

## **SCRUTINY COMMITTEE REPORT**

Date Written	22 <sup>nd</sup> January 2024
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Service Area	Education ALN
Committee Date	4 <sup>th</sup> March 2024

# **Review of Additional Learning Needs (ALN) following Implementation of Additional Learning Needs and Educational Tribunal (Wales) Act (ALNET) 2018**

## **1.0 SUMMARY OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to show progress made to comply with the duties set out in the ALN Act and use this information to inform future priorities and to provide an update on current ALN provisions.
- 1.2 It also considers the recommendations from the Scrutiny Task & Finish Group Review (March 2022).

## **2.0 RECOMMENDATION(S)**

- 2.1 The report is discussed and noted.
- 2.2 Members consider if there are other aspects, they wish to scrutinise.

## **3.0 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 The aim of the Additional Learning Needs and Educational Tribunal (Wales) Act (ALNET) 2018 is to transform the expectations, experiences and outcomes for children and young people with Additional Learning Needs (ALN).
- 3.2 The Act introduced a new statutory framework for supporting children and young people with ALN. This, alongside a mandatory code, makes sure that the new ALN system has a set of clear, legally enforceable parameters within which local

authorities, schools, and other partners responsible for the delivery of services to children and young people with ALN must act.

- 3.3 An annual report has been provided to Scrutiny on progress regarding the introduction and implementation of ALNET and this has coincided with work undertaken to ensure that provision is appropriate to pupil need. This report covers both ALNET work, and the work undertaken on provision.

## **4.0 WHERE WE WERE**

- 4.1 Considerable preparation for ALN reform took place to enable Education, Health and wider services to shape provision and meet the statutory requirements under the new ALNET Act.
- 4.2 Merthyr Tydfil education services supporting learners with ALN prepared themselves and school staff for the ALNET Act which came into effect from September 2021.
- 4.3 100% of schools across the Local Authority (LA) engaged in training in readiness for the new Act. Merthyr Tydfil is unique in including all school settings, its Early Years leaders, Further Education and Education Psychology Service in the professional learning offer.
- 4.4 The Additional Learning Needs Coordinator (ALNCo) Forum has been established as an effective professional learning platform to meet the needs of the transformation from the SEN to the ALN system. The focus has been on leading whole school improvement in relation to the identification of ALN, the development of Individual Development Plans (IDPs), provision management, self-evaluation, accountability, and systematic reporting to Governors.
- 4.5 The ALNCo Cluster Leads working in partnership with local authority officers have developed a co-constructive model of learning and developing professional practice within the Merthyr learning community.
- 4.6 The Learning Department has built capacity within its ALN Team and is well placed to meet the new statutory duty on local authorities of keeping ALN under review.

## **5.0 WHERE WE ARE NOW**

- 5.1 Implementation of the 2018 Act commenced in September 2021 with the ALN system being phased in over a period of three years until August 2024. During the intervening three years two systems have been in operation (Special Educational Needs (SEN) and ALN systems).
- 5.2 The LA has a clear action plan to manage the moving of individual learners, for which the LA retains responsibility, from the SEN system to the ALN system. The LA has shared details with schools relating to the process involved and the expectations for practitioners in working with the LA to support the moving of learners onto the ALN system.

5.3 The quality assurance of IDPs has been devolved to ALN clusters and the identified IDP Champions have embedded person centred practice in all educational settings. There is a bank of quality assured IDPs created for pupils with a range of ALN.

5.4 The LA has a designated Post 16 ALN Officer who has worked closely with The College Merthyr Tydfil to ensure:

- that effective transition arrangements are in place for young people;
- there is timely information sharing in place between schools / LA and Further Education Institutes (FEI)
- There is a shared understating regarding the Additional Learning Provision (ALP) available within the college.

A Transition Protocol is under development outlining agreed expectations, timelines and The College Merthyr Tydfil offer for pupils with ALN. The LA has provided Bitesize training sessions on IDPs, Person Centred (PC) Tools, PC Outcomes and PC Reviews.

5.5 Wider education partners such as Health increasingly understand their role in contributing to the IDP process. Networking meetings with the Designated Education Clinical Lead Officer (DECLO) and the establishment of the ALNET Strategic Board of five LA representatives have allowed partnership working to embed. Health colleagues have a standing agenda item and the following colleagues have contributed at each half termly ALNCo Forum: Speech and Language Therapy Service; Physiotherapy; Occupational Therapy; DECLO.

5.6 The Early Years ALN Lead Officer (EYALNLO) has reviewed and strengthened the role of the Early Years settings in relation to the early identification of ALN and transition into the school setting. They have established collaborative working practices and arrangements with the LA Admissions Team, EYs settings and other professionals such as Educational Psychologists and Health colleagues.

5.7 The Early Years Transition Guidance was launched with all educational settings in 2022. A collaborative multi-agency approach was taken to prepare guidance for improving the transition process for Early Years children. This is a stand-alone document for all Early Years and school settings for universal transition outlining procedures for children with ALN. The LA Early Year Transition Forum was successfully piloted during the Autumn term 2021 with 4 schools and now takes place termly and is particularly well supported.

5.8 The LA ALN Headteacher Steering Group was established in December 2022. A number of ALN Task and Finish Groups (TAFG) with additional Headteacher representation have been established where Headteachers (HTs), ALNCoS and LA Officers have worked collaboratively to ensure the LA is able to meet its statutory duties under ALNET and to ensure provision for pupils with ALN is sufficient and suitable and has a trajectory of on-going improvement. Timescales for the work involved are set in agreement with the Steering and Task and Finish Groups and are

adjusted accordingly where there is a need to do so, and with agreement of the Groups. This is in line with recommendations one and two of the Scrutiny ALN Task & Finish group.

- 5.9 A Draft Merthyr Tydfil ALN Principles document has been developed in consultation with the HT Steering Group and its aim is to agree a shared understanding of how the LA will ensure compliance with its new ALN statutory responsibilities under the ALNET Act 2018 and the requirements of the ALN Code.

The document places the underlying ALNET Act principles of inclusion and participation at its core and shares the vision of the Merthyr Tydfil RARS 'Success for every child':

*The opportunity for all children and young people in Merthyr Tydfil to access high quality education so that they develop as ambitious capable learners, enterprising and creative contributors, ethically informed citizens, and healthy, confident individuals, ready to lead fulfilling lives.'*

- 5.10 To ensure that the LA's decision-making process in relation to ALN is compliant with the statutory requirements of the ALN Code and the IDP process the LA ALN Steering Group set up a TAFG to review the LA ALN Clearing Panel and termly specialist placements panels.
- 5.11 A revised panel model was trialled during the summer term of 2023, reviewed, and implemented fully in September 2023. The new LA ALN Panel processes are transparent, clearly communicated to schools and there is appropriate representation from educational professionals to ensure the decision making is fair and equitable for all learners with ALN. Headteachers and ALNCoS are now represented at all ALN Panels on a weekly timetable shared at the beginning of each academic year.
- 5.12 The work in relation to reviewing processes and procedures to ensure clarity, consistency, responsibility etc. is in line with the Scrutiny ALN Task & Finish Group recommendation 3 and is a work that is ongoing with Headteacher involvement.
- 5.13 A comprehensive review of the funding, management, and governance of all the LA Learning Resource Bases (LRB) has been tasked to a group of LRB headteachers and LA finance and education officers.
- 5.14 From September 2023, the Afon Taf High School LRB for KS3/4 pupils with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is piloting a satellite partnership approach with Greenfield Special School.
- 5.15 The LRB class size has been reviewed and reduced from 35 to 25 pupils. A Greenfield teacher has been seconded to lead the class, share expertise, and promote skill development within the provision in order to meet the complexity of ALN learners in the LRB. This pilot will be reviewed in the summer term.
- 5.16 An additional LRB provision is being piloted at Cyfarthfa High School for the 2023-24 academic year. This secondary LRB provides a highly specialist and structured

learning environment for up to six KS3/4 pupils who have Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) needs and associated behavioural complexity.

- 5.17 The setting has a high adult to pupil ratio and offers a safe, nurturing and emotionally secure learning environment. Staff provide a bespoke curriculum approach focusing on the acquisition and consolidation of basic skills, social skills and interaction and concepts in key curriculum areas. There is also a focus on multi-agency involvement and support.
- 5.18 To meet the growing complexity and increase in number of pupils who have severe learning difficulties resulting from social communication / ASD needs a Foundation Phase LRB is being piloted at Dowlais Primary for the 2023-24 academic year.
- 5.19 The Pilot Early Intervention Class for pupils with complex social communication difficulties at Twynyrodyn Primary School is now in its third year and an evaluation report was produced in July 2023. The partnership working and collaborative approach with educational professionals such as EPs, ALN Team Officers, outside agencies and parents has undoubtedly underpinned the success of the pilot class.
- 5.20 The 'Cwtch' Early Years provision was established in September 2022 at Little Rascals, ICC Pentrebach for pupils with social communication difficulties who might experience a gap in provision. Pupils have access to targeted social communication intervention strategies prior to transition into mainstream schools.
- 5.21 Additional classroom capacity has been provided to Greenfield school in order to cater to the increased number of pupils and work is ongoing to provide further capacity from September 2024 for post-16 learners.
- 5.22 Work is ongoing via the ALN priority in the WESP (Welsh in Education Strategic Plan) to establish a Welsh medium LRB.
- 5.23 Developing the education workforce is at the core of the ALN transformation and the Merthyr Tydfil LA RARS strategy.
- 5.24 The ALNCo Forum is now well established as the professional learning platform within the LA. 100% of Merthyr schools attend alongside representatives from the College Merthyr Tydfil, Early Years settings, Greenfield Special School, Health, and the LA ALN Team.
- 5.25 The ALNCo Forum and the Headteacher Steering group have proved important forums for strategic discussion in relation to ALN. For example, when considering the key strategic role of the ALNCo in the new ALN Code, compared perhaps to the role of the SENCo under the old SEN Code, it is not practicable for more than one school to share an ALNCo at present. However, it is encouraged that schools consider how efficiencies can be made via the sharing of resources. This is in line with recommendation four of the Scrutiny ALN Task & Finish group.
- 5.26 The focus of the professional learning this academic year is on how to create an inclusive education system to better meet the needs of children and young people.

Best practice has been identified and shared as to how Merthyr schools foster inclusive classrooms and support their learners with ALN. It is an agreed fundamental principle that ALN is 'everybody's business.'

- 5.27 Alongside the new curriculum and its person-centred approach, we aim to narrow inequalities and attainment gaps and transform the expectations, experiences and outcomes for children and young people with ALN.
- 5.28 The ALNCo Induction programme is rolled out twice a year. Schools are now recognising the need for strategic planning to build ALN leadership capacity within their settings as well as succession planning.
- 5.29 In response to the growth in complexity of the social communication needs of our youngest pupils, the LA has prioritised training to support all educational practitioners.
- 5.30 The two-day accredited training courses in the Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) was attended by 55 professionals in July and September 2023. Attention Autism (AA) training has been rolled out across all schools and early years settings.
- 5.31 An AA accredited trainer has now been funded based at Greenfield Special School and will support practitioners in implementing the development of attention strategies within our mainstream Nursery classes.
- 5.32 Seven learning support assistants (LSAs) have attended six days of 'Mediating Learning LSA' (MeLSA) training focusing on mediating learning, mindset, thinking about thinking, memory and recall and specific literacy and numeracy strategies.
- 5.33 The LA hosted a Social Communication Conference attended by 130 professionals during the Spring term of 2023. The aim of this well attended event was to raise awareness of and develop understanding of how to teach, encourage and support the social communication skills of young children.

## **6.0 WHERE WE WANT TO BE**

- 6.1 Confidence that the transition from the SEN to the ALN system is smooth, effective, and equitable.
- 6.2 Inclusive educational provision and practise underpinning the learning journey for all children and young people in Merthyr.
- 6.3 LA ALN systems and processes meet statutory duties under the ALNET Act, are embedded and are clearly communicated and understood by all partners and parents.
- 6.4 The development of the Merthyr Tydfil Principles document articulates an agreed set of principles which apply when determining when it would be reasonable for the LA to secure ALP.

- 6.5 The LA ALN funding mechanism is fair, equitable and fit for purpose to meet the needs of schools in supporting learners with ALN.
- 6.6 The availability of specialist provision for learners with ALN is sufficient to meet need.
- 6.7 The ALNCo Forum and ALN cluster groups continue to strengthen in their ability to support professional learning, sharing of best practise and enabling schools to build ALN leadership capacity.
- 6.8 The education workforce is confident in being able to meet the needs of all learners.

## **7.0 WHAT WE NEED TO DO NEXT**

- 7.1 The ALN Team will continue to work with schools, ALNCoS, Headteachers, Governing bodies and wider partners to ensure that the transition to the ALN system is smooth, effective, and equitable.
- 7.2 The ALN Steering Group of Headteachers and LA Officers will ensure that the systems and processes meet statutory duties under the ALNET Act and clearly understood and communicated to all partners.
- 7.3 The ALN Task & Finish Groups will complete their work on the reviewing of LA Learning Resource Base provision and the review of the current ALN Additional Funding model.
- 7.4 The ALN Team and wider Education team will support Greenfield school as it takes on additional classroom space.
- 7.5 Work to progress the establishment of a Welsh medium LRB will proceed via the appointment of a Welsh speaking LRB teacher able to work with pupils as an interim measure whilst building work is completed.
- 7.6 The ALNCo Forum will support schools in developing ALN leadership and drive forward the principles of inclusion in all professional learning.
- 7.7 Continue to work with the DECLO to develop multi-agency and collaborative working with health professionals to ensure effective engagement in the IDP process and support for schools in the development of Individual Health Care Plans (IHCP).
- 7.8 LA Post 16 Protocol ensures effective transition arrangements are in place to support a successful and seamless experience for young people.
- 7.9 The LA now has a statutory duty to keep under review the arrangements which support the identification of ALN and ALP needed to meet those needs. A joint protocol for support and challenge to schools to be agreed.

## **8.0 CONTRIBUTION TO RAISING ASPIRATIONS, RAISING STANDARDS STRATEGY**

- 8.1 The contents of this report relate to the following themes and goals within the RARS:
- Partnership & Collaboration and Post Pandemic Recovery
  - Supporting Learners Health and Wellbeing

## **9.0 CONTRIBUTION TO WELLBEING OBJECTIVES**

- 9.1 The ALNET Act 2018 is consistent with the five ways of working as prescribed in the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act 2015:

- Collaboration – a fundamental principal of the Act focuses on improving collaboration and creating a unified system.
- Involvement – ensuring that pupils, parents, and carers are at the heart of the system.
- Long term – the Act focuses on meeting the needs of children from 0-25
- Prevention – the focus of the Act on early identification of need and ensuring appropriate provision to meet needs.

- 9.2 This report relates to the following Objectives within the corporate plan – Acting for a Better Tomorrow

- An Aspirational Merthyr Tydfil focused on learning.
- A Healthier Merthyr Tydfil

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<b>BACKGROUND PAPERS</b>		
<b>Title of Document(s)</b>	<b>Document(s) Date</b>	<b>Document Location</b>
<b>Does the report contain any issue that may impact the Council's Constitution?</b>		No