

P-06-1347 Review ALN policies & make compulsory to FULLY train all teachers and TAs - Correspondence form the Petitioner to the Committee, 29.08.23

Dear Petitions Committee,

I am writing to provide a comprehensive response to the email sent by Jeremy Miles, the Education Minister of Wales, in relation to the pressing issue of **mandatory** neurodiversity (ND) training for education staff. I must emphasize that while Mr. Miles' email highlights various initiatives, it falls short of directly addressing the central demand of our petition: the need for **mandatory** ND training for all education professionals in Wales.

I would like to address several critical points raised in the email:

- 1. Initial Teacher Education (ITE) Requirements:** The suggestion that teachers should have an "understanding" of Additional Learning Needs (ALN) is insufficient. We advocate for thorough training, involving both experience and specialised training led by ALN specialists and individuals with ALN themselves.
- 2. Challenges of Online ALNCo Training:** The proposal for online ALNCo training may overwhelm already overburdened professionals. Given their administrative duties, family interactions, and student support obligations, expecting ALNCo staff to engage in additional online courses is impractical.
- 3. Workload and Time Constraints:** ALNCo professionals often support large groups of staff and students. With limited time available, expecting them to complete workbooks and assessments on top of their other responsibilities is unrealistic, especially considering the current strain on school budgets.
- 4. Equity in Training:** While the national neurodiverse team focuses on professionals, it is essential to extend their efforts to the general public, ensuring broader awareness and understanding of neurodiversity.
- 5. Effectiveness of the Response:** The email's tone is aspirational, but it falls short of adequately addressing the core concerns. To assess success, there must be clear metrics and accountability mechanisms in place, ensuring that Local Education Authorities (LEAs) fulfil their obligations.
- 6. Guidance for ASD/ADHD Needs:** Clear guidelines must be provided to ensure that decisions made are driven by the needs of ASD/ADHD students.

The Equality Act's interpretation and guidance should be utilised to shape these decisions.

7. **Mandatory Training Necessity:**

A member of our campaign team, a parent governor went to school to talk about her experience of ADHD and ASD and spoke for 20 minutes to teachers and TA's who for the most part knew nothing about the difficulties we experienced as parents/children
This highlights the knowledge gap that exists within the education system. Compulsory training is vital to bridge this gap and provide essential learning.

8. **Importance of Diagnosis:** The concept of intervening without waiting for a diagnosis is flawed, as it fails to account for the diverse needs of each child. Diagnosis provides a personalised understanding that is crucial for effective interventions.

9. **Systemic Inefficiencies:** The current system's delays and lack of knowledgeable staff are impeding the timely support that neurodiverse students need. ALNCo professionals are overwhelmed, and the burden placed on them is unmanageable.

10. **Training for Teaching Assistants:** Training opportunities for Teaching Assistants (TAs) are lacking, and the process of diagnosis is too slow to enable timely interventions. Compulsory training could ensure that all staff members are prepared to support neurodiverse students.

11. **Scaling DARPL Initiatives:** Replicating DARPL initiatives for ALN training may not be effective, given the substantial disparity between the number of education staff and those reached by DARPL.

12. **Transparency and Funding:** The allocation and utilisation of the £12 million funding for neurodiversity training need clarification. Parents and students have yet to see the benefits of this allocation.

13. **Support for Individual Needs:** Without proper training, it's unclear who will identify, address, and support neurodiverse learners, as highlighted in the Minister's commitment to early intervention and support.

14. **Promoting Awareness:** I would like to propose the idea of a national campaign focused on neurodiversity awareness, involving televised initiatives and billboards. Such a campaign could significantly contribute to breaking stigma and promoting a truly inclusive society.

Furthermore, I've suggested the implementation of arena-style training days in each county. These events could feature neurodiverse speakers from various fields, inspiring educators to adopt effective teaching strategies for neurodiverse students. Such events could be both impactful and cost-effective.

I wish to reiterate the need for serious consideration by the Petitions Committee.

Our children are being failed by the current education system's lack of **mandatory** neurodiversity training. This deficiency in training impacts their education, their lives, and their futures.

The current variance in training from school to school perpetuates a postcode lottery, denying consistent, high-quality support to all students.

Teachers require regulated, evidence-based training, and universal provision must be clearly defined and consistently implemented across all schools.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. Urgent action is required to ensure a fair and equitable education system for all.

Sincerely,

Petition Feedback from Grassroots



1. Why is ND training not compulsory?
2. My daughter is due to start nursery in September and worried is an understatement she is non-verbal doesn't show interest in anything and I just been told she has to attend a mainstream school first her assessment for ASD is a year away I feel so alone because I don't know where to start I let my son down when I sent him to a mainstream before he got moved in year 5 and now I feel I'm doing the same with my daughter.
3. To use Neuro affirming language. I'm fed up with the acronym ASD. I'm not a disorder. For training to be given by Neurodivergent people. Here's a blog <https://www.thepdaspaces.com/blog/neurodiversity-affirming-glossary-of-key-words-for-families-and-professionals>
4. I have been telling my child's school since nursery and they tell me he's disrupting the class and can't keep still it's 2 weeks now and he's finishing and going to comp and last week telling me they do see he's got a problem so now going to pass this problem. Over to comp I have told them I don't know how many times of what he's like and they really don't care I'm not getting anywhere.
5. Essential to create engaging training. Not just online. Needs to be mandatory!
6. Neurodiversity training for schools/teachers is an absolute must and it should be standard across the country. This should include how to work with parents rather than against them and to be completely inclusive of our children with ALN rather than creating/putting up constant barriers.
7. Being autism/ADHD affirming rather than trying to get our children to conform to neurotypical behaviours.
8. Maybe including parents accounts/views within the training to better educate schools on what it's really like to care for children with ALN 24/7 because I really think so many people have no awareness or appreciation of how tough things can be.
9. Why Primary schools only get a very limited amount of hours of Ed psych time rather than the amount of time needed? This leads to some children never getting the help needed as it has to be rationed. Education in Wales is failing our children.
10. Why children are not getting their 121 support because although statements (IDPs) are in place there is no additional funding.
11. Why children from a LAC background do not receive extra funding , as in England, thus making them second class compared to their English counterparts.
12. How they can say the ALN reforms are good when all it does is take children in need of support off the support list and into a so called "universal provision " which in reality doesn't work (I know this from experience in a professional capacity). These reforms are a cost cutting exercise.
13. Why the majority of home educated children in Wales are so because they have been failed by the ALN policy and autism policy? Then, why WG is making it more difficult to home educate when the state provision has already FAILED these children?
14. How can Welsh government ensure that schools and LA's are complying with this mandatory guidance... and can we make sure that it is co produced with disabled pupils, parent carers and disabled people? <https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-04/planning-to-increase-access-to-schools-for-disabled-pupils.pdf>

15. I think neurodiversity training would be an excellent idea (I'm assuming they don't have any at the moment, since understanding is so godawful!)
16. The different ways that ND can present in women/girls/AFAB - it's not just boys with train obsessions!
17. Appropriate/Affirming, identity first language (use 'Autistic' as a default for example not 'on the spectrum' or 'has ASD' / definitely never say "suffers from...")
18. An awareness of masking, and the long term impacts on mental health and access to education (just because a kid seems 'fine' in primary school, it doesn't mean that the trauma isn't building up, leading to serious problems in high school).
19. If schools could just stop defaulting to a base layer of parent blame, that would be super! (Stop assuming that just because the kid is so well behaved at school that it means the parents are at fault!) most parents are excellent, and doing their best, and it's exhausting having to constantly justify ourselves.
20. It's (training) very much needed at some schools, particularly around masking and just how good some of them are at masking, but that it doesn't mean they're fine/coping, different presentation between girls and boys across ND too.
21. For primary, it needs to cover how more 'traditional' rewards aren't appropriate for ND kids. Ours had general policies apply to all, and then would adjust if necessary, but would be a more positive approach if they were just more inclusive to begin with. My 7 year old would really struggle to sit still and 'nicely' to get a dojo point, even though it would leave her disregulated . Negative impact on self esteem not recognised.
22. Our ALNco hadn't realised that the ND team can support with OT assessments without a diagnosis, you just had to have a referral accepted. We also weren't made aware that the school can contact CAMHS for advice with anxiety. Both these things caused delay to support that we could have accessed. So think it needs better awareness of who/how to link in with support.
23. Also how important it is that other kids in the class are aware of ND and making sure it's a positive thing. I'm coming from experience of primary age kids not having any awareness and my 7 year old having to explain to friends when she was only starting to understand things herself.
24. Mandatory training for headteachers, governors and all staff in relation to the equality act 2010!
25. Unless evidence stating otherwise, parents should be listened to about concerns raised about their child and not told child is fine and parent blamed. This process adds months and months of upset anxiety and lack of education and trauma. Masking especially amongst girls is very common and school refusal in itself needs to be enough to warrant further investigation and referrals.
26. If you want some Wales specific research data to strengthen your case, feel free to quote some of the findings reported within the preliminary report considering 'The Education of Autistic Pupils in Wales' published in 2021. Steffan Davies Research @SDResearch - https://swanseauniversity-my.sharepoint.com/:f/g/personal/856614_swansea_ac_uk/EsLZBQ_6JRZGnkoH4VW4OvYBgFAGKgGRhBLWcx6IDXNGOA?e=B1ZVI9
27. Curriculum that includes inclusivity awareness, making children aware of neurodivergent conditions. It just seems that if a child acts out in school then other children are not aware of the possible reasons and will then go home and be told oh they are just a naughty child. I appreciate this is not the case for everyone but I do still hear it happening

and it makes me so sad because my own child was portrayed as a naughty child and left out of activities with her peers. Offer the opportunity to be informed to everyone.

28. I think the inclusivity training & awareness shouldn't just be making children aware of neurodiversity but their parents too - making it an open conversation within schools especially during welcome meetings/transition sessions when children first start. It would hopefully help to make it a less 'us & them situation' - I have seen plenty of neurotypical children behave badly but I always feel like my daughter will be more harshly judged if she does because she's ALN - if people were more educated generally then hopefully this would get better. I also know there are plenty of books aimed at children about neurodiversity that could be provided for parents to read to their children via school.
29. Will neurodiversity training also be for nursery/preschool teachers? Or at least for nurseries attached to a school? My sons nursery are lovely, but have been clueless with noticing any of his ND behaviours. Outreach from specialist schools had to come in to point things out.
30. Training is needed for ALL school staff not just teachers and heads. Training must include autistic traits in girls and pathological demand avoidance (these children have no understanding in schools at all and are seen as naughty with unacceptable behaviour)
31. My son has moderate dyslexia acknowledged and autism traits, on the waiting list for assessment. He cannot cope with mainstream. Why is he not meeting ALN criteria as told by his ALNCo? The mainstream 'universal provision' cannot cope with individual needs and reasonable adjustments fitted to the child. Why are children that were supported before criteria changed not being supported now?
32. Awareness of the right to education and the rights of people with disabilities, as well as the expectations of the new ALN framework/Act. teachers need to know the rules of the game have changed and ND kids are not meant to be shunted out.
33. I see more and more of parents being asked for medical evidence for their child. The attendance and wellbeing officer told me they should be getting marked in. Be great to clarify from them because doctors don't give medical evidence for children unless you pay for it.
34. To have an all Wales approach to supporting children with ALN, not each council making it up as you go along. Different levels of support are offered within each Local Authority. I know it will be due to funding but an all Wales approach needs to be implemented to make it fair for all.
35. Schools (Nursery) should be given the same funding and training as the staff at flying start - there seems more training is given in that setting than the teaching staff in schools.
36. My daughter has dyscalculia and we STILL can't get her statemented. We offered to pay for an assessment but they said they wouldn't accept it unless it was done by someone her school approved.
37. Why are they leaving children diagnosed with no IDP until they are left unsafe and struggling ? why are parents finding out years after diagnosis that they child has learning needs that need to be in special schools ? this is because the ipds are done before assessment of their needs by ep .these idps are a waste of time . Why are the schools saying no resources and lea saying they get the funding for 121 ? why are they sending children to year 7 with o support ? Why do panel not go and see the child suffer as they are the ones forcing parents to accept placements that are not suitable .Why are schools getting away with constant exclusions when it is them the ones failing a childs and setting them up to fail. What is the role of an ALN exclusions officer ?

38. LEA are causing our children trauma and Aces they know well the effects of ACES.
39. It is no wonder so many kids especially girls end up self harming, feeling alone and disconnected to their peers because their really brilliant brain works differently to what is expected. Can we put in a massive safeguarding referral because to me that's what it comes down to, the system as it stands is causing harm and neglecting those kids who are ND.
40. Intelligent, neurodivergent children struggling to attend school have no schools to support their needs.
41. Children being left with no education or setting because they don't fit into mainstream and don't fit into ALN school.
42. This is the situation with my middle child. 18 months now with no education.
43. Please mention the need for compulsory training in Initial Teacher Training programmes PLUS for established teachers, in how to set up environment and learning for ND pupils (which also aids neurotypical pupils). Most importantly, teachers & support staff need updated information about ASD and ADHD, including in girls and inattentive type, to dispel the myths about ADHD occurring mostly in 'bouncy boys'.
44. Why do we have a predominantly one size fits all high stakes exams system which does not capture what ND children know can do and care about?
45. Definitely a need for all teachers to have training. I find especially Welsh schools. They haven't been used to having ALN children but now more are going through them and they don't know what to look out for as much, I find.
46. Much more training for ALN needs to be part of the Teacher training courses
47. I agree the ALN training given in ITE (Initial Teacher Education) programmes in Wales isn't sufficient for what those teachers will encounter when they enter schools. One ITE provider I know has an ALN conference for one day during the whole ITE year and that is it really in terms of ALN training. During that conference they approximately 1 hour workshops on different types of ALN. I suspect similar anecdotal evidence can be found in other ITE providers.
48. To stop focusing so much on academic achievement and more on social and emotional welfare. Schools are judged on academic success so schools have to focus on that, time to focus on wellbeing. Also to listen to parents when they say their children are finding School hard even when they appear fine in school but behaviour at homes indicates they are not. To recognise private diagnosis when they are completed to the same and sometimes above NHS standards. Parents only go private through desperation to get help for their children.
49. The amount of schools not accepting private diagnosis' are shocking. Parents come to me desperate for help and wanting to go private but I have to warn them about this all the time.
50. One company I spoke to said according to the SEN act they legally can't say no. It is just so confusing. My son can have an operation done privately but can't have an autism assessment done, makes no sense.
51. It's actually saving the schools budgets... helping them out but yet wham another barrier to learning for these pupils is put in place.
52. We should be holistically all working together for what's best for the child and if that means private assessments (that parents can afford- another discussion needed for whether it should actually come to that - as for some parents this isn't an option) which parents are able to complete then these should 100% be accepted.

53. Why aren't parents views taken into consideration? My son masks in school and they won't refer him to be assessed because they don't see what we see!
54. Exactly when did these untrained teachers with so much power become doctors? Why do children with ASD diagnosis still don't get believed if they are high functioning and again no support.
55. we've been fighting for 5 years. Writing everything thing down, all our concerns and still he can't be referred. Parents should have rights too.
56. my 9 year old is excellent at masking I school, then either withdraws completely once home because she needs to reset or we have emotional dysregulation so intense sometimes that she cannot physically hold herself upright. I have had to explain so many times that she is masking and every single time they say we are struggling with her behavior - I don't understand how they can so blatantly disregard parents concerns and fob of with I being behavioural
57. my girl comes home and unload everything she found overwhelming and frustrating.
58. Training made compulsory for ALL staff in all conditions ADHD, autism, pda, pica, tourettes etc the Welsh government fund autism Wales to do training for neurodiversity awareness and hardly any schools have taken it up.
59. IDPS need to also include mental health/anxiety.
60. Parents listened to more of what their child needs not told no they don't get bothered by noise, it's not school causing anxiety, they said they will go on stage at a concert, etc when you know they have cried, had meltdowns, panic attacks and even self-harmed the night before anxious over it.
61. Masking needs to be recognised.
62. Parents observations also taken into account for an IDP not just the schools as masking children are getting missed and getting no support at all many end up so anxious they suffer long term mental health problems and self harming.
63. More EP places as children are being refused phase B as not enough slots.
64. More sensory rooms.
65. Better support while waiting for diagnosis (CAHMS refuse to support anyone on the waiting list and there's no service to replace them during this time) . Reduced waiting times for diagnosis.
66. Play workers in school specialising in ASD/ADHD
67. More specialised placements.
68. Stop penalising parents threatening them and giving them fines when their child is struggling to attend school and stop excluding students constantly for a medical condition they cannot help.
69. Consideration to autistic/ADHD needs to be given for discipline procedures like detention and shouting at children at it is not helpful and makes matters worse.
70. definitely need more ed psych phase b and c slots...unreal loads of diagnosed children don't ever get seen by an ed psych so how can an idp be weighted ?
71. My daughter has been refused an IDP on the basis she can cope academically and isn't disruptive in class. The fact she got so anxious and sat in class self harming and the supply teacher was oblivious to it and got shouted at for walking out of class to come and find me in the library doesn't matter. The fact she has panic attacks, makes herself so stressed she's physically sick don't matter, the fact she has violent meltdowns at home don't matter. Simply her mental health which 99% school cause doesn't matter.

72. Eating provisions for ALN in mainstream for those with high sensory needs ,so many ALN children school refuse at the thought of lunchtime overload.
73. I'd like to know why the ALN Act did not adopt any of the protections of the Children and Families Act 2014 (England) for children where attending a school would be inappropriate? English EOTAS law was significantly updated, Welsh law was not. Why?
74. A major step forward would be for schools to have dedicated Occupational Therapists alongside school nurses, especially for those kids that struggle prior to diagnosis. Also sensory stimuli should be available, as an example my 9 year old uses an exercise ball at home, we have one weighted with sand and a normal, she focuses amazingly using this, she also is sensory seeking so sitting still is unnatural for, dynamic cushions in class would make a lot of different for her as would sensory oriented play to support regulation. I am sure she is not alone in this. An OT with sensory integration training could support formulation of strategies specific to each child's needs.
75. Educational psychologist with a well trained support team in every secondary school is required now. Some primary schools are not referring pupils, they get to comp and are then disengaging from learning, 4+ year wait is ridiculous.
76. I'd like to see a more positive focus on nd. Not the superpower stuff but highlighting the positives of the individual. Give the children a sense of pride in their ND identity. The focus is too much on what they can't do, what's wrong with them. This leads to low aspirations their whole life.
77. I think it would be good to talk money to them. That's the language they speak. Unmet needs leads to traumatised children which costs a lot in MH support, lost earnings and tax from parents who can't work. Then when these children become adults without education and qualifications it costs a fortune in out of work benefits. If things were picked up so much sooner all this could be avoided.
78. School ALN budgets need to be protected so when a school is making cuts, the most vulnerable aren't the first to miss out.
79. There needs to be accountability for LA/schools who discriminate and delay our children getting the full time education they are entitled to. The system of complaining to the school who is causing the harm must be changed. Parent/school relationships are key to the child's needs being met. The current complaint system seriously damages this and it's too complicated for parents to navigate.
80. The language used in referring to autistic people must be right. All research done shows autistic people overwhelmingly prefer identity first language. I'm autistic, I don't have autism. Using the right language gives a sense of security that they have up to date information and have consulted with autistic people.
81. Autistic children will need specific education to help them succeed in life too. Things like, knowing their rights and where to get help if they are violated. How to advocate for themselves. What DWP access to work programme can do for them? How to spot red flags in relationships? How to set boundaries. We are more vulnerable to abusive relationships so these things are crucial.
82. Adequate compulsory training that is created by ND people. Across Wales not just pockets of schools who decide to take it up.
83. Early intervention and believing parents first concerns.
84. A website for each LA that shows ALL available provision and parents can easily find out what they need. It seems to be a dark secret that they deliberately hide when they don't want to pay for what the child needs.

85. Schools to understand that all behaviour is communication. Discipline and punishment doesn't work for our kids. They need understanding and help to get through the big emotions they experience. They don't need to be made to feel shame when this happens. This would help all children not just ND.
86. To start listening to the parents. they need to realise how these children masks their emotions in school and really try to confirm themselves to 'normality' that they overwhelm themselves and leave it all explode when home in their comfort space where there is no judgement, just love and understanding, how they try their best to keep up with others in work that they stress themselves over every subject.
87. all neurodiverse children are being left floundering in mainstream education because teachers and teaching assistants lack the reasonable training and our issues are being swept under the rug because they seem functional in school.
88. If the ALN act is up to age 25 why do the education tribunal not deal with cases of discrimination ETC at college?
89. What impact assessment has been conducted on the deliverance of provisions and also early identification of ALN pupils if teachers are not aware of behaviours displayed by pupils with neurodivergence conditions.
90. How do policy change the behaviour of ALN pupils with current use of sanctions / detention?
91. Are WG advising schools that a separate behaviour policy should be implemented regarding ALN pupils punishments and ALL staff dealing with ALN pupils during this should be FULLY trained in pupils suspected disability.
92. the diagnosis process is the real problem and ignorance to scientific facts with the chemical imbalance and people aren't trained properly these days to keep up with the modern ways of life.
93. I've got many points but I'd say it would be great to mention what several other comments have said around the ALN provision given to training teachers on Initial Teacher Education courses. I was on a PGCE primary course during the 2021-2022 academic year and the only ALN content was the one day ALN conference which back then was online and we had 1 hour sessions on different ALN with guest speakers. That was it. I had to drop out of the course but that is a whole other story! Thankfully I now have an ASD diagnosis.
94. When I then studied the ALN module on my Masters degree, the majority of the newly qualified teachers on the module agreed that this ALN training was not sufficient.
95. I work with early years, (0-4) and parents struggle to find any one to speak to if they have concerns about their child's development. They are told to talk to GP who directs them to health visitor who may send them back to GP, and so the cycle begins. Generally they pay for private support, increasing the gap between haves and have nots! We need to be putting support in place asap for all children and their families, not waiting for school to identify, assess, bring in outside agencies etc.. we all know this can take years, which equals a failed child and family!
96. I know what a hard time my mum's cousin had with her son between these ages. Just felt she was getting no where with schools/professionals/local authority for years...really impacted on her wellbeing.
97. Why do the GP's tell you that the school have to refer? They won't refer though just 'monitor' which they don't even do that. That was my GP's response just last Sept? Even if you are lucky enough for a referral the wait is 4+ years. How can a child go through 8

years of primary without being picked up with adhd? Why are our children being left with low self esteem due to not receiving correct support at school, why are teachers just punishing when there is clearly an unmet learning need?

98. I worked in a nursery and had concerns over a child, (ALN/sensory) I was told to not say nothing, it's awful.
99. School is the wrong place to ask, it needs to be multi disciplined approach. They are underfunded and simply can't afford to have a child diagnosed with anything that would require money thrown at it. Hence the "we don't see that behaviour here" routine. Without more funding in schools for additional needs we will never get fair play for our children.
100. My Grandson who has adhd regularly misses breaks for fidgeting. He even has been slapped by one TA and told to shut up!
101. Why has the WG behaviour policy for schools not been updated for over 10 years and does not incorporate ALN pupils? <https://www.gov.wales/behaviour-management-classroom-guidance-secondary-schools>
102. My son today had isolation, missed his lunch completely, told he was not allowed to eat his lunchbox items, got 9 sanctions and is having detention for these again tomorrow during lunch? How many punishments are enough?
103. why does the definition of ALN in the new system still contain words like 'deficit' 'significantly greater difficulty' 'prevents' 'hinders' - it's very medical in it's focus - there has to be problems in the child themselves. It's not very social model when this system is meant to be moving to a social model of disability.
104. In terms of teacher training there should be refreshers linked to understanding behaviours needs and how to teach for and when teachers know they have these needs in their classes - cannot possibly cover all needs in one course what can end up being years before knowledge is practically needed.
105. The amount of times I've been back and forth the GP with my son since the age of 3. 'go to the school' the school sent me to the GP, and it then became a vicious circle. My son told me aged 4 he wanted to kill himself. I phoned CAMHS, they said he isn't priority. So I phoned my GP. They told me to look online for a link. He's 9 on Wednesday and we are currently on the pathway after fighting for it. He has no support in school. He the 'naughty' child as far as they are concerned.
106. All school staff need training in neurodiversity. All TAs need to be highly trained as they are the people often assigned to help ND children.
107. Teaching assistants need to be well paid or they will keep leaving the jobs. What is the average lifespan of a TAs employment?
108. Much more training for primary school teachers needed. I went through teacher training and did additional module in SEN and still didn't recognise ADHD in myself! Much more awareness needed particularly in how girls present. Would love to see some kind of basic screening at primary level so children have chance of support and being able to reach their full potential rather than struggling all the way through education.