Wales) Regulations 2021. Multiple sources (the Steering Group Issue Paper, January 2023 and TSANA[37]) refer to concerns about the interpretation of the two-year entitlement to further education and training for post-16 learners and the determination of reasonable need for additional education or training after the two years. TSANA (2023a, 2023b) state that, 'by the very nature of their learning disabilities and difficulties these learners take longer to learn, and this should be reflected in policy' so that 'processes accommodate programmes longer than 2 years duration as appropriate'. TSANA (2023a) also raise concerns about the shift in decision-making responsibility from Welsh Government to local authorities for placements in

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[37] TSANA, the Third Sector Additional Needs Alliance is a coalition of third-sector organisations working with, supporting and representing children and young people with additional learning needs. It is facilitated by Children in Wales.

specialist further education colleges as they fear that this change might jeopardise the opportunities for young people with complex ALN to access further education, especially for those with low incidence and complex needs that cannot be met by FEIs. They also ask for clearer guidance to ensure that the inability of a FEI to meet a learner's needs does not imply that the learner's additional learning needs cannot be accommodated. They are concerned that this lack of clarity may lead to stopping IDPs too early.

4.80   Colegau Cymru (2022) raise concerns regarding limited workforce capacity to support ALN learners in further education. Although the number of ALN-focused staff increased in most colleges over the two years up to 2022, Colegau Cymru suggest that colleges may struggle to meet the needs of ALN learners without a guarantee of further ongoing funding. This raises questions about colleges' ability to sustain support for learners with ALN in the long term; Colegau Cymru speculate 'if no further funding is identified, they may feel forced to manage their provision by limiting the number of IDPs' (p.6). Additionally, they note that challenges persist in meeting increasingly complex needs, as FEIs are unlikely to be able to meet the level of need that many local authorities would prefer. Furthermore, despite efforts to establish consistent transition protocols, Information Sharing Protocols (ISPs), and systems for IDP referral, there is still some work to be done on these procedures.

4.81   In summary, this section has outlined challenges specific to ALN in the post-16 phase of education. The evidence shows that concerns have been raised about the interpretation of the two-year entitlement to further education and training, particularly for learners with complex needs, and the limited evidence available emphasises that ensuring consistency in transition protocols and sufficient capacity in further education institutions are priorities requiring ongoing attention. The emerging evidence, therefore, underscores the need for the evaluation to carry out research on the interpretation of post-16 entitlements and on the consistency of ALN system implementation for this age group.

Welsh-medium provision

4.82   One of the principles of the ALN system is developing a bilingual system. The literature highlights several key issues related to delivering ALP through the medium of Welsh, as set out in this section.

4.83   A joint report by the Children's Commissioner for Wales and the Welsh Language Commissioner highlighted that the current ALN system in Wales does not fully meet the needs of a bilingual nation. The report noted that few Welsh Language in Education Strategic Plans (WESPs)[38] provided a clear and detailed overview of ALN provision in Welsh. It highlighted that several local authorities admitted to not fully understanding the need for Welsh medium ALP, leading to potential gaps in meeting the requirements set out in the Act and ALN Code (Children's Commissioner for Wales and Welsh Language Commissioner, 2023).

4.84   From the available literature, the availability of resources to deliver Welsh medium ALN provision emerges as a key theme. For example, Welsh-medium providers have expressed concerns regarding the availability of Welsh language resources to support ALN work, indicating potential disparities in resource provision (Estyn, 2023a). Additionally, recruitment challenges for Welsh-medium staff were described as having reached crisis point, particularly in the case of classroom support/assistants. NAEL's research reported that some schools, especially those in rural areas and including Welsh-medium schools, struggled to recruit qualified staff, impacting the quality of support available for ALN learners in those settings (NAEL, 2023).

4.85   In summary, based on the evidence reviewed there are clear challenges to realising the core aim of creating a bilingual ALN system. These challenges include weaknesses in strategic planning to support and develop Welsh-medium ALP, limited Welsh language resources, and a shortage of qualified staff able to support ALN learners through the medium of Welsh. The evaluation will need to explore how these issues are being addressed and whether there is effective implementation of the ALN system in Welsh-medium settings.

Conclusion

4.86   This review of evidence has sought to summarise and highlight many of the key issues and considerations relating to the implementation of the ALN reforms. As noted previously, it is important to acknowledge that the available evidence regarding ALN system implementation remains relatively limited and that, at

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[38] A Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP) is a local authority's programme to improve planning and development of Welsh-medium education provision in its area. Plans available at Welsh in Education Strategic Plans 2022 to 2032

present, perspectives from mainstream primary and secondary schools dominate. In time, it is hoped that further evidence drawing on the experiences of a wider range of education settings (including early years and post-16 settings), partners in health, local authorities as well as parents, carers, and learners, will become available; this should provide greater insight into the challenges and implications for these stakeholders in the implementation of the ALN reforms. As outlined in the summaries of each sub-section above, key areas of focus will be prioritised in the next stage of the evaluation, as set out in Chapter 6.

5. Data mapping

5.1 This section presents the findings of the data mapping process which examined the data that is available against the inputs, activities, outcomes and impacts set out in the ToC presented in Section 3 of this report, namely:

- inputs and activities

- short term (and ongoing) outcomes

- ALN system implementation

- medium-term outcomes for children, young people, parents/carers and the ALN system

- long-term impacts.

5.2 Annex C[39] includes a description of data sources that have been identified under each of the above headings and the extent to which these sources enable us to answer research and evaluation questions which emerge from the ToC. The data sources include government administrative datasets, national participation and attainment data, education survey data and ad hoc research and evaluation evidence. These data sources are managed by a variety of organisations including Welsh Government and other stakeholders. For some of the data sources identified, regular data, reports or statistical bulletins are published, while some are ad hoc publications and others are not routinely published.

5.3 Many data sources have been identified which provide insights into specific elements of the ToC. However, few of the sources examine the causal links between items, and this therefore limits the extent to which the ToC can be tested using existing sources of secondary data.

Overview of data mapping

5.4 Table 3 provides an overview of the findings of the data mapping. It sets out the following:

- Columns A and B set out the sections and items from the ToC

- Column C presents corresponding research questions relating to each item in the ToC and its contribution to subsequent items in the causal chain

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[39] Annex C - to be included in version 2 to be published in February 2024

- These questions relate to many of the assumptions implicit in the ToC, as set out in Chapter 2.

- Column D notes the main data sources that have been identified through the data mapping process

- Column E shows the extent to which the available data would enable the questions in Column C to be answered at national level using secondary data.[40] . For the purposes of this data mapping exercise, data availability has been classified as follows:

   - **Not at all.** The data mapping has not identified any secondary evidence that enables the research question(s) to be answered

   - **Limited.** There is some evidence available in relation to the relevant inputs or activities in the ToC (e.g. for some groups of people or sectors) but not on the short, medium or longer-term outcomes, nor examining the causal links between items in the ToC

   - **Partial.** There is some evidence available in relation to the inputs, activities and on relevant short, medium or longer-term outcomes in the ToC, but not on the causal links between the inputs and activities and these outcomes

   - **Fully.** The secondary evidence enables the research question(s) to be answered.

- Column E illustrates that, in most cases, current data provide only a limited or partial evidence base in relation to ALN system implementation and impacts thereof. None of the existing data sources identified through this data mapping exercise, enable the research questions outlined in Table 3 to be answered fully.

   - Annex C presents a more detailed description of each of the sources identified against items of the ToC, and provide further detail on how the findings in column D have been derived.

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[40] Secondary data includes statistics and survey data (both regular and ad hoc) collected by Welsh Government and stakeholder organisations as well as reports based on qualitative evidence, such as reviews, evaluation reports and school inspection reports.

- Column F indicates which phases of the evaluation should seek to gather evidence against each research question

  - In most cases this shows that Phases 2-5 should each gather some evidence that relates to each question.

The shaded colours used in Table 3 correspond to those used in the sections of the ToC illustrations in Chapter 2.

Table 3. Summary of data mapping findings

A. ToC section	B. ToC item	C. Research questions relating to the ToC [Note: other questions may be considered as part of the evaluation, including questions relating to the key assumptions underpinning the ToC]	D. Main data sources identified as being relevant[41]	E. Extent to which data enables the questions to be answered nationally	F. To be explored in which evaluation phases?
Inputs and activities	Funding	To what extent does funding for the ALN system contribute towards improving the short-term outcomes in the ToC, including: o parents' and carers' awareness and understanding of the ALN system? o practitioners' awareness, knowledge and understanding of the ALN system? o practitioners' skills and confidence to support the ALN system? o Improved collaboration and knowledge sharing between professionals and sectors? Is there sufficient resource, capacity and support available to realise the aims of the reforms?	Budgeted Expenditure on SEN Provision: 2023-24 (WG, 2023a) Estyn thematic report (Estyn, 2023a) NAEL survey report (NAEL, 2023)	Limited	2 & 4
	Information, advice and guidance about the ALN system	To what extent does the information, advice and guidance on the ALN system contribute towards improving: o parents' awareness and understanding of the ALN system? o practitioners' awareness, knowledge and understanding of the ALN system? o practitioners' skills, confidence and capabilities to support the ALN system? Is there equity of access to information and support?	Estyn thematic report (Estyn, 2023a) Supplementary guidance for inspecting ALN in non-maintained settings (Estyn and CIW, 2022) ALN Implementation Progress Report (Jones, 2022)	Limited	2 – 5
	Workforce development and professional	To what extent does workforce development and professional learning for practitioners contribute towards improving: o practitioners' awareness, knowledge and understanding of the ALN system?	Higher Education Statistics Agency	Limited	2 – 5

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[41] In Table 3, report titles have been shortened for presentational reasons (full references are in Annex B). WG is used to refer to Welsh Government in the table.

A. ToC section	B. ToC item	C. Research questions relating to the ToC [Note: other questions may be considered as part of the evaluation, including questions relating to the key assumptions underpinning the ToC]	D. Main data sources identified as being relevant[41]	E. Extent to which data enables the questions to be answered nationally	F. To be explored in which evaluation phases?
	learning for practitioners and leaders	o practitioners' skills, confidence and capabilities to support the ALN system? Is there equity of access to professional learning? Do practitioners understand the new ways of working intrinsic to the ALN reforms? Are practitioners committed to the new ways of working intrinsic to the ALN reforms? Do leaders and teachers have the knowledge and skills to ensure learners with ALN have appropriate access to the curriculum?	(HESA) Student Record Education Workforce Council ITE student results Initial teacher education programmes: accreditation criteria (WG, 2023b) Estyn thematic report (Estyn, 2023a) ALN Implementation Progress Report (Jones, 2022)		
	Collaborative activity including national and regional networks	To what extent does collaborative activity, including national and regional networks, contribute towards improving: o collaboration and sharing of knowledge between professionals, organisations, sectors? o practitioners' awareness, knowledge and understanding of the ALN system? o practitioners' skills, confidence and capabilities to support the ALN system?	NAEL survey report (NAEL, 2023) Colleges' Readiness for the Implementation of the ALN Act (Colegau Cymru, 2022) Estyn thematic report (Estyn, 2023a)	Limited	2 – 5
	Work of transformation leads; creation	To what extent has the work of transformation leads and creation of new statutory roles contributed towards improving: o collaboration and sharing of knowledge between professionals, organisations, sectors?	Estyn thematic report (Estyn, 2023a)	Limited	2 & 4

A. ToC section	B. ToC item	C. Research questions relating to the ToC [Note: other questions may be considered as part of the evaluation, including questions relating to the key assumptions underpinning the ToC]	D. Main data sources identified as being relevant[41]	E. Extent to which data enables the questions to be answered nationally	F. To be explored in which evaluation phases?
	of new statutory roles	o practitioners' awareness, knowledge and understanding of the ALN system? o practitioners' skills, confidence and capabilities to support the ALN system?	ALN Implementation Progress Report (Jones, 2022)		
Short term (and ongoing) outcomes	Improved awareness and understanding of the ALN system for children, young people parents and carers	To what extent do the inputs and activities support increased awareness and understanding of the ALN system for children, young people parents and carers?	CYPE Committee evidence (TSANA, 2023) SNAP (2023b) From SEN to ALN: Summary Report 2022-2023 (Unpublished)	Limited	2 – 5
	Improved awareness, knowledge, understanding of ALN system for practitioners	To what extent do the inputs and activities support increased awareness and understanding of the ALN system for practitioners?	NAEL survey report (NAEL, 2023) Estyn thematic report (Estyn, 2023a) Supplementary guidance for inspecting ALN in non-maintained settings (Estyn and CIW, 2022)	Partial	2 – 5
	Improved practitioner skills and confidence to support the ALN system	To what extent do the inputs and activities support increased skills and confidence among practitioners to support the ALN system for practitioners?	NAEL survey report (NAEL, 2023) Estyn thematic report (Estyn, 2023a) Supplementary guidance for	Partial	2 – 5

A. ToC section	B. ToC item	C. Research questions relating to the ToC [Note: other questions may be considered as part of the evaluation, including questions relating to the key assumptions underpinning the ToC]	D. Main data sources identified as being relevant[41]	E. Extent to which data enables the questions to be answered nationally	F. To be explored in which evaluation phases?
			inspecting ALN in non-maintained settings (Estyn and CIW, 2022)		
	Improved classroom practice	To what extent do the inputs and activities support improved classroom practice?	Guidance for Inspectors: maintained schools and PRUs Estyn (2023b) Supplementary guidance for inspecting ALN in non-maintained settings (Estyn and CIW, 2022)	Partial	2 – 5
	System-wide: statutory roles in place	To what extent have statutory roles been established?	School Workforce Annual Census (SWAC), WG	Partial	2 – 5
	System-wide: Improved collaboration and sharing of knowledge between professionals, organisations, sectors	Do the inputs and activities support Improved collaboration and sharing of knowledge between professionals, organisations and sectors?	NAEL survey report (NAEL, 2023) Estyn thematic report (Estyn, 2023a)	Limited	2 – 5
	Most children and young	Are the majority of children and young people with ALN participating in mainstream education?	Pupil Level Annual School Census	Partial	2–5

A. ToC section	B. ToC item	C. Research questions relating to the ToC [Note: other questions may be considered as part of the evaluation, including questions relating to the key assumptions underpinning the ToC]	D. Main data sources identified as being relevant[41]	E. Extent to which data enables the questions to be answered nationally	F. To be explored in which evaluation phases?
Assumptions relating to implementation	people with ALN participate in mainstream education and have access to an education that meets their needs	Do the majority of children and young people with ALN have access to an education that meets their needs?	(PLASC) and Independent school PLASC (based on STATS1 returns to WG) Absenteeism data (WG, 2023g) EOTAS data (WG, 2023c) WG exclusions data (WG, 2022a) Lifelong Learning Wales Record (LLWR), WG LA Childcare Sufficiency Assessments		
	The ALN system aligns with wider reforms and strategic priorities which complement implementation and contribute to desired outcomes	To what extent does the ALN system align with wider reforms and strategic priorities which complement implementation and contribute to desired outcomes?	Estyn thematic report (Estyn, 2023a) Research on the early implementation of CfW (WG, 2023j)	Partial	2–5

A. ToC section	B. ToC item	C. Research questions relating to the ToC [Note: other questions may be considered as part of the evaluation, including questions relating to the key assumptions underpinning the ToC]	D. Main data sources identified as being relevant[41]	E. Extent to which data enables the questions to be answered nationally	F. To be explored in which evaluation phases?
ALN system implementation	Unified plan: IDPs are person-centred, based on collaboration	To what extent are IDPs being developed in a person-centred way, based on collaboration?	PLASC, WG NAEL survey report (NAEL, 2023)	Limited	2 – 5
	Views of children, young people parents and carers are central to planning and provision	To what extent are the views of children, young people parents and carers central to planning and provision?	Estyn thematic report (Estyn, 2023a) Education Tribunal Wales	Limited	2 – 5
	ALP meets the needs of children and young people and is consistent with ALN Code	To what extent is ALP meeting the needs of children and young people? To what extent is ALP consistent with ALN Code?	Estyn thematic report (Estyn, 2023a) Education Tribunal Wales	Limited	2 – 5
	Services work together to deliver efficient, effective, children and young people-centred support (education,	To what extent are services (education, health & social services) working together to deliver efficient, effective, children and young people-centred support? How effectively are services working together to ensure ALN are identified early and co-ordinated support is made available to meet needs?	Estyn thematic report (Estyn, 2023a)	Limited	2 – 5

A. ToC section	B. ToC item	C. Research questions relating to the ToC [Note: other questions may be considered as part of the evaluation, including questions relating to the key assumptions underpinning the ToC]	D. Main data sources identified as being relevant[41]	E. Extent to which data enables the questions to be answered nationally	F. To be explored in which evaluation phases?
	health & social services)				
	Information is shared effectively between practitioners and organisations	To what extent Is information being shared effectively between practitioners and organisations?	Estyn thematic report (Estyn, 2023a)	Limited	2 – 5
	Timely assessment, planning and interventions	To what extent are assessments, planning processes and interventions being undertaken in a timely way?	Estyn thematic report (Estyn, 2023a) NAEL survey report (NAEL, 2023)	Limited	2 – 5
	Review processes in place for IDPs and ALP	To what extent are effective review processes in place for IDPs and ALP?	None identified	Not at all	2 – 5
	Provision of independent advocacy services	To what extent are independent advocacy services available and provided to children, young people, parents and carers?	Estyn thematic report (Estyn, 2023a) CYPE Committee evidence (TSANA, 2023)	Limited	2 – 5
	Clear and consistent rights of appeal are in place	To what extent are there clear and consistent rights of appeal in place?	Estyn thematic report (Estyn, 2023a) Education Tribunal Wales data	Limited	2 – 5

A. ToC section	B. ToC item	C. Research questions relating to the ToC [Note: other questions may be considered as part of the evaluation, including questions relating to the key assumptions underpinning the ToC]	D. Main data sources identified as being relevant[41]	E. Extent to which data enables the questions to be answered nationally	F. To be explored in which evaluation phases?
			(Education Tribunal Wales, 2022)		
	A bilingual system: the need for ALP in Welsh is documented and all reasonable steps are taken to secure provision	To what extent is there a bilingual system in place where the need for ALP in Welsh is documented and all reasonable steps are taken to secure provision?	NAEL survey report (NAEL, 2023)	Limited	2 – 5
Medium-term outcomes for children, young people, parents/carers and the ALN system	Increased participation of children and young people in the planning process	To what extent is ALN system implementation contributing towards increased participation of children and young people as part of the planning process?	Estyn thematic report (Estyn, 2023a) Education Tribunal Wales data	Partial	2 – 5
	Improved experiences for children and young people	To what extent is ALN system implementation contributing towards improved experiences for children and young people?	Estyn thematic report (Estyn, 2023a) Education Tribunal Wales	Limited	2 – 5
	High aspirations and improved outcomes (including	To what extent is ALN system implementation contributing towards high aspirations for children and young people and improved outcomes (including progress and attainment)?	Patterns in reading and numeracy attainment: from 2018/19 to 2022/23 (WG, 2023n)	Partial	2 – 5

A. ToC section	B. ToC item	C. Research questions relating to the ToC [Note: other questions may be considered as part of the evaluation, including questions relating to the key assumptions underpinning the ToC]	D. Main data sources identified as being relevant[41]	E. Extent to which data enables the questions to be answered nationally	F. To be explored in which evaluation phases?
	progress and attainment)		GCSE entries and results pupils in Year 11 by SEN provision (WG, 2023o) A level entries and results (pupils aged 17 only) by SEN provision (WG, 2022b) Consistent performance measures for post-16 learning (achievement): August 2021 to July 2022 (WG, 2023c) Absenteeism data (WG, 2023g)		
	Positive social relationships; emotional resilience and stability	To what extent is ALN system implementation contributing towards positive social relationships; emotional resilience and stability for children and young people	None identified	Not at all	2 – 5
	Improved experiences for parents and carers Greater agency and	To what extent is ALN system implementation contributing towards: • Improved experiences for parents and carers? • Greater agency and ownership for parents and carers?	SNAP Cymru Engagement with parents: report of January 2023 workshops (SNAP Cymru, 2023a)	Not at all	2 – 5

A. ToC section	B. ToC item	C. Research questions relating to the ToC [Note: other questions may be considered as part of the evaluation, including questions relating to the key assumptions underpinning the ToC]	D. Main data sources identified as being relevant[41]	E. Extent to which data enables the questions to be answered nationally	F. To be explored in which evaluation phases?
	ownership for parents and carers		SNAP Cymru (2023b) From SEN to ALN: Summary Report 2022-2023 (Unpublished) National Survey for Wales		
	Improved experiences for practitioners (job satisfaction, retention)	To what extent is ALN system implementation contributing towards improved experiences among practitioners (job satisfaction, retention)?	NAEL survey report (NAEL, 2023) National education workforce survey (Education Workforce Council, 2021) (2023 for FE)	Not at all	2 – 5
	Increased collaboration & integration Inclusive, fair & transparent system Increased trust and public confidence A less adversarial system: fewer disagreements, earlier	To what extent is ALN system implementation contributing towards: • Increased collaboration & integration • Inclusive, fair & transparent system • Increased trust and public confidence • A less adversarial system: fewer disagreements, earlier disagreement resolution • Learners access ALP in Welsh where needs are identified	Estyn thematic report (Estyn, 2023a) NAEL survey report (NAEL, 2023) Education Tribunal Wales data	Limited	2 – 5

A. ToC section	B. ToC item	C. Research questions relating to the ToC [Note: other questions may be considered as part of the evaluation, including questions relating to the key assumptions underpinning the ToC]	D. Main data sources identified as being relevant[41]	E. Extent to which data enables the questions to be answered nationally	F. To be explored in which evaluation phases?
	disagreement resolution Learners access ALP in Welsh where needs are identified				
Long-term impacts	Improved transition between phases of education	To what extent is ALN system implementation contributing towards improved transition between phases of education?	None identified	Not at all	4 & 5
	Improved transition between mainstream and specialist provision	To what extent is ALN system implementation contributing towards improved transition between mainstream and specialist provision?	None identified	Not at all	4 & 5
	Achievement of full potential	To what extent is ALN system implementation contributing towards children and young people achieving their full potential?	None identified	Not at all	4 & 5
	Improved employability	To what extent is ALN system implementation contributing towards improving the employability of young people?	Longitudinal Education Outcomes (LEO) Study	Partial	4 & 5
	WFGA goals	To what extent is ALN system implementation contributing towards the achievement of WFGA goals?	WG national indicators	Not at all	4 & 5

Summary and implications for evaluation

5.6   The findings from the data mapping show that there is currently either a limited or partial evidence base for answering the majority of the research questions set out in Table 3. As noted earlier in this section, none of the existing data sources identified through this data mapping exercise, enable the research questions outlined in Table 3 to be answered fully.

5.7   There are several gaps in the evidence base, particularly data that illustrate the experiences of learners, parents and carers of the ALN system. While emerging sources of evidence exist in relation to the views of education practitioners (Estyn, 2023a; NAEL, 2023), there are gaps in terms of the views of professionals in local authorities, the health sector, early years and post-16 settings. This shows that the evaluation will need to gather evidence from these audiences during its next phases. Specific gaps have also been identified in terms of the available data against individual items in the ToC, and the extent to which the inputs and activities contribute to the short, medium and long-term outcomes. The following recommendations, for the evaluation and for the Welsh Government's wider research activity, are therefore made based on the findings above.

5.8   In relation to the inputs, activities and short-term outcomes set out in the ToC, the evaluation should consider:

- examining how ALN funding is used by organisations and settings, and the extent to which funded activities are supporting the short-term outcomes set out in the ToC. Qualitative views of practitioners and stakeholders on this issue could be examined through the area studies.

- the variations in the percentage of funding delegated to schools and how this influences local implementation. This should be considered in selecting samples for the area studies.

- gathering information on the extent to which parents and carers and practitioners in education and health settings have accessed information, advice and guidance about the ALN system, and their views on it (see data relating to short-term outcomes)

- gathering evidence from practitioners in all sectors on the extent to which they believe workforce development and professional learning help develop

their awareness, knowledge and understanding of the ALN system as well as the skills and confidence to support it.

- o additionally, the findings suggest a need to engage health professionals on the extent to which they have accessed specific workforce development relating to the ALN system.

- examining the extent to which collaborative activity is taking place within and between sectors and how it contributes to the short-term outcomes set out in the ToC.

  - o this should include views on the effectiveness of collaboration and whether it has improved - including the sharing of knowledge between professionals, organisations and across sectors –as part of the fieldwork with practitioners, professionals and senior leaders

- gathering practitioner views on the outcomes of transformation activities and creation of statutory new roles

- exploring explore children, young people, parents and carers' awareness and understanding of the ALN system

5.9 In relation to ALN system implementation, the medium and long-term outcomes set out in the ToC, the evaluation should consider:

- gathering data on the perspectives of children and young people, parents and carers and practitioners about the extent to which the process of developing IDPs is considered to be person-centred and based on collaboration.

- exploring during the fieldwork with children, young people, parents and carers to what extent.

  - o the views of children, young people parents and carers central to planning and provision?

  - o ALP is meeting the needs of children and young people and consistent with the ALN Code?

  - o are services (education, health & social services) working together to deliver efficient, effective, children and young people-centred support?

- is information being shared effectively between practitioners and organisations?

- there are clear and consistent rights of appeal in place?

- there is there a bilingual system in place where the need for ALP in Welsh is documented and all reasonable steps are taken to secure provision?

- whether ALN system implementation is supporting the creation of a less adversarial system?

- exploring to what extent are effective review processes in place for IDPs and ALP

- exploring with local authorities the extent to which independent advocacy services are provided across Wales and gather the perspectives of parents and carers on this, particularly the extent to which it influences their experiences of the ALN system

- gathering data on the perceptions of children, young people, parents, carers and practitioners on the extent to which the ALN system is enabling them to access mainstream education and an education that meets their need

- gathering the views of practitioners and professionals on the extent to which the ALN system aligns with wider reforms and strategic priorities

- gathering the views of children and young people (as well as practitioners, parents and carers) on the extent to which the ALN system has improved the participation of young people in decision-making that affects the, and in different aspects of the ALN system

- gathering data from learners on these medium-term outcomes for learners as part of the qualitative and survey-based methods

- gathering the views of practitioners and professionals on whether ALN system implementation is contributing towards improved practitioner experiences (e.g. job satisfaction, retention)

- gathering the views of children, young people, parents, carers and practitioners on their experiences of transition

- gathering the views of children, young people, parents, carers and practitioners on the extent to which the ALN system contributes to learners achieving their full potential.

5.10   Alongside the evaluation, the Welsh Government should consider:

- undertaking further research into how local authorities determine and allocate funding for ALN, for example by examining local authority budgets and funding formulae for ALN

- reviewing local authorities' principles documents, where these have been developed

- reviewing evidence from inspection reports by Estyn and CIW reports to consider to what extent the inputs and activities of the ALN system are supporting improved classroom practice

- whether other stakeholders should be engaged as part of the evaluation process or as part of its wider research activity, particularly in relation to whether there are clear and consistent rights of appeal in place

- continuing to monitor absenteeism data according to different ALN provision types during this evaluation, particularly to consider whether absenteeism data improves among those being supported under the new ALN system.

6. Implications for the next steps of the evaluation

6.1 This chapter summarises the evidence base presented in Chapters 4 and 5, highlights the main gaps identified and sets out the implications for the evaluation.

Evidence base: summary

6.2 The evidence review (see Chapter 4) and data mapping (see Chapter 5) illustrate that there is a range of sources of evidence on the **rationale** for the ALN system, the **inputs and activities** that have influenced ALN system implementation to date and the progress made in **implementing the ALN system**. These include government administrative datasets, national surveys and ad hoc research studies. Several secondary data sources are identified in Chapter 5 which will need to be continually revisited during the evaluation to understand how ALN system implementation is progressing.

6.3 Chapters 4 and 5 also identify emerging evidence of how the inputs and activities in the ToC are beginning to influence the **short and medium-term outcomes** for children, young people, parents, carers and practitioners as well as the whole system. At this stage, the evidence base is largely focused on the views of practitioners in education settings, therefore providing a limited or partial picture of progress.

Gaps in the evidence base

6.4 The findings of this scoping phase indicate that the main gaps in the evidence base are:

- a lack of evidence examining the causal links between items in the ToC (e.g., between inputs and short-term outcomes)
    - o in particular, a lack of data on the perceptions of children, young people, parents and carers on how ALN system implementation is influencing their experiences and outcomes
- a lack of data on the perceptions of practitioners and professionals, particularly in local authorities, from early years settings, LHBs and FEIs, on:
    - o how ALN system implementation is progressing in practice
    - o what the enablers of, and barriers to, implementation are

- a lack of data in relation to most of the long-term outcomes identified.[42]

6.5 The findings also suggest a need for a continued focus on gathering up-to-date views from practitioners in schools and PRUs, building on the evidence gathered through the work of Estyn (2023a) and NAEL (2023).

Implications for the evaluation plan

6.6 The findings of the scoping study indicate that the area studies (Phase 2 and 4 of this evaluation) and the surveys (Phases 3 and 5) planned as part of the evaluation (see Chapter 1) should include a focus on research questions set out in Chapter 5 of this report. Specifically, the research tools (questionnaires, interview guides) should include a focus on the questions where a limited or partial evidence base has been identified.

6.7 The findings of the evidence review (Chapter 4) additionally suggest that Phases 2-5 of the evaluation should explore several specific issues:

- Assessment of the transparency and effectiveness of ALN funding allocations and also the sufficiency of resources, both financial and workforce capacity, to implement the ALN system.

- The relationship between ALN reforms and workforce capacity, staff well-being, and professional development, especially for ALNCos.

- The extent to which there is a clear and consistent understanding and interpretation of ALN and ALP among practitioners, settings and across local authorities, and considering how the use and dissemination of information and guidance shape these interpretations.

- Examine the data on the numbers of IDPs and factors contributing to variations across Wales.

- Explore how parents/carers and learners are being engaged about the ALN system and supported to understand their rights, including issues stemming from delayed decision-making and the necessity for transparent information on ALN reform.

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[42] Section 5 presents more detailed gaps in the current evidence base against individual items in the ToC, and the extent to which the inputs and activities contribute to the short, medium and long-term outcomes.

- Investigate local authorities' approaches in maintaining IDPs and assess how these approaches are communicated to schools, parents, caregivers, and learners.

- Consider specific post-16 learner issues, including the transition of responsibilities from the Welsh Government to local authorities, ensuring equitable access to education and training for this cohort of learners.

- Consider challenges to realising the core aim of creating a bilingual ALN system and explore whether there is effective implementation of the ALN system in Welsh-medium settings.

Implications for areas of focus during the initial qualitative phase

6.8 The next phase of the evaluation, the area studies (Phase 2), will involve qualitative fieldwork in 4-6 local authorities, involving fieldwork with:

- Senior leaders, ALNCos, teachers and lecturers and learning support workers, in schools, PRUs and FEIs as well as a sample of learners and parents.

- Professionals in local authorities and LHBs.

6.9 The area studies in Phase 2 of the evaluation will provide an opportunity to design research tools that take into account the findings of this scoping report and seek to address some of the gaps in the evidence base. This, in turn, will enable the evaluation to explore to what extent the ToC for the ALN system and its assumptions are borne out in practice.

Annex A: Main sources for the evidence review

Main sources of evidence

The new additional learning needs system: Progress of schools and local authorities in supporting pupils with additional learning needs.
Author: Estyn
Date: September 2023 (drawing on research autumn term 2022 until spring term 2023)

Themes Covered
- Understanding of ALN definitions;
- Transition from SEN to ALN
- Role of ALNCos
- Maintenance of IIDPs
- Collaboration and information sharing
- Access to specialist support services
- Funding for ALN
- Professional development
- Effective practices and guidance.

Method

Estyn carried out discussions with 29 providers. This consisted of four local authorities, 15 primary schools, eight secondary schools and two all-age schools in the spring term of 2023.

Further discussion with half of the local authorities on the statutory roles and, information, advice and guidance.
Review of school and local authority website content.

Limitations

Scope is limited as research only covers a small selection of mainstream schools and local authorities. There are gaps, but note that these will be addressed in the second stage review which will look at post-16 education; the roles of early years additional learning needs lead officer and the designated education clinical lead officer (DECLO). Additionally, it will assess how the Act is being implemented in early years settings, pupil referral units, and maintained special schools.

What is the role of educational leadership in delivering the Additional Learning Needs reform in Wales?

Author: National Academy for Leadership
Date: September 2023

Themes covered:
- Personal understanding and confidence in ALN
- Education setting's position
- Meeting needs through the medium of Welsh
- Skills, expertise and capacity, Engagement with partners
- Funding for ALN

Method

Background research which informed a online survey (conducted by OB3 Research) of school leaders and ALNCos. Survey carried out in December 2022-Jnauary 2023.
There were 730 responses (Of those, some 49 had headship responsibilities; 62% had ALNCO responsibilities. Most based at school settings, 69% in a primary, 18% in a secondary.) Also
12 semi-structured interviews with Designated Educational Clinical Lead Officers (DECLO), Local

Authority ALN Officers (LA), Early Years Leads and Advisory Teachers, Cluster Lead ALNCo, Estyn and discussions with Welsh Government.

Limitations

The report provides insights based on a specific period and might not reflect the current situation.

Limited scope of questions: The survey relies on the perspectives of school leaders regarding skills and engagement etc without delving into the practical implementation of these aspects.

No breakdown: Certain findings are presented based on different respondent categories such as ALNCO, but further detailed breakdowns, including setting types, are not made.

Limited information outside of school leaders' perspective: Although 12 semi-structured interviews were held with non-school-based staff, there is limited coverage of those findings, and no mention of the feedback from DECLOs

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Series of papers from the Children, Young People and Education Committee's monitoring of the implementation of education reforms
Author: Various. The Children, Young People and Education Committee and those that provide evidence to it.
Date: 2022 – 2026 (ongoing)

Themes covered:
- Implementation of the ALN system and the effective transfer of learners from the existing SEN system.
- The application of the definition of ALN, compared to presently for SEN, and whether there is any 'raising of the bar' on the ground for determining eligibility for provision.
- The professional learning and other support settings are receiving.
- Other factors potentially affecting implementation ALN system, for example levels of funding and fall out from the pandemic.
- The particular challenges and opportunities facing different types of schools in varying circumstances (e.g. language medium, demographics and locality) in terms of implementing ALN reform.

Method
The Committee will carry out a series of short, focussed, thematic check-ins throughout the period. Each check-in will involve some engagement activities (e.g. visits to schools to talk to staff, pupils and parents) and scrutiny of a Welsh Government Minister. Two have already taken place.
- The first 'check in' took place in July/September 2022 and visits to schools (no further details available) and a scrutiny session with the Minister for Education and Welsh Language.
- The second 'check in' took place in April/May 2023 and gathered evidence in focus group discussions form 24 ALNCos and school leaders from 20 secondary schools that had decided to roll out the new curriculum to their year 7 students during the 2022/23 academic year. A total of 65 schools were invited to take part. Participants were self-selecting. The schools were based in rural (6), suburban (7) and urban (7) areas and were located across 13 local authority areas.

There is additionally an open consultation, whereby anyone with an interest in either the new curriculum or the ALN reforms – such as educators, stakeholders, pupils or parents - can submit their views on any element of the rollout of the education reforms at any point**.**

Limitations
- Incomplete data due to ongoing evidence gathering until 2026.
- Uncertainty regarding the coverage and comprehensiveness of the data until the conclusion of the data collection period and subsequent analysis in 2026.
- Potential sample bias due to the use of purposive and convenience samples.

Annex C - to be included in version 2 to be published in February 2024

Annex B: Bibliography

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