

This response was submitted to the **Children, Young People and Education Committee** inquiry into **Implementation of education reforms**

IER 14

Ymateb gan: Y Gymdeithas Genedlaethol i Blant Byddar

Response from: National Deaf Children's Society



Additional Learning Needs Reforms – National Deaf Children's Society Research, 2023 About Us

The National Deaf Children's Society seeks to create a world without barriers for deaf children, young people and their families. We support children and young people aged 0-25 with all levels of deafness, from mild through to profound, including those with temporary hearing loss and a unilateral loss. There are more than 2,300 deaf children across Wales. Around 80% of school-aged deaf children in Wales attend mainstream schools.

Additional Learning Needs Reforms

National Deaf Children's Society believes that The Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018, and its associated guidance, is clear that deaf children in Wales should routinely be seen as eligible for an Individual Development Plan (IDP).

Attainment levels amongst deaf children are consistently lower than those of their hearing classmates, and the use of Individual Development Plans, and the support that will be delivered alongside them, is a key part of addressing this attainment gap.

We expect all those involved in, advising on and implementing the reforms following the 2018 legislation to act in a way which is fully consistent with these legal requirements on eligibility.

Members Survey Overview

Between August and November 2022 we carried out a survey of families of deaf children and professionals who work with deaf children to understand our member's experiences of the ALN Reforms. These surveys revealed some key findings:

- Generally, carers and parents have a low understanding of the ALN reforms and what it means for them and their deaf child
- Professionals who work with deaf children believe there is still confusion within the system about the eligibility of deaf learners for an individual development plan
- Only around a quarter of the families of deaf children surveyed said their child had an Individual Development Plan

Parent/Carer Views

Overall, our survey showed that carers and parents of deaf children have a low awareness and understanding of the Additional Learning Needs reforms. In fact, over two-thirds of parents/carers who responded to our survey told us they only became aware of the Additional Learning Needs Reforms and IDPs through information from the National Deaf Children's Society.

In addition, almost half of respondents said they essentially had no understanding of what the IDP system meant for them and their child.

A number of parents and carers told us they were looking for more specific information on the reforms, including:

"How it [IDPs] will actually be supported in the classroom"

Parent of 13-year-old deaf young person

“A simple, basic overview in layman terms for parents. A print out maybe?”

Parent of 12-year-old deaf young person

“Some sessions about what to expect [from the IDP system] and how I can best support my son.”

Parent of 10-year-old deaf child

“We have no idea [about IDP support plans], and would like support and information, to help us understand and help our child”

Parent of 9-year-old deaf young person

Our evidence suggests that significant work is still needed to inform parents and carers of their rights under the ALN system, and the duties local authorities and schools have towards them.

Since the introduction of the reforms, we have found instances of parents and carers first encountering the ALN reforms and the IDP system upon receipt of a decision as to whether their child is eligible for an IDP. With no prior knowledge of the reforms, this is leaving parents and children with uncertainty about the ability of schools to meet their educational needs. The significant gap in understanding highlighted by our survey shows that further work is needed to raise awareness at a local level. It is vital that parents and carers are aware of the IDP system prior to them receiving an IDP decision notice.

Alongside an understanding of their rights, key information on how to contact local ALN Coordinators in order to request an IDP would allow parents to play a more proactive role and work with local authorities to ensure their child's needs are met.

Professionals

We understand that as the ALN Reforms are new, there will be a period of learning for professionals to understand and come to terms with the system. Whilst training and development is ongoing, professionals have told us that there is still an element of misunderstanding within the system as to how the IDP system relates to deafness. Some professionals have told us that there is ongoing confusion around whether deaf children with a temporary hearing loss or even hearing aids are eligible for IDPs.

This is worrying information. It is the view of the National Deaf Children's Society that virtually all deaf children, whether they have a temporary or permanent hearing loss, should be eligible for an IDP, including those with hearing aids. Hearing aids will make sounds louder and clearer but they don't restore 'normal' hearing. A deaf child wearing their hearing aids will not be able to hear in the same way as a hearing child.

Our most recent educational attainment gap data (2019) shows that deaf children, which includes those with hearing aids, fall behind their hearing peers in educational attainment at every level from the foundation phase through to Key Stage 4. The relative gap sits at 20% for those in the foundation phase. Deaf children can achieve anything their hearing peers can, and this gap can be closed with the right support in place.

Professionals must have clarity on this issue otherwise deaf children are at risk of losing out on the support plans they are entitled to. Professionals have added to this that deaf awareness training

could help with services supporting deaf children. National Deaf Children's Society [offers](#) advice, guidance and training in this area.

Teachers of the Deaf

Responses from professionals also told us that the experience of Teachers of the Deaf has been essential in terms of understanding how the reforms relates to deaf children and young people. Concerns have been raised over staffing and resource provision, however. Professionals told us that a lot of the work with supporting deaf children through the new system falls with Qualified Teachers of the Deaf or Communication Support Workers. However, they said staffing is stretched and this work is carried out in addition to all of their previous duties. One respondent said that transferring deaf students to the new ALN system would be a "*mammoth task*". This demonstrates a great need for more Teachers of the Deaf to ensure smooth implementation of the Reforms and embed support for deaf learners.

However, the recent Consortium for Research in Deaf Education (CRIDE) survey at the National Deaf Children's Society has highlighted a continued decline in the number of Teachers of the Deaf in Wales. This service has been cut by 20% since 2011. To future-proof the Teacher of the Deaf service and to ensure deaf children receive the support they need, investment is needed now to reverse the decline in numbers. Further to this, many Teachers of the Deaf are set to retire within the next decade. Without their support, deaf children will continue to fall behind their hearing peers at school, and the educational attainment gap will not be closed.

Additional Concerns

We have also received an individual case of a deaf child being given a No IDP Notice and placed on a non-statutory plan instead. Whilst we saw this case resolved and the child given an IDP, it only serves to highlight the confusion and unfamiliarity with the new system, and we have fears that this is happening across Wales in instances we are not yet aware of.

Some parents also told us that their child received a one-page profile only. Whilst this forms part of an Individual Development Plan, one-page profiles should not be handed out on their own. They do not meet the statutory requirements, and information to professionals and parents should make this clear.

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