

Cyflwynwyd yr ymateb hwn i ymchwiliad y [Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg](#) i [weithredu diwygiadau addysg](#)

This response was submitted to the [Children, Young People and Education Committee](#) inquiry into [Implementation of education reforms](#)

IER 30

Ymateb gan: Gwasanaeth Addysg yr Eglwys Gatholig

Response from: Catholic Education Service (CES)

Nodwch eich barn mewn perthynas â chylch gorchwyl yr ymchwiliad. | Record your views against the inquiry's terms of reference.

Introduction

The Catholic Education Service (CES) is the education agency of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales (Bishops' Conference). The Bishops' Conference is the permanent assembly of the Catholic Bishops in England and Wales and the CES is charged with promoting and securing education on behalf of the Bishops. There are three Welsh Catholic Dioceses each with a Director of Education. There are 85 Catholic schools in Wales educating over 28,500 pupils. Catholics schools in Wales are more ethnically diverse than the national average and often serve a higher proportion of learners from disadvantaged backgrounds. Several Catholic schools in Wales were chosen to become pilot schools for the implementation of the Curriculum for Wales and the ALN system.

In order to track schools' progress and views over the consultation period, the CES created a questionnaire based on the CYPE Committee's terms of reference which will be reissued to gather information in alignment with the CYPE thematic check-ins. Questionnaire responses were submitted by primary and secondary headteachers from across the three dioceses. The CES gathered additional feedback from headteachers at monthly meetings and will continue this throughout the consultation process.

At this stage of the implementation process, headteachers' were most concerned about capacity and workload. Navigating the changes to two large pieces of legislation at the same time had placed a strain on their schools' workforces. Funding and difficulties with budgets have been exacerbating this. The detail of replies, particularly concerning the ALN bill, exceeded expectations. Despite the workload associated with implementing two significant pieces of legislation, headteachers are keen to share their experiences with the CYPE Committee to ensure successful implementation.



1. Implementation of the Curriculum for Wales in early years settings, primary schools and secondary schools

Staff absence and funding were listed by headteachers as their main challenges so far in managing the changes for the Curriculum for Wales over the last two years whilst dealing with the pandemic. Responses indicated collaboration, professional learning and confidence with the new curriculum have also been challenging.

Despite initial indications that all secondary schools would begin implementing the Curriculum for Wales this year, some Catholic schools decided to postpone this until next year due to the pandemic's impact. The lockdowns and lack of in-person teaching led to many pupils requiring extra time to catch up developmentally.

2. The level of consistency and equity of learning opportunities for pupils across Wales, given the flexibility for schools to develop their own curricula within a national framework.

Cluster working was rated by headteachers as the best way to ensure a high level of consistency and equity of learning opportunities for pupils given the flexibility that comes with the new curriculum to develop their own curricula within a national framework. They had also found that collaboration with local schools and professional learning had been beneficial.

3. The associated reform of qualifications to align with the Curriculum for Wales.

60.9% of schools said they did not feel clear about the changes associated with the reform of qualifications to align with the Curriculum for Wales. They were given the option to elaborate on this question:

Concerns

Clarity on what changes will look like would be appreciated. They would welcome joined-up messaging from the Welsh Government, Qualifications Wales and WJEC on the changes and their timeline.

One school said:

'The suite of qualifications will need to be reformed to ensure the programmes of study reflect the Curriculum for Wales and progression that learners have made pre-14'

4. Implementation of the new Additional Learning Needs (ALN) system and the effective transfer of learners from the existing Special Educational Needs (SEN) system.



Funding was mentioned as the greatest challenge in managing the changes for ALN over the last two years whilst dealing with the pandemic. Professional learning and confidence in implementation were also listed as challenges.

No school rated the funding available as good. 17.4% rated levels as sufficient and 82.6% as insufficient.

69.6% of schools stated they felt the progress made implementing the new ALN system in their school has been good. 21.7% said it has been steady and 8.7% said it has been slow. They were invited to give reasons for their answers:

Positive Feedback

Many schools were appreciative of the ongoing support of local authorities and cluster groups in ensuring good implementation progress and a consistent approach. They highlighted having a whole-school consistent approach and vision, alongside staff training, had enabled staff to complete referrals and IDPs more efficiently. New, smarter ways of working like holding virtual meetings had increased capacity.

'We are supported well in terms of the role of the ALNCo by the Local Authority and Cluster. Our policies and procedures align with the new requirements'

'We were a pilot school so got started on the transition to new IDPs early. We have had 2 strong non-teaching ALNCos over the time'

Concerns

Many headteachers highlighted they have been reliant on dedicated and resilient ALNCos to ensure they were progressing well in implementing the new ALN system. However, many, especially those in primary settings said the role of ALNCo had become a full-time job and they were having to juggle budget pressures with the implementation timeline. Many said they didn't receive enough funding to allow for additional staff to assist:

'We have worked extremely hard to ensure we have met timelines and implemented all that is needed, but that has come at a huge financial cost and also workload for staff'

'We have worked hard on the implementation of the ALN Code but last term due to budget pressures, we had to reduce the ALNCo's time out of class and this has impacted on level of work we are now able to carry out to implement the new arrangements'

Concerns were also expressed about differing interpretations of the new ALN system depending on the local authority. Some local authorities have written IDPs for schools which enabled consistency. However, in other local authorities this is not the case. This created capacity issues in some schools concerning the review of the previous year's IDPs and development of new IDPs as the process of assessment is ongoing to meet learners' needs.



5. The application of the definition of ALN, compared to presently for SEN, and whether there is any 'raising of the bar' on the ground for determining eligibility for provision.

78.3% of headteachers indicated that comparing the application of the definition of ALN to SEN, there has been a 'raising of the bar' for determining eligibility for provision. 21.7% of respondents didn't agree.

Positive Feedback

Those who found a 'raising of the bar' shared that it has been useful to have been given clarity on the definition of ALN, its criteria and its difference from Universal Provision. Some schools shared this was because of clear guidance given by their local authority:

'We have had very clear guidance from our LA on the difference between ALN and Universal Provision'

Concerns

The majority of schools outlined workload as the main difficulty experienced with the transfer of learners from the existing SEN system. A number of schools raised concerns about the length of time required to collate information and complete paperwork 'behind-the-scenes' such as writing IDPs. They felt the workload expected with the cost of staffing was not realistic or sustainable. Examples below:

'Costs associated with ALN are increasing. There is an increased workload for our ALNCo - partly due to higher level of needs post COVID'

'The number of children to arrange meetings for and to get all the parents and professionals to attend is a huge administration process even before dealing with the statutory elements of the documentation. Staff need to be released from classes to attend reviews and space needs to be made available. The cost of this to the school is significant'

Some schools were concerned that the change in criteria meant some learners have not been able to access the support they require. This has led to more pressure on teachers as well as schools more generally to meet the needs of these pupils in the absence of professional development opportunities:

'We have made good progress but we now have far more children with ALN who are not classed as ALN and there is no funding to support these children'

'It has become more difficult to get help for children, and the process now lies heavily on the school'



6. The professional learning and other support settings are receiving to ensure effective implementation of the Curriculum for Wales and the ALN system.

Curriculum for Wales

School-to-school learning was rated by headteachers as the highest requirement for schools to successfully implement the new curriculum. This was closely followed by training from the Welsh Government and local authorities. Catholic schools have appreciated professional learning provided by the CES and diocesan education officers. This support will continue throughout the implementation phase. A number of headteachers also made the suggestion that training from examination boards would be helpful.

The majority of headteachers said that consortia-led learning and support as well as working with schools in their cluster are the best professional learning and training sources required by the workforce for successful implementation. A large proportion stated working with local schools had been effective. Some mentioned they had sought their own best practice by doing research or by enlisting external training providers to assist with implementation.

ALN System

The majority of schools listed learning and training from the local authority as the most crucial professional learning and training requirement for the successful implementation of ALN reform. This was closely followed by learning and training from the Welsh Government and school-to-school learning.

100% of respondents listed their local authorities as a source of learning and support to ensure effective implementation. They found working with schools in their clusters helpful, as well as working with other local schools.

Positive Feedback

Our questionnaire responses highlighted the following as being beneficial:

- Professional learning and support provided by the LA and consortia
- Support through school-to-school working
- Regular forums for ALNCos
- Upskilling of ALNCos enabling them to train staff in their own schools
- Regular cluster meetings
- Working closely with outside agencies
- Specialised additional training for SMT provided by Las
- Prioritising time for ALNCos to attend the LA ALN Forum Meetings and work with cluster primaries



7. Other factors potentially affecting implementation of the Curriculum for Wales and the ALN system, for example levels of funding and fall out from the pandemic.

Curriculum for Wales

No respondents rated the levels of funding as good. 21.7% rated it as sufficient and 78.3% as insufficient. When asked what factors may affect implementation, funding scored very highly, with nearly all headteachers flagging this as an issue. 73.9% of respondents raised staff capacity as affecting implementation. Just over 60% felt quality of advice and guidance could be improved. Just over half said cost had been an issue and staff still did not have confidence in how to implement the new curriculum. Fallout from the pandemic was also raised.

Some primary headteachers expressed concerns about the clarity of assessment. They felt it is still too vague and will take time to embed. There needs to be a clear read-across into KS4 and this should have been developed at an earlier stage so there is a clear line of sight from the outset to public examinations.

ALN System

Schools were asked what factors may affect the implementation of the new ALN system. Nearly all schools raised funding as an issue that has affected the implementation of the new ALN system. However, staff capacity was selected by the most schools (91.3%) as the biggest issue.

73.9% raised cost as an issue, and nearly 50% of headteachers said that quality of advice and guidance could be improved. Some schools expressed a lack of confidence in coping with the new system, along with concerns around engagement with parents. The level of support and access to professional learning were raised as areas of concern by 30% of respondents. The time required to complete IDPs was also a significant concern.

The ALNCo role has had to be redefined to include them within the wider leadership team due to the importance of the strategic role. The new system has put additional pressure on school budgets, as this is more expensive to administer.

8. The particular challenges and opportunities facing different types of schools in varying circumstances (e.g. language medium, demographics and locality) in terms of implementing curriculum and ALN reform.

New Curriculum

Deprivation - Catholic schools in Wales often serve an above-average proportion of learners from disadvantaged backgrounds and are often situated in urban areas of high deprivation. Headteachers reported:

- An exponential rise in child protection referrals



- Increased reports of domestic violence incidences
- A deterioration in learners' social skills
- A dramatic rise in the number of families claiming free school meals, across primary and secondary schools
- A lack of consistent parental involvement, impacting areas such as learning phonics

'I have 3 members of staff trained in ELSA but can't afford to release to deliver intervention'

Buildings - The poor condition of many Catholic schools is proving to be a significant difficulty in realising the Curriculum for Wales. This is impacting on the equity of opportunity for learners in secondary and primary schools. An example:

'The fabric of the building is over 100 years old. We do not have a space - a hall in which to gather, to celebrate, to share our learning journey'

Time pressures - Day-to-day pressures have impacted the time required for staff to meet to develop a thorough, coherent, broad curriculum. Concern was expressed about a lack of time to allow for effective school-to-school working.

Messaging – Some schools raised concerns about the lack of coherent messaging from the Welsh Government, local authorities, consortia and Estyn. One school shared this:

'Schools have been left to devise their own curriculums and now consortia messages are coming through suggesting other ways of doing things. The mixed messages are very hard to take on board after working so hard to put things in place specific for our schools and communities. Cluster work is being encouraged but after 3 years of working in isolation, so we are all at different points in our curriculum journey'

Staffing and funding – Some headteachers reported difficulty in recruiting and retaining staff due to high workloads and lack of funding. This has made it difficult to implement new systems effectively.

'Challenges facing us now are a significant lack of funding causing a deficit budget meaning that experiences, resources, specialist provision we have been providing for our pupils will no longer be affordable'

ALN Reform

Meeting the needs of EAL learners - Catholic schools in Wales are more ethnically diverse than the national average. Headteachers have reported significant numbers of pupils arriving from India, Sri Lanka, and Africa who do not have English or Welsh as their first language. Some learners with ALN come from families who are reluctant



to have their child referred or have an IDP, so additional engagement and reassurance with parents is required. One school reported that it is sometimes difficult to identify whether a EAL learner is struggling with language acquisition because English or Welsh is their second language, or whether they are struggling due to an ALN.

Size of School – Some smaller schools have found it too challenging to deliver updates and purposeful professional learning for both curriculum and ALN together. One schools said:

‘There are not enough hours in the day to meet, collaborate, share and support each other’

Impact of the coronavirus pandemic – Headteachers have reported more challenges with learners’ social and emotional needs post-pandemic. Demand has been unprecedented for many schools which has put pressure on staff capacity to deal with issues as they arise.

‘Since the pandemic, we have seen lots of children come in with undiagnosed needs that are far more profound than we would have been dealing with before. Children coming into school are less developed...having missed out on support during the pandemic’

One school stated that their local authority had experienced budget cuts which has meant ‘that we have had to lose staff who were tasked with skills interventions and narrowing the gap’.

ALNCo Capacity –The extra work that is now required to help implement changes and keep up-to-date with the new processes can be a challenge for ALNCos that are also class teachers. This is the case in many primary schools as they do not have the funding or budget to employ more staff.

Catholic Identity

Catholic schools are committed to realising the Welsh Government’s vision for education whilst maintaining their own distinctive Catholic identity. The Catholic Education Service has worked in close dialogue with the Welsh Government to ensure they consider the needs of Catholic schools.

Parents as primary educators - This has particularly impacted the way in which Catholic schools have taught RSE and RVE. The removal of the right to withdraw does not acknowledge parents as the primary educators of their children. This is contrary to Church teaching and removes choice from parents.

Relationships and Sex Education – Parents in Catholic schools continue to express concerns about the mandatory learning in the RSE code. Headteachers and diocesan directors are spending considerable time allaying the fears of parents in their schools



and that this will be an ongoing area of work as the RSE code is rolled out at secondary level.

Catholic Resources – The CES supports the Welsh Government’s aspiration for all learners to receive RSE that is of the highest quality. The CES, Welsh diocesan officers and practitioners from Catholic schools have been involved with the development of the RSE code and guidance. Working with Welsh dioceses, the CES has obtained funding for whole-school professional learning events to build the knowledge and skills of Catholic practitioners and those of different faiths or no faith.

