PLANT YNG NGHYMRU
CHILDREN IN WALES

Children in Wales Participation Programme 2024/25 – Additional Learning Needs (ALN) End of year report

Context

As part of a large-scale evaluation of the new ALN Act, Children in Wales were commissioned by Welsh Government to work with Children and Young People in educational settings across Wales, including both Welsh and English Medium, Primary and Secondary settings, and one local authority housed specialist class provision for pupils with ALN. We engaged with 4 settings, delivered 36 sessions and worked with 33 ALN pupils between the ages of 6 – 16.

The purpose of the work was to work directly with children and young people in education settings to gather their experiences of the new ALN Act. For this programme of work, we explored thematic areas specifically aligned to the ALN Act/ Code. In gathering children and young people's views and experiences, our approach has been to use a multi-method, creative, fluid and participatory approach. Feedback was captured in group sessions, small focus groups, and one-to-one interviews as part of a deep dive into the thematic areas.

The purpose of this programme of work has been to enable Welsh Government to take children and young people's views meaningfully into account in the planning and delivery of policy and services, and to put children's rights at the core of planning and service delivery, whilst informing the wider on-going research and evaluation programme on the implementation of the ALN System.

Thematic areas explored with pupils across all settings

Our programme of work is underpinned by 3 thematic priorities agreed with Welsh Government.

1. **About you in school:**

   - Awareness and understanding from CYP of how their needs are being met by practitioners, their rights, their IDP and support available to them such as ALP

   - Views from CYP on whether their ALP (Additional Learning Provision) meets their needs

   - Engagement of CYP in ALN processes through a person-centred approach, such as CYP's involvement in the development of IDPs

- Views from CYP on whether their language preferences are accommodated, e.g ALP available in Welsh or not

2. About your school:

- Are CYP happy with their educational experiences and do they feel they are learning, developing and making progress?

- Do they want to participate in school/college?

- Do CYP feel school/college helps them to develop positive social relationships, emotional resilience and stability?

3. About your future:

- What are CYP's aspirations for further education, for employment?

- Do they feel they can achieve these goals?

- Do CYP participate in activities outside of school/college?

- Does school/college help CYP to participate in these activities (e.g. increased confidence, practical support)

NB. The information provided below is to compliment the more detailed narrative in our quarterly monitoring reports and our Findings Reports from each of the school settings

1. ABOUT YOU IN SCHOOL

Relational practice

When asked if they felt teachers were meeting their needs, pupils' feedback highlighted that the stronger their **relationships**, the more pupils could say that their needs had been met. When asked what kind of teachers had met their needs, pupils focused on teachers' personal qualities and said, '*Kind, funny, trusting teachers; someone you can be vulnerable with and who makes school feel safe'.* Pupils said teachers who find ways to connect with them, inspire them and offer choices, had brought out the best in them.

When they felt listened to, they also felt respected and that their views had been taken seriously. Some pupils admitted to feeling nervous around teachers, causing them to express feelings of frustration, low self-esteem and disengagement. They said teachers who are *"too strict, shout and don't allow enough time to complete the work",* were not meeting their needs. Pupils described feeling most engaged where they had felt **seen**, **respected** and **valued**. They reported being able to experience a sense of pride and celebrate their strengths, develop greater self-esteem and confidence along the way. Pupils said praise and **personalized teaching** had a positive impact on their self-esteem, learning and overall engagement in school. They said, '*In math's, the teacher gives me praise, notices me, he is kind. Other teachers are so understanding, and they go out of the way so that I understand the work. I know they want school to be a **safe space** for me and they want me in their classroom'.* This **inclusive approach** cultivated a more fluid, reactionary and optimistic learning climate for pupils.

Even though pupils expressed having had positive relationships with teachers, they said how the poor relationships with few teachers have led to ill feeling, their needs left unmet and feelings of disengagement. One pupil described the impact such relationships had on them *'I can't crack a joke with her, constantly frowning and miserable. It's not an enjoyable environment to be in.'*

Pupils said how feeling **able to ask for support** was an important step in accessing the support they needed. To be able to trust that what they said, will be acted upon. One pupil talked about the impact being able to ask for help meant for them, *"I now have the courage to ask for help, but this hasn't always been the case, it's taken me years to build up this courage.'* Pupils expressed the relief they felt to finally get to a place of feeling seen and heard by teachers, in more equitable and inclusive ways, *'I feel like I have been fighting for years but now, finally, I'm in a place where I feel listened to, I almost feel*

equal to other normal kids with how we are treated. Before they didn't see me, I was overlooked. I wanted them to hear me out.'

Key Factors

Healthy relational connections between pupils and teachers

Embracing vulnerability

Safe Spaces

Inclusive environment

Prioritizing individual needs

School Environment

Pupils identified how their needs were being met using **Person-Centred strategies**, including one-to-one intervention, collaborative intervention, behavioural interventions, classroom-based intervention and social, emotional and wellbeing interventions. They said how one to one and collaborative interventions, had allowed them to feel more relaxed and less self-conscious in class so that they felt more able to participate, develop and engage in learning. One pupil said *'I prefer **small group interventions** because I have more time to do the work, and I feel more confident. In a bigger class I will just refuse to read.'*

Others said how **behaviour support intervention** and teachers using approaches in ways that felt personal to them, is supporting them in school. How teachers responding authentically and flexibly, means they feel listened to, better understood, more able to cope, develop better resilience and refocus their behaviour in positive ways. One pupil shared their experiences of a teacher **understanding their needs** by responding in ways that the pupil needed them too. They said *'The teacher just stood with me and let me calm down in my own time, but teachers challenging me and provoking me does not help. I even have buzz sentences for them like get away from me'.*

Support that felt **bespoke and accessible**, gave some pupils opportunities to develop their independence. One pupil said *'good support to me Is knowing you are around me. If people are touching me, I feel claustrophobic, I end up not wanting that support. I just need them around me when I need them to be'.* Pupils and teachers reported how feeling able to be open and honest was important and led to more needs being met. One teacher commented on their relationships with a pupil and said *'I know them insider out. If I get it wrong, they tell me.'* Teachers modelling vulnerability and understanding that it's ok to get it wrong sometimes, demonstrated to pupils a willingness to listen, respect and that pupils' views had meaningfully been considered.

What emerged through our work was how some pupils lacked the confidence or felt schools could not meet their needs. Even though pupils felt supported and that teachers were doing their best, they felt

schools **lacked capacity and resources** to meet their needs. Others felt their ALN to be too complex and that school didn't have the necessary resources to work with them. In an interview with one pupil, they said *'I do not think the school is equipped to deal with people like me'.* Others understood the pressures and challenges in the classroom and said, '*They got hundreds of people to support here, they really are trying their best'.* Some pupils identified and admitted to these being the reasons they hold back from asking for support, as they felt there was too high a level of need in the room with other ALN pupils also needing support. Some pupils said how their **environment** and their relationships with peers and teachers, had left them unable to ask for help in class. They worry about the consequences of asking for help and instead will turn to trusted peers to support them. One pupil said, *'I don't ask for help in case they think I'm weird or stupid'*. Consequently, some pupils have dropped subjects where they were unable to ask for support. Where pupils were able to ask for support, it led to **greater self-esteem**, wellbeing, learning and development.

Even though pupils lacked awareness and understanding of **ALN terminology**, they were able to identify the support made available to them and how this support met their needs. In addition to the use of targeted intervention, pupils said how **access to classroom resources** such as whiteboard mats, timetables and technology is supporting their needs. One pupil shared how **access to technology** has alleviated barriers in their learning and is making a difference in meeting their literacy needs and contributions in school. As a result of this, they now felt more able to communicate – *"I speak on a computer that can generate my ideas and thoughts to produce the words.'* Others highlighted the impact of having **one-to-one support** and how this has meant they don't fall behind, whilst others said **flexible timetable** means they can avoid school traffic and learn at home where their physical needs are able to be met. With adjustments to their learning environments, pupils said how access to **quieter and alternative spaces** was what they needed. One pupil shared how noisy environments is a barrier to their learning and engagement *'In my old class there were too many pupils. I needed quiet time'.*

Key factors

Tailored interventions

Access to Resources

Fluid and responsive environments

High level of need

Children and young people's involvement in ALN processes

Across all settings, the complexity of need, age of pupils and the choice to participate, were all factors that often-meant pupils had little or limited input and involvement into their **IDP's** and were only briefly attending their **PCP meetings**. However, in line with ALN policy, pupils shared good awareness and understanding of how teaching staff were using Person Centred approaches to gather views to

inform IDP's. Even though pupils lacked the awareness and understanding of ALN jargon and terminology, what emerged was that pupils were able to identify their needs as being met.

Pupils had varying levels of awareness, understanding and involvement in their IDP's. Pupils who know they are with an IDP shared good awareness and understanding of the contents of their IDP saying, "*it has your picture, name, information about you, how we are progressing and what we like about school'.* Other pupils understood the information to be relevant and unique to them, and how the **sharing of information** is a tool to support them across the whole school. They said, "*if there's a substitute teacher, they can use it to find out all about you and support you'.* They understood it to be something that felt **unique, important and individual to them**, describing it as *'their identity".*

For some pupils, they felt their IDP was an opportunity to feel listened to and taken seriously, and how, when this does happen, it works. One pupil said, *'You know when teachers bother to read your one-page profiles because when they do it can be really useful'.* It's not just an information sharing tool, it's a **tool for pupils to feel listened to, heard and know they are being taken seriously.** Whilst some saw their IDP as relevant and important in meeting their needs, others said theirs is *'out of date and no longer felt relevant'*.

In most settings, teaching staff said that where pupils are not engaged in PCP meetings and have limited awareness and understanding of their IDP, PCP capture tools are used to colour and inform an IDP. Pupils engaged in this process said it has given them the space to *'offer opinions'* and *'feel involved'*. They have been able to reflect on their learning and development, '*the good, the bad and the ugly.*' Pupils talked about the **collaborative nature** of this way of working *'teachers help me think about where I'm struggling, help me remember, and create better habits.'*

For pupils engaged in PCP meetings and wanting to attend, they felt it was an opportunity to hear how they are **progressing and growing in school**. One pupil said, *'it helps me to do better, to treat others better and better myself'.* They felt listened to and that change was possible, "*I can ask to change stuff like lessons and how I do my work."* Other said how it had allowed them to map their progress in school, telling us *'I have come along way with reading, writing and speaking'.*

Even though some pupils admitted to not being vocal in meetings, saying *'I mostly listen and speak a tiny bit',* they were able to acknowledge, how outside of these meetings, their opinions are being listened to and taken seriously. One pupil said *'they do listen when I speak about changing anything and if I need more help. Last year I didn't want to ask for help, I wanted to be independent. But chatting more with friends and teachers has made me want to ask for help more this year'*. Pupils identified how meetings make them feel more informed about **decisions affecting their lives and education,** "*I wouldn't know what was going on and what was being said about me'.* They said how feeling **included** and being able to contribute left them feel happier, more listened to and more positive about school. They said how it had been an opportunity to create positive change in their lives, *'I get to say what I like In school, what I want, need and I get to explore possibilities'.*

Some pupils admitted to not always being able to be truthful, or that discussions didn't feel important and relevant to them. Some said how they **lacked clarity around the purpose** of their meetings, *'I*

didn't really know what the meeting was about, so I wasn't interested in attending.' Other pupils felt unhappy about the changes affecting their life and described feeling frustrated and upset during conversations around their transition into 6th form. They said *'Meetings aren't helpful, they are triggering – no change comes from them, they make your life miserable. There are unfamiliar people who you do not have relationships with'.* They felt that due to a lack of resources, it wasn't possible for the school to support them in 6th form, as they once were able to. With less access to their one – to - one and designated spaces previously made available to them, the pupil felt their needs weren't being met.

Key factors

Involvement in ALN processes

Unique support systems in place

Collaborative approaches

Feeling listened to and taken seriously

Reflective working

Exploring possibilities and creating change

Feeling informed about decisions affecting their lives

Language and Children's Rights

All pupils said how **language preferences** were being accommodated and that it didn't matter so much, whether provision was being accommodated in Welsh. However, one pupil highlighted how teachers not always teaching bilingually has felt challenging for them. They said '*it takes up energy and can be draining, especially where the words can be technical.'*

Across all settings, pupils seemed to lack awareness and understanding of **children and young people's rights**, under the new ALN System. In the time allocated for this piece of work, there needed to be more consideration and time allocated to building on pupils' existing knowledge of children's rights as a foundation to promote greater awareness and understanding of the Rights Children and Young People have under the ALN System.

2. ABOUT YOUR SCHOOL

Happiness in school

Pupils reported feeling happiest in school when their **relationships with teachers and peers** were strong, they had experienced **fulfilment of learning**, were given opportunities to **celebrate strengths**, had felt valued, respected, understood and **experienced a sense of belonging**.

One pupil shared their experiences saying, *'I enjoy criminology, I'm interested in the subject, the teacher is cool, nice, kind, she understands me, she gets it, takes time to talk to me – the good, the bad and the ugly'.* Other pupils felt similar and said how teachers **modelling positive attitudes and creating inclusive environments** positively impacted on their engagement, learning and development. One pupil said, *'I love food tech; it's a subject I learn lots in. The teacher is stern but respectful, she understands me. I love teachers who you can tell love their job. If they're upbeat, it makes me excited for their lesson'.* Other factors contributing to pupils' happiness in school included more time spent in lessons they enjoyed, **accessing emotional and social support, self-directed learning and spending time outdoors in nature**.

Pupils highlighted the **pressure of exams** and the impact this is having on their well-being and engagement in school and how they now feel less happy in subjects they once had previously enjoyed and felt passionate about. One pupil who has felt the impact of exam pressure said *'exams can take the joy and fun out of subjects.'* Equally, pupils said alternative arrangements have eased the pressure for them. Pupils commented on how they feel teachers' negative attitudes towards them have affected their levels self-esteem and capacity to learn. One pupil said, *'I try not to judge people because I think they might not be having a good day but if teachers are constantly negative, this does something to my brain, and I get frustrated'*.

Key factors

Support with exams

Positive teacher and peer relationships

Fulfilment towards learning

Celebrating strengths and interests

Valued, respected and a sense of belonging

Access to emotional and social support systems

Participation in school

When asked if pupils wanted to participate in school, across all settings they responded with 'yes', 'no' and 'it depends'. Pupils commented on how teachers' personal strengths have positively impacting on

their emotions and participation in school with '*time spent with favourite teachers who make you laugh'.* They identified feeling more able to participate when the learning had **felt creative, hands on and experiential**. They felt more able and want to participate more when the nature of the work felt **purposeful, allowed for skills development** and when teachers found ways to teach them in ways that were unique to their learning and communications styles.

Some pupils said how it's not a matter of wanting to participate, but that they haven't felt able to. One pupil shared how not understanding instruction left them feeling unable to participate. They said '*in school they just say write this down even when I don't really know what I'm writing about'*. Literacy barriers being another factor with pupils preferring '*less writing and more practical learning',* whilst others said, '*lessons feel bell bound and they often feel pressured, nagged by teachers to complete the work'.* Pupils admitted to experiencing frustration and a lack of motivation '*when the work is either too easy or too hard, too complicated or just impossible'.* Some highlighted how '*not being able to sit with friends or feeling that nothing is being done about bullying'* left them feeling less motivated to learn and engage in school. Lessons and interventions being unexpectedly cancelled or teachers absent, left pupils less able to cope and participate. One pupil with a disability shared their experience of attending a gym session where a teacher not understanding their needs, left them feeling unable to participate and consequently lead them to drop this subject. They said, '*I have a disability so couldn't run fast and keep up, but the teacher just thought I was being lazy. They didn't adjust or change the lesson for me, so I just didn't want to take part in the end'.*

Pupils said how their **friendships** in school have supported their participation, development and sense of belonging. They said how these friendships have gone beyond school, into their communities and further education. One pupil highlighted what it has meant to be part of a friendship group and how this has supported them, saying '*we are more like family'.*

Key factors

Teachers positively impacting pupils' emotions

Creative, hands on and experiential learning

Skills development towards future aspirations

Understanding pupils' unique learning and communication styles

Teaching strategies to ensure pupils understanding

Sufficient time to complete work related tasks

Bullying being dealt with and taken seriously

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3. ABOUT YOUR FUTURE

Educational Aspirations

All pupils were with aspirations to either attend **6th form, FE college** or enter **employment.** For pupils wanting to attend college, they felt this would mean greater **access to technology**, opportunities to develop **autonomy** and have more **freedom** around routines. For one pupil wanting to enter employment they said there's *more chance of being someone you want to be'.* One pupil aspiring to become a sports media influencer said, *'you can earn money for doing what you enjoy and it's less boring than school.'* Some pupils knew their aspirations very early on and are now on the pathway to making this transition into college. They shared how **emotional support** from school and **career advice** has supported them to be able to achieve this step.

Others are with aspirations but feeling ambivalent over which pathway to choose. Pupils aspiring to attend college said it would mean a more mature environment, to feel viewed as an adult, experience fulfilment of learning, greater independence and opportunities for skills development. Even though they admit to feeling supported and that their needs are being met in school, one pupil shared their excitement for college this year saying, *'school has felt like a drag since day one, so now, it's about o*

Pupils said that **familiarity of relationships and buildings**, exam results, enjoyment for subjects, equipped with the necessary skills and **support from family,** is what makes them feel their aspirations are achievable. Also, support from school including careers advice, discussions with peers and school staff, travel training and **visits to college**. Pupils aspiring to attend 6th form said they feel this is achievable because of familiarity of relationships, environment and that their needs had been met. However, due to lack of available support and suitable courses, teachers' aspirations for pupils, didn't always match the aspirations pupils had for themselves. Some pupils with aspirations to attend college admitted to **feeling overwhelmed** and worried about the **unfamiliarity and uncertainty**. When asked what some of these worries might be they said, *'others about others judging me', 'if teachers and students will be nice', 'being bullied'* and *'what the class will be like?'*

Key Factors

Familiarity and safety

Careers advice

Discussions with peers and teachers

Emotional and social support systems

Travel training

Preparation, planning and visits to school

Family support

Participation outside of school

Whilst some pupils told us they are involved in activities outside of school, most pupils told us no, they are not. Where pupils were engaged in activities outside of school, these were mostly young people led and spent in social groups or as part of solo activities to improve better mental health.

Rather than activities, pupils shared examples of hobbies they are participating in. Sports, gaming and social media allowed them to feel emotionally connected, passionate about individual performance, a sense of belonging, opportunities to be social, play and strategize. As pupils weren't engaged in activities outside of school, they were unable to identify how they felt school is supporting them. They said access to transport, more opportunities and authentic opportunities, would support their engagement in outside school activities. Where activities had been identified by parents, some pupils admitted to feeling disengaged and lacked interest. Also, bullying and rurality where other factors contributing to pupils' lack of participation in outside school activities. Some pupils said schools did more to promote pupils' participation when the school was being represented, with events such as the Eisteddfod.

Key factors
Young person led/initiated
Transport
Interest in activities/ opportunities
Rurality
Bullying

For further information, please contact:

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