

MEETING	Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee
DATE	10/04/25
TITLE	ALN in Main Stream and Special Schools
REASON FOR SCRUTINY	To scrutinise the Additional Learning Needs education provision and to secure the input and understanding of the Scrutiny Committee of the progress made to ensure that Gwynedd is ready for the new ALN and Inclusion Act.
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1. Why does it need scrutiny?

- 1.1 This report is submitted in response to a request from members of the Scrutiny Committee Education and Economy to receive a report on ALN in Mainstream and Special Schools.
- 1.2 During the discussion on the item 'Gwynedd's Education Strategy towards 2032' in the Committee meeting on 14 September 2023, concern was expressed about 2 specific issues,
- Overcrowding at the two ALN schools in Gwynedd.
 - The number of children in the mainstream who are unable to cope with a mainstream education system.
- 1.3 There is a significant shift in the area in terms of integration and the role of assistants. How does the financial allocation of the special education sector in Gwynedd compare with the rest of Wales, along with the challenges in the field.

2. What exactly needs scrutiny?

This report is intended to present information regarding the situation of ALN in Gwynedd, within the context of a significant change in legislation, as well as an increase in demand for a service.

3. Summary and Key Issues

- 3.1 This report summarises the difficult situation facing Gwynedd Schools considering the change in demand for a service, the current financial climate and the impact of budget cuts.
- 3.2 There is a need to provide an update on the situation of Additional Learning Needs in Gwynedd in the context of changes in legislation and a change in demand for a service.

4. Background / Context

4.1. Key Information:

- The new 'ALN and Tribunal Act Wales (2018)' has come into force since September 2021, with a transition period ending in September 2025.
- The ALN and Inclusion Service was established in September 2017, in conjunction with Ynys Môn Council and Cyngor Gwynedd. The Service has evolved over the years since, in order to respond to changes in demand, and has been Externally Reviewed in 2020, and again in December 2023.
- There are two Special Schools for ALN within the Authority – Ysgol Hafod Lon and Ysgol Pendalar.

4.2 What is the ALN provision in mainstream?

- Each School receives funding to cater for learners with an Individual Development Plan (IDP). They create a provision map using this funding. Additional funding is currently available by applying to the Moderation Panel at individual child level. From March 2025 (following implementing a working group, and consultation with Schools and Finance officers) this will change to receive funding on a formula basis. The formula will use data on the number of learners with an IDP, as well as the level of need.
- The ALN and I Service supports the schools to cater for the learners. The type of input depends on the needs of the school and learners. Input is tailored in order to respond in the most appropriate way. The input is given for a period, with a focus on upskilling school staff to be able to respond to their needs. We measure progress following receipt of input. See Appendix 1.
- Historically, the Special Schools budget have protected from cuts, while there have been cuts to the budget of the Mainstream Schools. The Special Schools are funded based on the intensity of each learner's need using 'bands' to describe the learners' need.

4.3 What works?

- The transition to the New 'Additional Learning Needs and Tribunal Wales Act 2018' has been successful in terms of:
 - Working with the Schools to successfully transfer learners to Additional Learning Plans, from the old Statement arrangements.
 - Creating provision maps that are consistent (but with a more local flavour at individual school level) across the catchment areas and the schools.
 - Creating dispute resolution processes with parents, schools and the ALN Quality Officers. This is noted by Estyn as good practice within the Estyn ALN Thematic Survey (2023) (see link at the end of the report).
 - Review the funding methods for Schools, so that the method of funding responds to the requirements of the new act.
 - There is a close working relationship between the Schools and the ALN and Inclusion team, and the provision is well known by the LA.
 - The Act requires Schools, and the LA, to 'keep provision under constant review'. This includes evaluating how effective the provision is, and the effectiveness of interventions that are being provided. We have established a process to do this. The review process is a way for the Quality Service to monitor the provisions, and

discuss further developments with the Schools, with key information available within the IDP. The specialist teams also measure the progress of learners who receive input termly, with the majority making good progress.

- We have an electronic IDP System, and this development has been innovative. We have established an IDP User Group to further develop the system, with a focus on reducing the workload of ALN Coordinators in our schools.
- The Role of the Designated Education Clinical Lead Officer within the Act is a Statutory Role. We have a close relationship and clear communication systems with this officer, and this is a key part of our collaboration and dispute resolution processes with parents.
- Our knowledge of ALN in the early years, along with the provision offered to them, is good practice. There has been investment in this area through a bid for funding.

4.4 How is the provision intended to meet demand? What specialist support and training is available to staff who support pupils with significant needs in mainstream schools? Is it sufficient?

The provision provided is tailored to the needs of the school or learner where possible. Appendix 1 summarizes what is provided.

It is more challenging to do this now, with resources being spread more thinly. The Data in Appendix 2 indicates the increase in needs. It is also necessary to note that the needs of learners are now more complex and across more areas. Communication and interaction skills development, and emotional and social development are growth areas.

As school budgets shrink, schools find it more challenging to deliver what's in their provision map. This leads to more requests for support for input from the ALN Team and also requests for special school placement.

4.5 What action is in place to respond to challenges in the area?

i) What are the challenges?

- The statutory responsibility of the ALN Act has extended legal responsibilities. Because of this, the pressure on Schools, particularly the Additional Learning Needs Co-ordinator (ALNCo) has increased significantly. This is a challenge for Schools, especially where budgets are shrinking, and the ability of the ALNCo to fulfill the role is a challenge. This has been recognised in the Estyn ALN Thematic Review (2023) and by Welsh Government.
- Resources have been reducing. With needs increasing and more complex, meeting needs is increasingly challenging. This is true for schools, and the ALN Team is facing an increase in referrals. Grants in this area are provided by WG, but it does not match the increase in demand, and there is no assurance of recurrence of funding, so it is difficult to plan strategically (Appendix 2 – Data)
- The demand for a specialist placement is increasing, and not all requests for a specialist placement are appropriate. Some learners have complex needs, but should be supported in mainstream, but the challenge of doing this increases by reducing budgets. This can drive parents to apply for a Special School when they feel the mainstream are unable to meet needs.

- The number of Tribunals has increased over the last two years (partly related to the previous point), which is challenging in terms of the time of Officers and Schools to prepare for Tribunals and work with the parents and schools (Appendix 3 – Number of Tribunals)
- The lack of availability of individuals applying for Teaching Assistant positions is a challenge, and is a stressor on the school provision map when vacant positions are unable to be filled.
- The training of Educational Psychologists through Cardiff University affects our ability to recruit Educational Psychologists who are able to speak Welsh. It is a statutory role within the Act, and a key role in identifying the provision that the learners need.

ii) What will we focus on, in order to respond to the challenges?

- In March 2025 the Primary Schools funding method will change to a formula approach in order to:
 - Provide greater financial stability to sustain staffing.
 - Be more consistent across schools – the formula is based on the number of learners who have a IDP, as well as the level of the learner's needs.
 - Reducing bureaucracy that currently exists.
- We will need to consider whether there is a need to put together a bid for extending the integration funding available to schools to provide adequate interventions, with financial challenges currently contributing to applications for specialist placement, and potential disputes with parents.
- We will work with Headteachers and ALNCo to:
 - Address the role of the ALNCo, reducing bureaucracy, and look at opportunities to collaborate across catchment areas.
 - Monitoring and evaluation of the new funding formula.
 - Ensure that the ALN and I service adapts to respond to the needs of Gwynedd schools.
- With the demand for specialist placement continuing, we are:
 - Continuing with the work to map the possible demand for specialist provisions from the early years upwards (see 4.6).
 - Look carefully at what our offer is for learners who have significant needs in the mainstream, but where a special school would not be a suitable placement. We have already scheduled training in April for all Mainstream Schools, with a focus on planning for learners with significant needs in mainstream. The Special Schools, and some of our Mainstream Schools, will share good practice during the day.
 - To collaborate with the Headteachers of the special schools to map their capacity. and the curriculum being offered (e.g. in the Post-16 sector). We will also look at the funding method through banding the learners needs (See 4.6).
 - Plan use of the ALN capital grant to develop to capacity/environments for learners in the special schools, mainstream and our centres.
- Continue to address the need for a training route for Educational Psychologists. This includes discussions about a training pathway in North Wales (Bangor University).

4.6 What are the plans to respond to capacity issues in special schools?

Special Schools have seen an increase in numbers over recent years (see Appendix 2), but this growth is not sustainable. The transitions to Special Schools tend to take place at certain key periods:

- Learners with intensive needs in the early years, who are assessed at the ABC centres, then transfer to the Special Schools at Reception Class age (4/5 years old).
- Learners moving into the area who have been attending special schools in their previous area.
- Learners who are coming to the end of a key stage (usually the end of the foundation phase or towards transition time to Secondary) with concern about their ability to make progress in mainstream moving forward.

When looking at the graph in Appendix 2, an increase in the numbers in current years 6-8 can be seen, with the number stabilising thereafter. This is likely to be in the period when the range of ALN and I centres were not available in the same way to support the mainstream, and also towards the end of the period of the current legislation. There were also a number of families moving to the area following the lockdown.

It is unusual for learners to transition back to mainstream once they have moved to a special school, and are able to stay in school until they reach Year 14 (18/19 years old).

It's unusual for a learner to share a placement with a mainstream school, but this can work well for some.

To target this situation we have been taking the following actions:

- Mapping: Our Early Years processes for ALN identification are robust. This means that we are able to map needs in the early years for forecasting numbers better than ever. We have started mapping more intensive needs in the early years, along with the learners who receive input from the ALN teams, in order to predict which learners are likely to need a specialist placement in the future.
- Integration: When a learner now attends the ABC Centre (Nursery), each one shares a placement with a Mainstream School. This helps us to observe the child in a mainstream placement – if the child is coping in mainstream, then we should be able to continue with the placement. We will also be looking at models of sharing placement with a Special School where possible, and transferring back to mainstream if a learner has made sufficient progress to be able to cope with mainstream curriculum.
- Intervention Centres and Groups: We have started to change the provision that some of our teams provide to more complex learners in the mainstream, in order to provide them with more regular support, and to upskill the schools in a different way. We will also look at provision maps with our schools, to improve provision for learners who are bordering on needing a special placement, but are making progress in the mainstream.
- Collaborative planning: We will be bringing the above information together with Special School Heads shortly, in order to plan further across the sector.
- We have invested in Ysgol Pendalar, using the ALN Capital grant in order to improve the use of the space available there, and increase capacity.

The above will enable us to develop a service and strategy for ensuring that we meet the requirements of Gwynedd Learners.

4.7 How many pupils with additional learning needs are there in mainstream schools in Gwynedd?

The data contained in Appendix 2 is annual data. Live data as of 23/3/25 showed the information below. There are 2139 children with an IDP (correct 23/3/25) in Gwynedd, which is 12.8% of the 0-25 population. There are also 36 children who have an Individual Medical Plan due to a condition e.g. Epilepsy, Type 1 Diabetes, which is provision for medical needs only. This equates to 0.2% of the school/preschool population.

School IDP – School Provision	943
Forum IDP Forum – School Provision, with input from the ALN Team	320
Authority IDP - Additional provision for a school, with input from the ALN Team	876

4.8 Do all pupils in mainstream schools have an Individual Development Plan? If not, is there a process in place to keep an eye on these pupils?

If education provision (pre-school/school or college 01-16) has identified that a learner has ALN (and therefore requires Additional Learning Provision) the learner has an IDP. If a school/pre-school/college is in the process of targeting the child, or gathering evidence to make a decision on whether a learner has ALN, they do not yet have an IDP.

Each school has a provision map, and as part of the map they will identify how they are keeping an eye on a learner's progress, in order to initiate an 'ALN enquiry' process if they feel ALN may be emerging.

5. Consultation

- Collaborating with Headteachers to Develop the ALN and I Funding Formula
- Gathering information about school opinions through satisfaction questionnaires.
- Further Consultation will take place with the Headteachers of Special Schools as set out in the report.

6. Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

6.1 The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 seeks to improve the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales. The Act imposes a duty of well-being on public bodies and is aimed at achieving 7 well-being goals by following the 5 ways of working.

6.2 The Act imposes a welfare duty on the Council to carry out sustainable development work by acting in co-operation with the 'sustainable development principle'. This means that the impact on people in the future needs to be considered when making decisions.

6.3 In terms of **collaboration and inclusion of others**, we are:

- Collecting monthly satisfaction questionnaires from parents and school staff, and respond to these comments.
- Gathering learners' views at the end of an intervention where possible, and also through a Person Central Planning process within the IDP.
- Discussing with Heads in the Strategic Groups and the Federation
- An Annual Panel meeting with each school, where there is an opportunity for them to give views on different aspects of the service

What has been done or will be done to **prevent** problems from arising or worsening in the future?

- The ALN Legislation and the Education Tribunal state the importance of responding early to any need that arises. Identifying a learner's need early is critical to reducing the long-term need.
- We will continue to review our ALN identification processes, so that we are proactive in preventing problems from developing.
- We have strong processes in starting the process in the early years, and this has been recognised by Estyn.

How have you considered the **long-term** and what will people's needs be in years to come?

In terms of **the long term** and looking to the future, we are already aware of the increase in demand for services. We use trend data to identify demand. This starts from the cradle, as the ALN Act covers the ages of 0-25.

To ensure **integration**, have you considered the potential impact on other public bodies?

- We work closely with the ALN Designated Clinical Lead Officer within the Health board, with our Early Years partners, and ongoing multi-agency work.

7. Impact on Equality, Welsh Language and Socio-Economic Duty Characteristics

The Additional Learning Needs and Inclusion Service is in keeping with the ALN and Tribunal Act Wales 2018

The Additional Learning Needs and Inclusion Service offers a complete service through the medium of Welsh.

An impact assessment will be carried out when relevant to any change.

8. Next Steps

See 4.5.

Background Information

Thematic Estyn - [The new additional learning needs system](#)

ETW Report - [The Education Tribunal for Wales, Annual Report 2023-24](#)

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Staffing Structure of ALN and CH Service (Gwynedd)

Appendix 2 – ALN Data

Appendix 3 – Appeals/Tribunal Data