

Isle of Anglesey County Council Scrutiny Report

Committee:	Partnership and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee
Date:	09.06.26
Subject:	ALN and Inclusion Service 2025-26: current situation, challenges and next steps
Scrutiny Chair:	Councillor Sonia Williams

1. Who will be the portfolio holder presenting / leading the report?

Portfolio Holder	Role
Councillor Dafydd Roberts	Portfolio Holder for Education
Service Officer (Supporting)	Role
Aaron Cadwaladr Evans	Director of Education, Skills and Young People

2. Why the Scrutiny Committee is being asked to consider the matter

The purpose of this paper is to provide assurance and an overview of the current performance of the ALN and Inclusion Service, highlighting what is working, the main operational challenges, and the managed risks.

3. Role of the Scrutiny Committee and recommendations

- For assurance
- For recommendation to the Executive
- For information

Recommendation(s):

A1 The Executive is requested to propose comments on the ALN and Inclusion Service 2025-26 report and suggestions on the offer's effectiveness for Anglesey schools.

4. How does the recommendation(s) contribute to the objectives of the Council's Plan?

One of the council's main priorities is education. The Council Plan includes an ambition to ensure effective provision for today and future generations. One of the Plan's 3 aims is to "create conditions that will enable everyone to fulfil their full potential", and the work of the

Learning Service and the Additional Learning Needs and Inclusion Partnership contribute to this aim.

5. Key scrutiny themes

Key themes the Scrutiny Committee should concentrate on:

1. Value for money.
2. Quality of the ALN provision.
3. Service effectiveness and focus on the learner.
4. Impact on the skills, achievement and well-being of learners with ALN.
5. Main challenges / risk management.
6. Next steps.

6. Key points / summary

Context:

- The Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act came into force in September 2021. There was a gradual transition process, and since September 2025, all learners have been transferred under the new Act.
- The ALN and Inclusion Service was established in May 2017, as a joint service between Isle of Anglesey County Council and Gwynedd Council. The service has since evolved to respond to changes in demand and the wider context. It was externally reviewed in 2020, and again in December 2023.
- Anglesey's authority received an Estyn inspection in 2022.
- Each school receives funding to provide for learners with an Individual Development Plan. Since March 2025, each school receives formula-based funding.
- The current contract with Gwynedd Council (Isle of Anglesey County Council and Gwynedd Council's ALN and Inclusion Service) will come to an end on 31.08.2026, and a consultation process on the service's structure for Isle of Anglesey County Council has recently completed. Owain Roberts will be leading this service as the Strategic Lead from September but is also co-ordinating planning and transition towards the new service.

Operational Summary

What has worked well

- The transition to the new arrangements was successfully completed, including collaborating with schools and colleges to transfer learners to Individual Development Plans (IDPs).
- Dispute resolution arrangements have been established, with a low number of tribunal cases last year and the majority resolved.
- Post-16 transition arrangements have been established and have been praised by partners, with an absence of disputes between young people/parents and the authority.

- Quality assurance mechanisms are in place to review IDPs and monitor provision, with close collaboration between schools and specialist teams.

Key challenges

- Demand for support and the complexity of needs are increasing while resources are diminishing, and this is putting pressure on schools (including the workload of the Additional Learning Needs Coordinator (ALNCo)) and the service's capacity.
- The demand for specialist settings continues to grow, with challenges in terms of supporting some intensive and complex learners in the mainstream due to financial restrictions.
- There are challenges in terms of recruiting some specialist roles, especially Welsh-speaking educational psychologists, which is a key statutory element within the Act.
- In terms of inclusion, there are ongoing challenges surrounding attendance, exclusions and an increase in social, emotional and behavioural needs in some contexts.

Main actions and priorities for Anglesey's new ALN&I services from September 2026:

- Make the most of the new integrated structure between the Learning Service and Children and Family Services to develop our provisions by looking at the needs of learners and their families in a holistic and trauma-informed manner.
- Collaborate with the ALN&I Forum and partners to reduce bureaucracy, strengthen collaboration arrangements and monitor the new funding arrangement.
- Continue to map the probable demand for specialist provision and plan strategically around capacity and types of provision.
- Develop the inclusion provision (including multiagency work) and maintain the focus on early intervention, attendance and well-being support.
- Monitor performance and the main trends through the data to adapt the response in accordance with needs and available capacity.

ADDITIONAL LEARNING NEEDS

What has worked well?

- The transition to the new Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018 was completed in September 2025 and has been successful in terms of:
- Collaborating with the schools and colleges to transfer learners to:
 - Individual Development Plans from the old Statement arrangements successfully.
- Dispute resolution systems with parents, schools and ALN quality officers have been established, with 3 successful tribunal appeals last year, two being resolved and the authority being successful in the third appeal.
- Established successful post-16 pupil college transition arrangements. This process has been praised by the college and schools, and there have been no cases of dispute between young people and/or their parents and the local authority.
- Continue to collaborate with the ALN Headteachers Forum and we have established a new funding arrangement to continue to be monitored by the primary headteachers.

- There is a close working relationship between the schools and ALN&I teams, and there is good recognition of the provision by the LA.
- There is collaboration with the Children and Family Services in relation to learners who are Looked After Children by the authority, and those in out-of-county placements, in planning and implementing the provision set out in the IDP.
- There is close strategic and operational collaboration with the Designated Clinical Lead Officer for ALN Education at Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board, which ensures early identification of needs at the pre-school stage; this is, of course, a key part of our collaborative working and dispute resolution processes with parents.
- The Code notes that it is a statutory requirement for schools and the LA to 'keep their provision under constant review'. This includes coming to a judgement about the effectiveness of the provision and the interventions offered. There is a process in place to ensure that this takes place. The IDP review process is a platform for the Quality Service to monitor the provisions on the SDP. The specialist teams also monitor the progress of learners who receive their input on a termly basis, with the majority making good progress.
- A member of the ALN Service's Senior Management Team sits on the authority's School Multiagency Support Board, and this is a way to keep an eye on ALN quality.
- We established a Primary Headteacher Forum in 2022. The forum has a work programme, and progress is measured against the action plan.
- We have an online IDP system. An IDP Sub-group has been established so that the schools' voices are expressed to ensure practical improvements to reduce the workload of ALNCoS in our schools.

Key challenges:

- The ALN Act's statutory responsibility has expanded in terms of legal elements down to the lowest tier in the ALN field. Because of this, school workload has increased in terms of the ALNCo work, and also in terms of the provision schools must provide. This is a challenge for schools, especially where budgets are shrinking, and the ability to release the ALNCo to fulfil the role is a challenge.
- Pupil needs are increasing and are increasingly challenging, and resources are limited and are dwindling. This is seen within our schools and also for the ALN team as referrals for services from the schools are increasing substantially. Although grants are provided by Welsh Government in the ALN field, they do not correspond to this growth in demand and there is no certainty in terms of repeated funding, therefore it is difficult to plan strategically.
- The demand for a specialist setting continues to grow. We have intensive and complex learners who need support in the mainstream, but the challenge of this is growing due to budget. This drives parents to apply for a special school.
- The ability of schools to appoint individuals to posts such as learning assistant roles within the school is a challenge and puts pressure on school provision maps when there are vacant posts.
- The process of training educational psychologists through Cardiff University impacts our ability to recruit Welsh-speaking educational psychologists. It is a statutory role within the Act and is an essential role in terms of identifying the provision required by learners.

Actions and priorities

- Collaborate on the ALN&I Forum's work programme, e.g.:
 - Give attention to the Additional Learning Needs Coordinator role, reducing bureaucracy and collaboration arrangements across the catchment areas
 - Monitor and evaluate the new funding arrangement
 - Ensure that the ALN&I service adapts to respond to the requirements of Anglesey schools.
- Continue with the work of mapping the probable demand for different types of specialist provisions, and plan strategically around this and around the capacity of the special school and the type of ALN centres we have within the authority.
- Give attention to the need for a training method for educational psychologists. This includes discussions regarding a training pathway in north Wales (Bangor University).

INCLUSION

What is working?

- The support offered to schools on Anglesey is extensive, e.g., training, modelling, resources and direct input. The close relationship with the schools is essential for this.
- The service offers a range of support for schools to support pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties through specialist teams, i.e., Behaviour Support, Welfare, Elective Home Education (EHE) and English as an Additional Language (EAL) in addition to a specialist setting for a small number of pupils who require a bespoke support package to address behavioural difficulties.
- Since the end of 2021, in partnership with the schools and Children Services, we have been able to establish education hubs within the five secondary schools to primarily support year 10 and 11 pupils who are not coping in the mainstream. A review of this model was commissioned in December 2023, and strengths were identified especially with the integrated/multiagency work that enriches the provision, and recommendations were also proposed to strengthen further. There is also close collaboration e.g., surrounding hard-to-place learners due to complex emotional and behavioural needs.
- A range of training and input is provided to support the school provision maps including safety intervention and packages on supporting the emotional well-being of pupils.
- The Shared Prosperity Fund Grant has enabled us to support over 100 of Anglesey's pupils who had been identified as at risk of becoming NEET on Anglesey (not in education, employment or training) by improving skills, well-being and helping them reach their full potential.
- Improving attendance has been a consistent focus for Isle of Anglesey County Council. The link between good attendance and learning is clear. Substantial work has taken place to improve attendance over the past year, allocating additional welfare officer hours through the Welsh Government Attendance Grant to target the attendance improvements of specific individuals within schools, especially pupils in year 11.
- However, although there has been improvement over time (see below), there is still considerable work to be done to further narrow the gap and to reinforce

improvements in a positive attendance trend, including in particular a reduction in persistent absence.

- Across Wales, attendance in schools has declined since the return to school following the pandemic, and it is slowly improving. Anglesey's attendance data shows progress which aligns with the progress in other counties across Wales.

Anglesey average (Sept 23 – Dec 23)	Anglesey average (Sept 24 – Dec 24)	Anglesey average (Sept 25 – Dec 25)	Wales average (Sept 23 – Dec 23)	Wales average (Sept 24 – Dec 24)	Wales average (Sept 25 – Dec 25)
90.4%	90.7%	90.7%	90.5%	91%	90.9%

- The attendance data above shows a trend of stabilisation over the periods presented, with the Anglesey level close to the Wales average in the most recent period. This is consistent with the national picture following the pandemic, with ongoing challenges but signs of gradual improvement. The targeting work with welfare officers, messages to parents and early support for schools continues, with continuous monitoring.
- Continuous training has led to consistency in the service the schools receive, with more specific group targeting work and a focus on early intervention support.
- Behaviour/exclusions – Clear challenges persist in addressing the substantial social, emotional and behavioural needs of pupils during the post-pandemic period and as a result, exclusions have been increasing compared to pre-pandemic levels. Over the past year, numbers have been high.

Primary - Fixed

	23/24 (Sept-Dec)	24/25 (Sept-Dec)	25/26 (Sept-March 26)*
Number of schools	8	9	13
Number of periods	33	50	58
Number of days	78	78	114.5

Primary - Permanent

	23/24 (Sept-Dec)	24/25 (Sept-Dec)	25/26 (Sept-March 26)*
Number of schools	0	1	2

Secondary - Fixed

	23/24 (Sept-Dec)	24/25 (Sept-Dec)	25/26 (Sept-March 26)*
Number of schools	5	5	5
Number of periods	223	158	450
Number of days	558	432	1132.5

Secondary - Permanent

	23/24 (Sept-Dec)	24/25 (Sept-Dec)	25/26 (Sept-March 26)*
Number of schools	3	3	4
Number of pupils	9	9	17

*7 month period rather than 4 months

- The exclusion trends above reflect continuous challenges in terms of social, emotional and behavioural needs during the post-pandemic period, and this puts pressure on the capacity of schools to support learners in the mainstream. The response includes support from specialist teams, multiagency work where appropriate, and inclusion developments such as education hubs.
- There has been improvement in this over the last term, with the number of days decreasing.
- The waiting time for counselling support has decreased.

Challenges

- Providing for learners with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties is a challenge where resources are dwindling, but society's needs are increasing.
- More complex needs are arising in the primary, specifically following the Covid-19 period.
- The level of exclusions continues to be higher than the desirable level, and although there has been progress in terms of attendance, it remains a high priority. The inclusion services continue to operate a variety of well-being and behaviour initiatives with the support of Welsh Government grant funding (which is in addition to the core budget).
- Applications for counselling input, which again reflect the need, are increasing with younger children. This puts pressure on the team's capacity.
- Elective Home Education – There is an increase in the number of families opting to teach their children at home. This is not unique to Anglesey and is a national pattern. The service has robust processes in place for monitoring, along with strong relationships with a large number of families.

Actions and priorities

- Take advantage of the new structure between the Learning Service and Children and Family Services to develop our provisions by looking at the needs of learners and their families in a holistic and trauma-informed way. This will include elements of the work highlighted above.
- Close collaboration with the ALN&I Forum, as an integrated team across the council and with the health board, to strengthen the provision. This includes creating specialist provision for primary children specifically, developing elements of the secondary hub provision, and schools' early intervention/provision maps.
- Collaboration with the ALN&I Forum on inclusion elements in the action plan.
- Developing the attendance campaign to target further progress in attendance practices, messages to parents and the role of welfare officers.

- Improving our processes for engaging with families who opt to teach at home (Elective Home Education) to strengthen the contact and collaboration with these families.

7. Impact assessments

7.1. Has an impact assessment (equality considerations, the socio-economic duty, Welsh language) been undertaken?

Yes

No

If not, please explain why:

7.2. Possible impacts on groups protected under the Equality Act 2010

The Additional Learning Needs and Inclusion Service complies with the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018.

The ALN&I provision is relevant to many protected characteristics, in particular disability, therefore the service considers the impact of policies and practices on access, consistency and fairness.

This includes:

- Ensuring that IDP processes are accessible to families (including communication and support):
- Monitoring relevant data to identify any differences in experiences or outcomes between groups.
- Working closely with Children and Family Services for learners who are Looked After Children.
- Using dispute resolution mechanisms to reduce the negative impact on schools.

7.3. Possible impacts on those experiencing socio-economic disadvantage (strategic decisions)

Although this report does not make a new strategic decision on priorities, ALN&I's work directly contributes to reducing the inequalities of outcomes associated with socio-economic disadvantage (e.g., access to support, attendance, support in the mainstream).

The service monitors the impact of this work through KPIs and in partnership with schools to target early intervention.

7.4. Potential impacts on opportunities to use Welsh and not treating the language less favourably than English

The Additional Learning Needs and Inclusion Service offers a complete service through the medium of Welsh. It is however recognised that workforce challenges in some specialist roles can impact capacity, and mitigations are in place to ensure bilingual service continuation.

The service operates in accordance with the principal not to treat the Welsh language less favourably than English and of increasing opportunities to use Welsh. Workforce challenges are recognised in some specialist roles (e.g., educational psychologists), and there are mitigations in place through workforce planning and operational arrangements to maintain a high-quality bilingual service.

7.5. Potential impact on the Council's Net Zero Carbon target

Neutral

This report is not likely to have a direct substantial carbon impact. However, where activities involve travel or commissioning/procurement, options that reduce emissions (e.g., using hybrid meetings and reducing unnecessary travel) are considered in line with public sector net zero reporting guidance.

8. Financial implications

The Additional Learning Needs and Inclusion Service will continue to operate within the agreed budget up to 31/08/2026, and there are no current signs or overspending. However, the increase in demand and dependency on some grant streams for specific initiatives continue to create capacity pressure.

9. Appendices

10. Report author and background papers

Ffion Edwards-Ellis