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## Readiness for additional learning needs reforms

October 2018

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## Introduction

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This report is in response to a request for advice from the Welsh Government in the Cabinet Secretary's remit letter to Estyn 2017-2018. The report examines the extent to which maintained primary and secondary schools, pupil referral units (PRUs), and education otherwise than at school (EOTAS) settings are preparing to meet the demands of the new Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018 (National Assembly for Wales, 2018). It considers what effective practice currently exists in schools and settings that will support the future reforms. It is the first in a series of thematic reports about additional learning needs which will help to shape and support the reform process.

The report is intended for the Welsh Government, headteachers and staff in schools, governors, local authorities and regional consortia. It may be of interest to those working with faith schools through diocesan authorities and other relevant organisations such as further education institutions and health bodies. The report includes case studies for local authorities and schools to consider.

The findings of the report are based on a wide range of school inspection evidence. In addition, inspectors held telephone interviews with a range of schools to explore successful practice that supports the transformation agenda for pupils with additional learning needs. Inspectors also received evidence from a survey sent to schools. The evidence base is detailed in the appendix.

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## Background

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The Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Bill was passed by the National Assembly for Wales in December 2017. The legislation then received Royal Assent in January 2018 and became the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018 ('the Act': National Assembly for Wales, 2018). The Act makes provision for a new statutory framework for supporting children and young people with additional learning needs (ALN). The Act replaces legislation around special educational needs (SEN) and the assessment of children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD) in post-16 education and training. The overall purpose of the Act is captured in three overarching objectives and 11 core aims. The three overarching objectives in the Act are:

- 1 To provide a unified legislative framework to support children and young people aged 0-25 with ALN in schools and further education institutions (FEIs)
- 2 To promote an integrated, collaborative process of assessment, planning and monitoring which facilitates early, timely and effective interventions
- 3 To have a fair and transparent system for providing information and advice for resolving concerns and appeals

In order to realise the overarching objectives the Welsh Government has 11 core aims. These can be summarised as:

- 1 **The introduction of 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 ALN. The term ‘special educational provision’ will be replaced with ‘additional learning provision’ (ALP).
- 2 **A 0 to 25 age range:** The Act brings together the existing and different legislative systems for supporting children and young people of compulsory school age who have SEN and young people in further education (FE) who have LDD. As a result, transition of learners between school and post-16 education will be improved to allow greater equity in terms of support and rights for this group of learners.
- 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 and LDD plans for learners in schools and FE. This includes statements of SEN, individual education plans (IEPs) for learners supported through school/early years action or school / early years action plus, and learning and skills plans carried out via assessments under section 140 of the Learning and Skills Act 2000 (Great Britain, 2000).
- 4 **Increased participation of children and young people:** The Act requires that the views of children, their parents and young people should always be considered as part of the planning process.
- 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’s or young person’s achievement of their full potential.
- 6 **A simpler and less adversarial system:** The process of producing and revising an IDP will be much simpler than is currently the case with statements of SEN and should avoid the adversarial nature of the existing, overly bureaucratic approach.
- 7 **Increased collaboration:** The new system will support a strong focus on collaboration. All services involved 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. To support collaboration, the Act places a new duty on health boards to appoint a Designated Education Clinical Lead Officer (DECLO). DECLOs will play a pivotal role in improving the extent and effectiveness of collaboration between health, education and social care in the delivery of services for children and young people with ALN. Maintained schools, including maintained nurseries, pupil referral units and FEIs will be required to have a designated Additional Learning Needs Co-ordinator (ALNCo). Local authorities will be required to appoint an Early Years ALN Lead Officer to coordinate its functions in relation to children under compulsory school age who are not yet in maintained settings.
- 8 **Avoiding disagreements and earlier disagreement resolution:** The new system will focus 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 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 ( and their parents in the cases of those under 16) have a right of appeal to the Education Tribunal for Wales, currently the Special Educational Needs Tribunal for Wales (SENTW) but which is renamed by the Act the Education Tribunal for Wales.

- 10 **A mandatory Code:** Responding to calls for a stronger Code that can be enforced, the provisions included in the Act will be supported by a new statutory ALN Code.
- 11 **A bilingual system:** Services will be required to consider whether the child or young person needs ALP in Welsh; this duty will be an ongoing one, rather than a one off decision. If they do, this must be documented in the IDP and ‘all reasonable steps’ must be taken to secure the provision in Welsh.

From September 2020 any learner newly identified with ALN will be supported under the new arrangements established by the Act, and secondary legislation made under the Act and the Additional Learning Needs Code (ALN Code). Learners within the existing system will transition over a three-year period as part of a phased approach. The key phases of implementation are summarised in the following timeline.

September 2018-2023	The current legal SEN framework under the Education Act 1996 (Great Britain, 1996) and SEN Code of practice (2004) remains in place until the end of the implementation period, which is expected to be September 2020-2021 to 2022-2023. The existing system will be gradually replaced by the new system. Local authorities are required to continue to exercise their functions and meet existing duties under the current SEN system until the new ALN system is fully introduced.
Summer 2018	Publication of the guide to the timeframes for implementing IDPs for children of compulsory school age and under. The guide is the first in a series of guides which will set out how specific aspects of the Act will be implemented.
Autumn 2018	Consultation of the draft statutory ALN Code, which will provide most of the detail for the way assessments and decisions about provision will be carried out.
End of 2019	ALN Code and supporting legislation published.
January 2020 onwards	Training to support implementation.
September 2020	The Act, the ALN Code and new systems in place. Any learner newly identified with ALN will be supported under the new arrangements established by the Act.
September 2020 to July 2023	Learners who have their SEN/ALN supported through statements and under Early Years Action, Early Years Action Plus, School Action or School Action Plus will transfer to the new system of IDPs. The Welsh Government has indicated this will focus on learners nearing key points of progression (for example, between key stages) in the first instance.

The Welsh Government is supporting the ALN reform process through ongoing training and guidance materials and a programme of pilots. For example, in preparation for the changes, the Welsh Government published guidance and best practice in person-centred practice (PCP) (Welsh Government, 2015), which aims to make sure that practitioners work with a pupil to gain a better understanding of their views, aims and needs and act upon these in the planning and delivery of their support. There has been a widespread training programme in relation to PCP, which introduced many of the emerging PCP approaches described in this report.

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## Main findings

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- 1 Between 2015 and 2018, care, support and guidance have been good or better in over nine-in-ten primary schools, seven-in-ten special schools and secondary schools, and a third of PRUs. These schools and PRUs with good and excellent practice have the following characteristics that mean they are well placed to make the transition to the new ALN system:
  - inclusive ethos and culture
  - clear leadership roles
  - being a learning organisation
  - high aspirations based on strong assessment practice
  - working with partners
  - investing in staff
  - supporting parents and pupils
  - strong school improvement processes
- 2 The majority of schools have a good awareness of the changes planned under the new Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018 (National Assembly for Wales, 2018). Many schools are kept informed of the ALN reforms by senior staff with a responsibility for SEN, such as the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCo). Around half of schools remain updated through personal interest.
- 3 Nearly all school SENCOs/ALNCOs have received training and support from the local authority on the forthcoming new ALN system. A particular focus has been on the introduction of PCP.
- 4 As a result, many schools and staff are aware of PCP. A majority of schools are already introducing the approach with staff, pupils and parents. Generally, this change in approach has been positively received by staff. There is evidence of schools providing a range of strategies to engage positively with parents, including holding targeted information sessions and making DVDs to share the work they are carrying out with parents. The case studies in this report show that involving pupils more in their learning and target setting can empower them and improve wellbeing and attitudes to learning. For a few schools, such as those involved in pilots, this practice is more established than in others.
- 5 Nearly all schools acknowledge the views of pupils are important in informing their planning. Many schools report that they gain a better understanding of the needs of the child when they use PCP. Many schools believe pupils know who is co-ordinating their support and, where appropriate, pupils are able to contribute to the process and can start to take responsibility for their learning. As a result, just over half of schools believe pupils are more aware of their needs and are engaged in the process.
- 6 PCP is leading to schools working more closely with other agencies involved with the family and child such as social services or health provision. For those schools who



have established this process, the impact of this multi-agency approach for the pupil and parent is positive. The majority of schools state other agencies involved with the child have a better understanding of the child and their needs through PCP approaches.

- 7 Many schools are aware of the draft ALN Code published February 2017 (Welsh Government, 2017a). The draft Code is being used to support schools to review current provision and to begin to shape the use of PCP. In a few cases, the draft Code is being used to inform early discussions for the implementation of IDPs, although this is in its initial stages, in schools and local authorities. A few schools are focusing on piloting the use of IDPs in consultation with their local authorities.
- 8 There are a few aspects of current practice which need to be improved for the ALN reform and transformation agenda to achieve the intended outcomes. In a minority of schools, the assessment and tracking of individual pupils' progress are weak. This hinders their ability to plan and implement appropriate strategies to support pupils with SEN. In addition, schools do not always share information well enough with other agencies to develop a full picture of a pupil's needs.
- 9 Across Wales, teachers' knowledge and understanding of SEN in general and of the specific needs of pupils they teach are variable. Teachers do not differentiate or adapt their teaching approaches well enough to meet the needs of pupils with SEN or use suggested strategies contained in advice or IEPs/IDPs.
- 10 Too few schools prioritise whole-school training on SEN or do enough to develop inclusive whole-school approaches and ownership of provision for pupils with SEN. They do not work closely enough with other schools to share their good practice or specialist staff and resources.
- 11 There are areas where the benefits of PCP approaches have not yet been realised. For example, in around half the schools in this survey, only the SENCo/ALNCo has been trained in PCP and so it has not been adopted across the school. A minority of schools feel that other agencies are clear in their commitment to support the pupil and provide information to support the process or attend person-centred planning meetings. However, the ALN reform is at its early stages of implementation.
- 12 Schools that have adopted PCP approaches have developed good communication systems with parents.

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## Recommendation

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**Local authorities, regional consortia and schools should:**

- R1 Remain up-to-date with all guidance and training materials produced by the Welsh Government and support staff to implement the additional learning needs reforms effectively

## What do effective schools do well?

- 13 Between 2015 and 2018, care, support and guidance have been good or better in over nine-in-ten primary schools, seven-in-ten special schools and secondary schools, and in a third of PRUs.
- 14 These schools and PRUs with good or excellent provision have the following characteristics that mean they are well placed to make the transition to the new ALN system:
- inclusive ethos and culture
  - clear leadership roles
  - being a learning organisation
  - high aspirations based on strong assessment practice
  - working with partners
  - investing in staff
  - supporting parents and pupils
  - strong school improvement processes

Each characteristic is described in more detail below.

### Inclusive ethos and culture

- 15 Leaders at these schools and PRUs have created an ethos and a culture where diversity is recognised, accepted and celebrated. Leaders provide clear leadership where roles and responsibilities are understood well by staff, pupils and parents.
- 16 In Crownbridge Special School PCP approaches are central to the ethos of the school. There are clear school-based expectations for PCP that are understood by all staff.

#### **Case study 1: Case study 1: Crownbridge Special School take a whole-school approach to person-centred provision**

##### **Information about the school**

Crownbridge School is Torfaen's only special school, and includes a main site at Cwmbran and a satellite base at Penygarn Community Primary school at Pontypool. It has provision for 110 pupils aged between 3 and 19 years of age. Pupils have a range of significant, complex and multiple needs.

##### **Context and background**

Person-centred practice (PCP) is central to the ethos of the school. This approach drives how the curriculum is planned and delivered based on the needs and interests of individual pupils.

The person-centred provision has been developed over a sustained period of more than six years. The school has continued to adapt their programme into one that is bespoke and possible to use with all pupils.

**Description of activity/strategy**

The school's approach on an individual pupil level includes one-page profiles, 'important to' and 'important for' information, 'what's working / even better if' information, strengths and challenges, personalised targets, action planning and communication charts. This information is captured through a range of review meetings with parents and partner agencies.

Across the whole school, leaders have strong systems to track pupil progress and use this information well to provide rich learning experiences. The school works well with other partners and includes multi-agency targets in their whole-school approach. There is strong communication and regular opportunities for leaders, staff and partners to share practice and plan improvements.

**Impact on provision and standards**

There are clear school-based expectations for PCP that are understood by all teachers. Senior leaders are well informed about the quality of PCP approaches across the school and create focused action plans to maintain and improve standards. Pupils make good progress towards individual targets over a sustained period. Parent feedback is positive.

**Clear leadership roles**

- 17 The Act introduces a new statutory role: an Additional Learning Needs Co-ordinator (ALNCo). All maintained mainstream schools, maintained nurseries, PRUs and FEIs in Wales must designate a person, or more than one person, to be known as the ALNCo. The ALNCo will have responsibility for co-ordinating provision for learners with ALN. The designation of an ALNCo does not remove the need for broader workforce training. All staff who work with children and young people have a responsibility for ensuring that the learners' needs are identified and provided for.
- 18 In the most effective schools, there are already clearly defined roles, such as the SENCo. In these schools, the SENCo is supported through good quality training and an appropriate allocation of time to do the role. In the best example, the SENCo is a part of leadership team discussions and is able to influence the quality of provision positively for pupils with SEN across the school.
- 19 Williamstown Primary in Rhondda Cynon Taf has accessed a range of training to develop the SENCo/ALNCo role in preparation for the ALN transformation. The SENCo has been trained to represent the school which is a 'Person-centred Champion School'. Champion school SENCos/ALNCoS have received training on PCP approaches with particular emphasis on the PATH approach (Promoting Achievement Through Hope). This approach fosters a sense of empowerment for all pupils. This has involved the SENCo/ALNCo meeting with parents to discuss the

changes, providing whole-school training and implementation of the one-page profile (OPP) for all pupils at the school.

## **Case study 2: Williamstown Primary introduce person-centred practice (PCP) reviews and one-page profiles (OPPs)**

### **Information about the school**

Williamstown Primary has around 340 pupils on roll with 22% eligible for free school meals and 65% on the special educational needs (SEN) register. The school hosts two local authority Learning Support Classes (LSCs) for pupils with communication disorders. In addition, there are three school-funded mainstream support classes. These classes have a higher staff: pupil ratio.

### **Context and background**

The school was proactive in ensuring key members of staff were trained in developing and implementing a PCP approach in preparation for the introduction of the ALN reforms.

### **Description of activity/strategy**

The SENCo attended training on PCP approaches and, working with the local authority, the school became a 'Person-centred Champion School'. The SENCo received two days of training with a focus on the Planning Alternatives To Hope (PATH) approach.

The SENCo met with parents of pupils in key stage 2 who were statemented or at School Action Plus. Parents were informed of the changes for SEN pupils as part of the ALN reform and were introduced to one-profiles for their child. Parents were asked to complete and return the Welsh Government's 'Person-centred reviews' guidance booklets for learners and families. As part of this, parents thought about what they 'like and admire', what is 'important to' and what is 'important for' their child. The SENCo used the information from parents and learners to develop the OPPs, which were shared with parents and pupils for comments.

The finalised OPP was shared with all staff to support their work with pupils.

### **Impact on provision and standards**

Through talking more with pupils and their families, staff develop a greater understanding of each child and their interests. For example, they discovered that one pupil loved doing jigsaws with his grandma. As a result, staff are better equipped to offer activities that support pupils' interests and improve pupil engagement in learning. Staff and parents report that their relationships are better. Parents particularly appreciate the positive comments about their child.

Children enjoy being part of the process and involved in making decisions about themselves. Staff found it easier to complete statement reviews and

all reviews for pupils in specialist and mainstream classes have been carried out using a person-centred approach, with extremely positive feedback. Parental comments include:

- “That was the best review I have been to!”
- “I feel like we were talking about my son, not the document”
- “It was nice not to have a table between us”
- “I found this way much more enjoyable”
- “It was more individual”

### Being a learning organisation

- 20 Schools that are judged good or excellent in inspection often create a professional learning culture where all staff are empowered to reflect on their own practice. Such schools develop and share a vision centred on the learning of all children and young people. They seek out best practice elsewhere and emulate it. In addition they collaborate well with other schools by offering support and learning together to bring about improvement. These schools work to an integrated model of the school as a learning organisation.
- 21 Greenfield Special School in Merthyr Tydfil, for example, regularly shares its good practices with the regional education consortium and the local authority. The school takes a leading role in supporting many mainstream schools to manage challenging behaviour and staff are working closely with other schools to develop person-centred planning across the local authority.

### High aspirations based on strong assessment practice

- 22 In good and excellent schools, there are high aspirations for all pupils. IEPs are based on a sound understanding of pupil needs. Staff use a range of appropriate assessments to determine strengths and areas for improvement for each pupil. As a result, targets are meaningful to each individual and the progress that pupils make is clearly tracked.
- 23 An example of this can be seen at Nant Celyn Primary School in Torfaen, which has two special need resource bases. The good practice in these classes has been used to improve provision for the school’s mainstream pupils with SEN. Internal outreach has been developed from staff working in the specialist provisions, to share practice, focusing on improving assessment and support for mainstream SEN pupils. This has had a positive impact on mainstream staff skills and improved how they set purposeful targets to demonstrate progress. As a result, pupils’ wellbeing has improved, the feedback from parents is positive and there has been a reduction in fixed-term exclusion figures.

### **Case study 3: Securing and promoting inclusion at Nant Celyn Primary School, Torfaen**

#### **Information about the school**

Nant Celyn Primary School provides education for around 450 pupils aged 3 to 11 years old. The school has two specialist classes for pupils with autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) and hearing impairment. The number of pupils in mainstream with special educational needs (SEN) has been increasing over a period of time and 32% of pupils have SEN.

#### **Context and background**

The provision within the ASD specialist class is a key strength of the school. This is as a result of a high level of training, carefully structured systems and a person-centred practice (PCP) approach to planning for individual pupils across all areas. There are supportive relationships between staff with pupils and parents.

In 2016, the school had 12 pupils in the mainstream school with diagnosis of ASD in addition to those pupils in the specialist class. There were also another fourteen pupils with complex and challenging social and communication difficulties. The school found it was increasingly challenging to provide an appropriate curriculum to fully engage and meet the needs of these 26 pupils. As a result, there was a rise in fixed-term exclusions.

#### **Description of activity/strategy**

The school decided to share the good practice established in the ASD specialist class to support the targeted mainstream pupils. Outreach teams were set up from within the ASD specialist class and mainstream pupils were able to access specific structured sessions within the specialist class.

The person-centred planning was adopted for all pupils with SEN. The head of the specialist class undertook the role of inclusion manager and planned a series of changes. All school staff completed training on PCP approaches and focused target setting. As a result, there is an improved use of assessments to plan and review provision regularly.

The school placed a strong emphasis on support for pupils' emotional wellbeing. For example, lego and play therapy were introduced and 'emotional check In' sessions run throughout each day, starting during a nurture breakfast club.

Transition between primary and secondary has been significantly strengthened. The inclusion manager is head of both the primary and secondary resource bases and this arrangement provides continuity and support. Both primary and secondary teachers are involved in person-centred plan reviews to support enhanced transition.

### Impact on provision and standards

More rigorous and appropriate assessment and support have raised standards for pupils across mainstream classes. Parents feel fully supported and have confidence that the school meets the individual needs of their child.

In 2015-2016, the school reported that pupils lost 53.5 days due to fixed-term exclusions, which reduced to 21 days in 2016-2017 and, at the time of this report, there had been no fixed-term exclusions in 2017-2018.

### Working with partners

- 24 A key principle of the draft ALN Code (Welsh Government, 2017a) is that all those involved in providing support to children and young people with ALN work together in the best interest of the child or young person. All professionals involved in supporting the needs of the child or young person should support the principles of PCP. In order to work with pupils meaningfully, schools that have well-developed links with relevant support services are able to provide a more individualised level of input.
- 25 An example of this can be seen in Torfaen PRU, which has established individual learning plans (ILPs) that are person-centred and available to all agencies involved with a child or young person. The ILP is a central point of reference and information for all agencies involved with an individual, for example social services, health services or the youth offending service. All agencies contribute to and update the ILP, which has led to a more co-ordinated approach and positive feedback from pupils and their parents.

### Case study 4: Torfaen Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) – the development of multi-agency person-centred practice (PCP) to develop and review Individual Learning Plans (ILPs)

#### Information about the setting

Torfaen PRU is based in Pontypool and has around 60 pupils on average. The secondary age provision consists of Ty Glyn, for pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, and New Inn for anxious pupils. The PRU also provides tuition for pupils with medical needs and outreach support for pupils of all ages.

#### Context and background

The PRU worked with partners to develop a system for person-centred planning reviews and ILPs that are transparent and consistent. By working with partners, they ensured that all parties had an equal footing.

#### Description of activity

All pupils who join the PRU complete a one-page profile (OPP) that is displayed in each classroom used by the pupil. The OPP captures a pupil's



interests, activities and likes and dislikes. It is used to help all staff plan activities based on what they know about a pupil, and informs discussions and ILPs.

An ILP is then developed for each pupil and is a central point of reference for all agencies requiring information about the individual pupil. The ILP is reviewed every half term and is continuously added to as a 'rolling' document with sections for each half term. The ILP contains a wide range of helpful information to support staff to work with a pupil. The ILP includes personal details, including attendance, timetable and actions to increase or personalise provision. The ILP also links to the Risk Assessment and Personal Handling Plan and includes individual strategies to use in the classroom. The ILP also holds all assessment data and any short and long-term targets relating to the curriculum, behaviour and personal development.

Torfaen local authority led training to support staff in the school and key partners to develop a common understanding of a person-centred review. Following training, a whole school structure of person-centred planning was developed. All agencies involved with the pupil are invited to half-termly review meetings. Information from the person-centred planning review, including comments from the pupil, parent/carer, school and other agencies, action points agreed and a review of previous action points, is captured in the ILP.

### **Impact on provision and standards**

The PRU has developed whole-school PCP approaches that are personalised to the individual pupil, informative to all, and useful on a daily basis to all agencies.

Staff have easy access to up-to-date information on individual pupils. The ILP is a central point of reference for all agencies to access. All parties are better informed on the progress pupils make. Individual pupils are valued and placed at the centre of the person-centred planning process.

Pupils comment that they feel listened to by staff and that their views are valued within the PRU.

- 26 As set out in the draft ALN Code (Welsh Government 2017a, chapter 10), an IDP should take a person-centred approach to gathering and presenting information that identifies the pupil's ALN and determines their ALP. IDPs should be revised at IDP meetings using PCP.

### **Investing in staff**

- 27 A school as a learning organisation has the capacity to change and adapt to new environments and circumstances as staff, individually and together, realise their vision. A contributing factor to achieving this is a good communication system that provides staff with relevant information on pupils. An example of this is Ysgol Heol

Goffa Special School in Carmarthenshire. Here the staff have increased participation in the decision-making process for pupils and parents. PCP has been well established at the school for a number of years. To build on this good practice, the school became a person-centred organisation. As a result, all staff have a good understanding of pupils' preferred means of communication, and relationships with pupils and parents improved.

- 28 Schools as learning organisations provide appropriate support and training for staff to ensure that suitable adaptations are made to resources, the curriculum and teaching methods to meet the special educational needs of individual pupils. At St Mary's Catholic Primary school in Wrexham, staff have focused on the development of the PCP approach. The senior leadership team received training, which was rolled out to all staff across the school and led to all staff being more aware of key information about individual pupils. This helped the staff better to support their wellbeing, engagement in learning and achievement.

**Case study 5: St Mary's Catholic Primary School in Wrexham – introduction of one-page profiles (OPP) with a more child-centred approach to assessment and learning**  
**Information about the school**

St Mary's is a Catholic voluntary-aided school situated in the centre of Wrexham. There are currently around 400 pupils on roll aged from 3 to 11 years. Almost all pupils are baptised Catholic. Around 9% of pupils have SEN.

**Context and background**

Following senior leaders receiving training on person-centred practice (PCP), leaders rolled out the approach to the rest of the staff. The OPP was introduced following a trial period. The OPP highlights a child's strengths, challenges, and the way forward.

**Description of activity/strategy**

The initiative was piloted with a group of identified SEN/vulnerable children.

Age-appropriate OPPs contain key information about what is important for a child and what is important to meet their needs. They also include what others like and admire about the child, emphasising their positive qualities and attributes and focusing on the child's wellbeing and readiness for learning.

The OPP is key to individual education plans (IEPs) and annual review meetings and drives all meetings with parents and outside agencies. Pupil voice and parent participation are a critical part of the process and they are consulted at each stage.

The OPP supports a smooth transition from one class to another, transition between key stages, and transition into secondary school. The OPP is a

valuable document when making a referral to other relevant agencies. School leaders review the OPP each term to quality assure their use and ensure that they are an up-to-date and purposeful working document.

### **Impact on provision and standards**

School leaders used a pupil questionnaire and feedback from the school council to evaluate the impact of introducing the OPP. This feedback was used to develop a collaborative whole-school OPP.

The use of OPP is clear, concise and holistic and results in focused SEN support and information at review meetings. All the staff in the school are more aware about key information from the child's perspective to support their wellbeing, engagement in learning and achievement.

Pupils feel that their views are valued and that the support offered is appropriate to their needs. As a result, pupils are engaged and confident learners who are happy to share their ideas about how the school can support them.

## **Supporting parents and pupils**

- 29 The most effective schools provide up-to-date information and support for parents. The role of schools in supporting parents to help their children learn features more predominantly in Estyn's new inspection arrangements since September 2017.
- 30 Under the Act, professionals must have regard for the views, wishes and feelings of the child or young person and their parents. Professionals must also ensure that the child or young person and their parents are provided with all the information and support necessary to enable participation in those decisions. The use of PCP is supporting the improved involvement and support for children, their parents and young people.
- 31 An example of this can be seen at Wrexham Early Years Centre, which provides assessment places for children with a wide range of SEN aged 3 to 5. Strong home-school partnership working has been developed through many different projects and initiatives, including a home-school co-ordinator, who liaises closely with parents, offering weekly telephone support. Parental involvement has also been encouraged and nurtured through the use of learning stories and the 'hand in hand' group. A learning story is a record of what a teacher or parent has seen a child or children do. It provides a snapshot of a child's activities over a specific amount of time (10 minutes for example). It becomes a learning story when the adult adds their interpretation of the child's competencies and dispositions toward learning. The learning story is generally formulated by the adult to highlight what the child can do and is doing, rather than what they cannot do.

## **Case study 6: Wrexham Early Years Centre – preparing for the ALN reforms**

### **Information about the school**

Wrexham Early Years Centre is a school situated in the Queensway ward on the Caia Park estate in Wrexham County Borough Council. It is a resourced provision, providing assessment places for children with special educational needs (SEN) from three to five years of age. The wide range of needs includes autistic spectrum disorder (ASD), severe learning difficulties, chromosomal syndromes, and sensory impairments.

### **Context and background**

Wrexham Early Years Centre places a strong emphasis on building relationships with parents. The school strives to embed person-centred practice (PCP) within the school and focuses on the holistic development of pupils through home-school partnerships.

### **Description of activity/strategy**

The school has developed several initiatives to engage and support parents and families. These include the use of learning stories, home school diaries and weekly phone calls home. These initiatives help to ensure that parents are well informed about their child's progress and foster close relationships between school and home.

The school's 'hand in hand' group offers tailored support to individual parents about issues such as bedtime routines, behaviour and toileting. Makaton training from a qualified Makaton trainer and advice on healthy meals from professionals based in the local health centre are available for parents. Parents are encouraged to share ideas and concerns and to seek advice and guidance when necessary.

Wrexham Early Years Centre works with the local authority to provide an outreach service, called Primary Steps, to schools and settings within Wrexham County Borough. The school's extensive knowledge and understanding of how to manage children's behaviour are shared, and staff offer strategies and support to colleagues to improve outcomes for children.

Leaders have started to plan for the ALN reforms and have kept all staff up-to-date on the changes. There has been a particular focus on PCP and the school was part of a pilot project exploring person-centred planning theory and practice. As part of the project, the school introduced one-page profiles (OPPs) and individual development plan (IDP) principles. Through work with the local authority and staff training, the school made sure that the PCP principles were applied across the school and all staff used IDPs where appropriate.

These changes were supported through the school improvement plan and performance management targets for members of the senior management team relating to SEN improvements and providing equality for pupils with SEN.

**Impact on provision and standards.**

The PCP has been further developed across the school and staff are now more confident in using person-centred tools within the review processes. Apps and technology are used well to ensure that all children have the means to communicate their aspirations and to gather pupil feedback. Parents are positive about the changes and report that pupils' voices are now a much stronger feature of review meetings.

- 32 The draft ALN Code (Welsh Government, 2017a) outlines duties in respect of and actions that should be taken to engage and empower children, parents and young people. An example of improved pupil participation can be seen at Darland High School in Wrexham where the introduction of person-centred planning has resulted in an improvement in both the appropriateness of provision for learners and learners' attitudes to themselves and school. There has been an increase in pupils' engagement in learning and attendance. Pupils state that they have benefited from the person-centred planning and feel empowered.

**Case study 7: Darland High School – empowering pupils through person-centred planning****Information about the school**

Darland High School is an English-medium 11 to 16 mixed community school in Wrexham. The school serves the village of Rossett and the surrounding rural areas. There are currently around 850 pupils on roll and around 22% of pupils have special educational needs (SEN). The school has two specialist resource bases for pupils with social communications difficulties such as autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) and specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia.

**Context and background**

The school works closely with the local authority's educational psychologists to meet the complex needs of pupils within the resource bases. The school was a pilot to use and review person-centred planning to explore how this practice could be further developed to meet the aims of the Act.

**Description of activity/strategy**

Within Darland there was already a target in place within the SEN/ALN Department to ensure that at least the 22% of SEN pupils who were linked to the resource base (pupils with a statement of special educational needs across both key stages 3 and 4) had their own person-centred plan by the end of that academic year. They realised that this objective was unachievable if the plans were to be useful to the pupil and of benefit to the setting. There was a need for more staff to be trained in administering the toolkit. Existing person-centred plans had to be reviewed, which increased the workload and reduced output. In addition to these factors there was evidence that pupils across the whole school could be supported through

person-centred planning. Pupils were identified via discussions held with heads of year and members of the pastoral team. Through an increase in the number of facilitators, the use of person-centred planning contributed to excellent inclusive practice.

### **Impact on provision and standards**

Through regular training sessions, each pilot school has developed their practice further. For example, schools are now embedding the review of the person-centred planning into the annual review process for pupils with a SEN statement. This process serves to inform all parties of what is working and what is not working, and allows for a solution focused approach to any adjustments that may be needed for the pupil.

The introduction of person-centred planning has seen an improvement in both the provision and the learners' attitude to both themselves and school. The measurement of which is clear from a change in their engagement in learning, attendance and their increased access to mainstream lessons.

The pupils themselves have stated that they have benefited from the time they have been given, are empowered from their voice being heard and feel a sense of relief knowing that key people involved in their education are now more knowledgeable of what is important to them and how best to support them.

Person-centred planning was introduced into Darland from 2015 and the following year the school reported a 100% achievement in level 1 at the end of key stage 4, with all pupils progressing to a full-time post-16 educational course.

### **Strong school improvement processes**

- 33 Many schools use assessment and tracking systems to identify learners in need of additional support. When learners are not achieving as well as they could or are falling behind in their work, schools provide support through a variety of ways, including targeted intervention programmes and individual support provided by classroom assistants. Where additional support has less impact, this is generally due to poor tracking and identification systems. In the best schools, the impact of classroom assistant's support for learners is evaluated well and is aligned to school improvement processes.

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## Which areas do schools need to improve?

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- 34 Many schools are well placed to prepare for the changes needed for the ALN reforms to be successful. However, there are a few areas for improvement that are common to the majority of schools across Wales.
- 35 In a minority of schools, the assessment and tracking of individual pupils' progress are not strong enough. The information held may not be updated regularly enough or evaluate progress in the most important areas for each pupil. As a result, schools do not have good enough understanding of pupils' needs and progress. This hinders their ability to plan and implement appropriate strategies to support pupils with SEN.
- 36 In addition, schools do not always share information well enough with other agencies to develop a full picture of a pupil's needs. Even where assessment information is available, this is not regularly shared with external staff working with pupils to ensure that they too can tailor their approaches best to meet the needs and interests of pupils.
- 37 Across Wales, teachers' knowledge and understanding of SEN in general and of the specific needs of pupils they teach are too variable. Too few schools prioritise whole-school training on SEN or do enough to develop inclusive whole-school approaches and ownership of pupils with SEN.
- 38 As a result, individual teachers lack the confidence to manage pupil needs or lack vital understanding of the importance of the strategies identified within an IEP/IDP. They do not differentiate or adapt their teaching approaches well enough to meet the needs of pupils with SEN or use suggested strategies contained in advice or IEPs/IDPs.
- 39 Too often, good practice in relation to SEN is not shared more widely across the teachers within a school or between schools. This will be increasingly important through the introduction of the new ALN Code. In addition, there are too few examples of schools working together formally to share specialist staff, resources and expertise.
- 40 Parental understanding of the ALN reform and their valuable contributions require a more consistent approach from schools. This can be further supported through the Welsh Government's guidance publication for parents, due to be released as part of the update information.

## How are schools preparing for the reforms?

- 41 Many schools have a good awareness of the changes planned under the new Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018 (National Assembly for Wales, 2018). The majority of schools are kept informed of the ALN reforms by senior staff with a responsibility for SEN, such as the SENCo. Around half of schools remain updated because of the personal interest of a member of staff.
- 42 Nearly all school SENCOs/ALNCOs have received training and support from the local authority on the forthcoming new ALN system. A particularly useful element has been the focus on the introduction of PCP.
- 43 As a result, many schools and staff within them are now aware of PCP approaches. A majority of schools are already introducing PCP with staff, pupils and parents. Generally, this change in approach has been positively received by those involved. The case studies in this report show that involving pupils more in their learning and target setting can empower them and improve wellbeing and attitudes to learning. For a few schools, such as those involved in pilots, this practice is more established than in others.
- 44 Most schools acknowledge that the views of pupils are important and are listened to. Around half of schools believe that pupils know who is co-ordinating their support and, where appropriate, pupils are able to contribute to the process and can start to take responsibility for their learning. As a result, just over half of schools believe that pupils are more aware of their needs and are engaged in the support process.
- 45 As schools have become more aware of PCP, they are working more closely with parents to support their child. Schools are building on good practice already established to increase parent participation in their child's learning and needs. There is evidence of schools providing a range of strategies to engage positively with parents, including holding targeted information sessions and making DVDs to share the work they are carrying out with parents.
- 46 PCP is also leading to schools working more closely with other agencies involved with the family and child. For schools that have established this process, the impact of this multi-agency approach on the pupil and parent is positive. Information and strategies are shared widely so that staff are able to support a pupil more appropriately and provide a cohesive approach to planning and delivery of a purposeful curriculum for the pupil to achieve.
- 47 Where schools have adopted person-centred planning, it is being positively received by staff and parents. Based on the schools surveyed as part of this report:
- Many schools report that they have a better understanding of the needs of the child based on the person-centred planning approach.
  - Many schools believe that the views of parents are being listened to more.
  - The majority of schools believe that parents are more aware of the contributions of other agencies, including schools, in supporting their child.



- The minority of schools state that other agencies involved with the child have a better understanding of the child and their needs through PCP approaches.
- 48 There are a few areas where the full benefits of a PCP approach have not yet been realised. For example, in around half the schools in this survey, only the SENCo/ALNCo had been trained and it was not yet a whole-school approach. Presently a minority of schools feel that other agencies are clear in their commitment to support the pupil and provide information to support the process or attend person-centred planning meetings. However, it is recognised that the ALN reform is still at its early stages of implementation.
- 49 Many schools are aware of the draft ALN Code published in February 2017 (Welsh Government, 2017a). The draft Code is being used to support schools to review current provision and to begin to shape the use of the PCP approach. In a few cases, the draft Code is being used to inform the implementation of IDPs, although this is in its initial stages, in schools and local authorities. A few schools are trialling IDP approaches in consultation with their local authorities. The majority of schools are clear about the purpose of an IDP, but have not yet begun the process of transferring from the use of IEPs and other plans, including statutory statements, to IDPs. Schools will receive guidance on timescales for adopting and the standardisation of an IDP format from the Welsh Government.
- 50 There are examples of good practice being shared between schools within local authorities, although this is not consistent practice at present. Most examples of sharing practice relate to person-centred planning.
- 51 Since it is early in the ALN transformation programme, schools have generally not yet formally communicated with parents about the future changes. Where schools are using person-centred planning, parents have been encouraged to be part of the process with their child and the outcomes have been very positive. It is too early to evaluate the impact of person-centred planning and other aspects of the reform work on levels of parental complaints.

## What data do we have on pupils with SEN?

- 52 Around a quarter (105,000) of pupils in maintained schools in Wales are currently on the special educational needs register. Most pupils with SEN are taught alongside their peers in mainstream schools (Welsh Government, 2017b). Just over 6,000 pupils are taught in local authority specialist classes in around 250 primary or secondary schools. Just over 4,500 are taught in special schools and just over 2,000 pupils receive their education otherwise than at school (EOTAS), including in PRUs.
- 53 Although learners with SEN have equal access to the curriculum, schools enter these learners on average for fewer qualifications than their peers. Learners with SEN are entered for two fewer GCSEs on average than learners who have no SEN.
- 54 Between 2013 and 2016, the gap in achievement between SEN learners and their peers in schools and FE colleges has not narrowed notably for key indicators and remains too wide (Welsh Government, 2017c).
- 55 Thirty-two per cent of pupils with autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) achieve the level 2 inclusive (Welsh Government, 2017c). However, this includes pupils with complex learning needs in highly specialised settings and those with ASD who may be educated in mainstream schools. The performance of pupils with autism is therefore unclear.
- 56 Persistent absenteeism was more common amongst pupils with special educational needs than amongst pupils who do not have SEN. In secondary schools, pupils with SEBD have a higher absence rate than any other groups of pupils with SEN. This group of pupils has the highest rate of unauthorised absence too. It is over three-and-a-half times higher than for pupils without SEN. The impact of persistent absenteeism for pupils contributes to underachievement. In 2016-2017, the percentage of persistent absentees in Wales has remained the same as in 2015-2016 at 1.5% in primary schools, and increased by 0.1 percentage points from 3.9% to 4.0% in secondary schools (Welsh Government, 2017d).

**Table 1: Percentage of key stage 4 learners with attendance below 90% and above 95% for learners with and without SEN, 2013-2017**

	Below 90% attendance		Above 95% attendance	
	Non-SEN	SEN	Non-SEN	SEN
2013	24%	38%	50%	38%
2014	19%	34%	56%	42%
2015	17%	31%	58%	45%
2016	16%	28%	60%	46%
2017	14%	29%	62%	47%

Source: Welsh Government, 2017e

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## Appendix: Evidence base

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This report is based on information collated from all school inspections conducted under the new inspection arrangements between January 2018 and March 2018. Inspection reports from 2015-2016 were also used to identify key characteristics of effective practice in meeting the needs of children and young people with SEN. In addition, 167 primary and secondary schools and PRUs across the four consortia were offered an opportunity to complete questionnaires and 35 responded. Nineteen responses were from primary and eight from both secondary schools and PRUs. All the information was used to provide indicators of the preparedness of schools for a phased transition to the new ALN system. Case studies from seven schools have been used to provide examples of good practice.

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## Glossary

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<b>ALN</b>	Additional learning needs as legally defined in the Act
<b>ALN Code</b>	Additional Learning Needs Code
<b>ALNCo</b>	Additional Learning Needs Co-ordinator
<b>ALP</b>	Additional learning provision
<b>DECLO</b>	Designated Educational Clinical Lead Officer
<b>EOTAS</b>	Education otherwise than at school
<b>FE</b>	Further Education
<b>FEI</b>	Further education institution
<b>IDP</b>	Individual development plan
<b>IEP</b>	Individual education plan
<b>ILP</b>	Individual learning plan
<b>LA</b>	Local authority
<b>LDD</b>	Learning difficulty and/or disability
<b>Level 1 threshold</b>	A volume of qualifications at level 12 equivalent to the volume of five GCSEs at grade D-G
<b>Level 2 inclusive threshold (L2+)</b>	A volume of qualifications at level 2 equivalent to the volume of five GCSEs at grade A*-C, including English or Welsh first language and mathematics
<b>NHS</b>	National Health Service
<b>OPP</b>	One-page profile
<b>PATH</b>	Planning Alternatives To Hope
<b>PCP</b>	Person-centred practice
<b>PRU</b>	Pupil referral unit
<b>SEBD</b>	Social, emotional, behavioural difficulties
<b>SEN</b>	Special educational needs

**SENCo** Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator

**SENTW** Special Educational Needs Tribunal for Wales

### Numbers – quantities and proportions

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

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