

Respecting children and young people's rights in Wales

The rights of children and adolescents in education are critical for ensuring inclusive, egalitarian, and high-quality learning experiences. These rights are founded on international human rights principles and child development theories, which impact educational policies and practices (UNCRC, 1989; Welsh Government, 2019). This discussion will look at crucial domains like legislative frameworks, theoretical perspectives, and practical implementations that protect children's rights in education.

Human rights frameworks, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), define key ideas such as non-discrimination, educational access, protection from harm, and the right to be heard (UNCRC, 1989). The CRC's concept of shifting capacities recognises that children's rights extend as they mature cognitively and emotionally, allowing for more participation in decision-making processes (Jones and Walker, 2011). Critics highlight the challenges of adopting universal rights frameworks in many socio-cultural contexts, needing culturally appropriate adaptations (Anderson, 2008).

Child development theories improve these frameworks by providing insights into children's learning and growing processes. Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky, Erik Erikson, and Urie Bronfenbrenner's theories all highlight the importance of cognitive, social, and emotional development in creating effective educational environments (Cleaver et al., 2009; Kanval, 2014). Furthermore, advances in neuroscience show the importance of brain plasticity in affecting learning experiences, emphasising the need for customised and adaptive teaching methods (Murphy and Waters-Davies, 2022).

This examination will investigate the role of legislative rules, educational methods, and multidisciplinary approaches to protecting and advancing children's rights. By incorporating these components, educational systems can ensure the well-being, empowerment, and active participation of all students, fostering settings that promote equity and inclusion (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2020).

The theoretical framework for promoting and protecting children's rights in education is rooted in a blend of human rights principles and child development theories, both of which are crucial for creating inclusive, equitable educational environments. Human rights theory, as reflected in documents like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Children (CRC), establishes that children are entitled to protection, education, healthcare and society engagement. These principles emphasise non-discrimination, the child's best interests, and respect for their evolving capacities, recognising that rights expand as children develop the ability to make informed decisions (Jones and Walker, 2011; Smith, 2012). Critiques of Human Rights Theory points to its challenges and account for diverse cultural contexts, highlighting the importance of cultural sensitivity (Anderson, 2008). Child development theories further refined this framework by providing insight into children's psychological, emotional and cognitive growth.

Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development, the need for age appropriate, tailored educational practices, though it has been critiqued for underestimating the role of cultural and social factors. Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural theory addresses this gap, emphasising the importance of social interaction and cultural environments in learning, particularly through the zone of proximal development (ZPD), which encourages collective learning (Kanval, 2014). Eric Erickson's psychosocial development theory expands the perspective to include identity formation and emotional well-being, while Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory highlights the influence of parental, community, and social factors of children's development (Cleaver et al., 2009).

Current research incorporates advanced findings in neuroscience, such as brain plasticity, to further emphasise the potential for growth in diverse learning environments. For example, inclusive educational practices that address systemic inequalities and provide individualised education plans (IEPs) for students with disabilities demonstrate practical applications of these theories (Murphy and Waters-Davies, 2022). These efforts not only support academic success but also foster emotional resilience and social skills through programs like men

meant to ship and social emotional learning initiatives cultural and socio-economic factors must also be considered an educational policies and practices.

Effective implementation requires acknowledging critiques of universal framework while leveraging into disciplinary approaches for account for cultural complexities. For instance, adopted educational strategies to reflect local traditions and values can ensure a greater acceptance and inclusivity. The concept of evolving capacities, as outlined in the CRC, highlights the importance of creating age-appropriate, culturally sensitive environments that respect children's growing decision-making abilities. Collaborative efforts among families, educators, and policy makers are essential to support the paradigm, ensuring holistic development and empowering children as active participants in their own education and society (Jones and Walker, 2011). Collectively, these theoretical frameworks guide the creation of policies and practices that uphold children's Wright while addressing systemic barriers. By embracing cultural complexity and interdisciplinary perceptive, educators and policy makers composter environments that promote equity, inclusion, and the full development of every child.

The legal and policy framework regulating children's rights in education is influenced by international treaties and state legislations, blending human rights concepts with pragmatic measures. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), ratified by the United Kingdom in 1991, is a foundational document emphasizing principles such as non-discrimination, the child's best interests, and the right to be heard. Key articles include Article 28 (the right to education), Article 29 (the aims of education), and Article 12 (the right to express views), which obligate member states to ensure accessible, high-quality education while protecting children from harm (UNCRC, 1989). Despite its significance, the implementation of the CRC faces challenges due to socio-cultural and economic factors that vary across regions and contexts.

In Wales, the CRC is embedded into domestic legislation through the Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011, which mandates Welsh ministers to prioritize children's rights in policy decisions (Rights of Children and Young Persons Measure, 2011). Similarly, the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010 requires local authorities to

integrate children's rights into their actions (Children and Families Measure, 2010). The Equality Act 2010 further strengthens protections against discrimination on the basis of disability, race, and gender, ensuring schools take reasonable measures to provide accessibility and equity (Equality Act, 2010). These principles collectively underscore Wales' commitment to fostering inclusive education systems.

The Welsh Government's strategic framework, "Education in Wales: Our National Mission," articulates a vision for inclusive education by aiming to raise standards, close attainment gaps, and guarantee equitable opportunities for all learners. This aligns with the Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Act 2021, which introduces rights education into school curricula to empower students to understand and advocate for their rights (Welsh Government, 2021). In addition, the Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Code of Practice 2015 provides guidelines for supporting students with disabilities, emphasizing the use of Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) and collaboration with families to address systemic inequalities (SEND Code of Practice, 2015).

To ensure policy conformity with CRC principles, tools such as the Children's Rights Impact Assessment (CRIA) are used to evaluate the impact of policies on children's rights, offering a structured framework for addressing their consequences (CRIA, 2011). International organizations such as UNICEF and UNESCO also play critical roles in assisting countries by providing data, guidance, and best practices. For example, UNICEF's Rights Respecting Schools Award (RRSA) promotes child-centered learning environments by integrating CRC principles into school ethos (UNICEF, 2021).

Comparative perspectives provide valuable insights into effective practices. For instance, Nordic nations have demonstrated successful inclusive education methods, including equity-focused policies, teacher autonomy, and comprehensive student assistance—models that Wales could adapt to further enhance its educational framework (UNESCO, 2023). However, obstacles persist, including socio-cultural barriers and resource constraints, particularly for marginalized groups such as children with disabilities or those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Addressing these inequalities requires targeted interventions, such as financial

assistance, mental health programs, and systemic reforms under frameworks like the Equality Act 2010 (Equality Act, 2010).

Emerging innovations, such as digital learning tools, offer opportunities to further improve accessibility and equity in education. Collaboration among stakeholders—governments, educators, families, and communities—is vital for translating policy into meaningful outcomes. Educating educators, increasing acceptance, and ensuring adequate resources are key steps. Continuous assessment and evidence-based improvements strengthen the realization of children's rights in practice. Wales provides a forward-thinking approach to children's rights, blending human rights principles with regional policy to create a system that empowers all young people.

A primary school in Cardiff, Wales, successfully implemented an anti-bullying project in line with Welsh Government policy, significantly improving the school atmosphere and student welfare. This endeavour promotes a culture of respect and inclusion by providing critical components such as regular training for staff and students on detecting and addressing bullying, accessible reporting methods, and ongoing support for both victims and offenders. Restorative strategies have been used to heal relationships and build empathy in children. Furthermore, community engagement is critical to the program's success and requires active participation from parents, staff, and students. Following its implementation, the school saw a 40% reduction in bullying incidents and an 85% increase in students' sense of school safety (Welsh Government, 2019). Nonetheless, challenges such as maintaining continuous staff training amidst funding constraints persist. This instance demonstrates how collaborative, evidence-based, and culturally appropriate anti-bullying measures may effectively protect pupils and promote positive behaviour.

Swansea's further education institution has established an inclusive education policy to ensure that students with disabilities have equal access to high-quality education. Significant investment in accessible infrastructure, assistive technologies, and specialised support services ensures equitable learning environments. Customised learning programs for students with exceptional needs (SEN) address individual learning preferences. A

dedicated SEN support team collaborates with students to develop individualised education plans (IEPs) that include personalised accommodations and strategies to attain their goals. Staff professional development enhances understanding of inclusive practices, allowing educators to effectively support diverse learners (Department for Education and Skills, 2015). This method has resulted in improved academic achievement, more student engagement, and a more inclusive campus climate. Since the program's start, 70% of students with disabilities have exhibited verifiable academic gain. Despite its success, challenges remain in accommodating students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. This study demonstrates the importance of intersectionality in establishing inclusive educational institutions by emphasising accessibility and tailored support.

A student council made up of elected representatives from each year group is used to engage students in governance at a North Wales secondary school. Students can use this platform to influence school policies and initiatives, such as peer mentoring programs, sustainability plans, and community wellness events. Regular forums encourage interaction between students and school leaders, which improves collaboration and response. The establishment of a peer mentoring program reduced disciplinary problems by 25% (UNICEF, 2021). However, securing diverse representation within the council remains a difficulty. Involving students in governance procedures allows them to actively affect their educational experiences, which fosters ownership and accountability. The initiative demonstrates how involvement may support student-centred policies and increase school community cohesion.

These case studies demonstrate numerous strategies for protecting children's rights in education, including combating bullying, promoting diversity, and facilitating participation. Connecting these efforts to laws like the CRC, the Equality Act of 2010, and localised measures emphasises their theoretical foundation (UNCRC, 1989; Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2020). Despite the persistence of obstacles such as financial constraints and representation, ongoing collaboration, stakeholder feedback, and evidence-based improvements enable progress towards equitable educational systems that serve all students.

Implementing policies and practices to protect the rights of children and young people in education is critical, but it creates challenges. Educational institutions frequently face financial constraints, limiting resources for inclusive practices such as specialised support services, adaptive technologies, and ongoing professional development for workers. This financial load exacerbates inequities, particularly among marginalised people, limiting access to quality education and exacerbating existing disadvantages. According to research, educational institutions in economically deprived communities frequently lack the resources required for effective inclusion (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2020). To ensure equitable resource allocation, these financial shortages must be addressed by structural transformation and government action.

Resistance to change among educators, administrators, and parents may stymie development. This reluctance is frequently motivated by misconceptions about the importance of children's rights, as well as concerns about increased burden and responsibility. Cultivating an acceptance culture requires effective communication and education. Educational institutions may launch community outreach activities to involve parents and stakeholders in understanding the benefits of inclusive education. UNICEF's Rights Respecting Schools initiative demonstrates how including stakeholders in decision-making processes has successfully increased acceptance and commitment to children's rights (UNICEF, 2021).

The lack of sufficient training opportunities for educators impedes the implementation of rights-based policies. Ongoing professional development equips educators with the skills needed to fulfil the diverse needs of students. In the lack of this, educators may struggle to create supportive and inclusive environments. Customised training on inclusive practices has been shown to improve educational techniques for students with disabilities (Department for Education and Skills, 2015). Investing in professional development is critical for helping educators to create equitable learning environments. Cultural and cultural customs, such as gender prejudices and the stigmatisation of impairments, pose additional challenges. These deeply ingrained beliefs frequently contradict the principles of children's rights, hampering the implementation of inclusive education. To combat racist views, a

comprehensive plan that includes community involvement, public awareness campaigns, and targeted interventions is required. Schools that work with local communities to raise awareness of gender equality have seen positive shifts in cultural norms over time.

Navigating the various legal and administrative frameworks exacerbates these challenges. Adherence to legislation such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) demands knowledge, resources, and administrative skills. Schools must ensure compliance with these obligations, which frequently necessitates extensive documentation, reporting, and accountability procedures (UNCRC, 1989). Streamlining compliance procedures and offering institutional guidance may help to ease this burden. Monitoring and accountability systems are critical for assessing the effectiveness of rights-based programs; unfortunately, they are typically underdeveloped. Systematic assessments, stakeholder feedback, and clear reporting channels are critical for identifying areas for improvement. In the absence of these structures, enforcement shortcomings may persist, jeopardising progress towards equal schooling.

Student involvement options are limited, which impedes genuine engagement, especially among underprivileged populations. Inclusive venues, such as student councils and forums, are critical for allowing students to shape their educational experiences. Participation promotes responsibility and ownership, as proven by initiatives that improve student happiness and policy responsiveness. Overcoming these challenges requires collaborative efforts from educational institutions, communities, governmental agencies, and international organisations. Securing resources, developing an inclusive culture, increasing educator training, and implementing extensive monitoring mechanisms can all help to move the educational system closer to equity. Adopting these steps ensures the protection of children's and young people's rights while also creating conditions conducive to the success of all students.

Advancing and protecting children's and adolescents' rights in education requires a comprehensive and diverse strategy that addresses systemic barriers while promoting equity and inclusion throughout the educational experience. A critical tactic is to provide intensive training for educators, allowing them to acquire the necessary skills and

knowledge to meet diverse student needs, ensure well-being, nurture mental health, and use inclusive teaching methods. This training enables educators to create supportive environments that protect and respect children's rights (Murphy and Waters-Davies, 2022). Furthermore, inclusive policies and practices are critical to ensuring that all students, particularly marginalised groups, have equitable access to quality education. These initiatives include the development of wheelchair-accessible infrastructure, the use of assistive technologies, and the implementation of Individualised Education Plans (IEPs) tailored to the specific needs of students with disabilities. Differentiated instruction allows teachers to address various learning styles and create inclusive, supportive classroom environments for all students (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2023).

One critical feature is allowing students to participate actively in decision-making processes. Schools can accomplish this by establishing student councils, holding regular forums, and creating feedback mechanisms that allow students to express their opinions and influence policy development. This participation empowers students and develops important skills like as leadership and communication, while also relating educational procedures to students' needs (Jones and Walker, 2011). The implementation of anti-bullying programs is critical for creating safe and healthy learning environments. Effective anti-bullying initiatives must include explicit reporting systems, restorative techniques to repair relationships, and ongoing training for both staff and students in detecting and resolving bullying behaviours. Restorative approaches, which emphasise empathy and reconciliation, are critical for creating a respectful and supportive school environment (KiVa Anti-Bullying Programme, 2023).

Collaboration with families and communities is vital because it fosters a cohesive support network for students. Workshops, community initiatives, and parental programs can be organised by educational institutions to improve the values and competencies taught in schools, while community resources such as mental health services and mentorship programs can be used to further support student development (Harvard Graduate School of Education, 2023). Addressing socioeconomic disparities is critical, as they typically limit impoverished students' access to education. Financial help, scholarships, free lunches, and

transportation subsidies reduce socioeconomic barriers, allowing all children to fully participate in their education (UNICEF, 2021).

Effective monitoring and accountability procedures are required to assess the efficacy of these activities and ensure consistent implementation. Routine assessments, feedback mechanisms, and transparent reporting procedures can help educational institutions identify flaws and adopt evidence-based improvements to their policies and practices (UNESCO, 2023). By applying these measures together, educational institutions may create fair and inclusive environments that uphold and protect the rights of children and young people. Continuous efforts to address systemic challenges, sustain stakeholder participation, and adapt policies in response to changing needs are critical for making meaningful and long-term progress in protecting the rights of all kids.

To summarise, developing and protecting children's rights in education requires a multifaceted approach that integrates human rights principles, child development theories, and inclusive policies. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) define essential rights, emphasising non-discrimination, the child's best interests, and growing capacities (UNCRC, 1989). These principles affect national policy, as seen by Wales' legislative initiatives, such as the Rights of Children and Young People (Wales) Measure 2011 and the Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Act 2021, which demonstrate a commitment to inclusive education (Welsh Government, 2019). Nonetheless, socio-cultural and economic issues continue to influence the implementation of these rights, needing adaptable and contextually sensitive strategies (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2020).

Piaget's cognitive development theory, Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, Erikson's psychosocial development model, and Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory all provide insights into cognitive, social, and emotional development, arguing for age-appropriate and socially interactive learning environments (Cleaver et al., 2009; Kanval, 2014). Neuroscientific advancement emphasises the importance of adaptable instructional techniques that meet a variety of learning needs (Murphy and Waters-Davies, 2022). Case studies demonstrate the practical application of these theories, emphasising effective anti-

bullying initiatives, inclusive educational policies, and student participation in governance (UNICEF, 2021).

Despite progress, challenges like as budget constraints, resistance to reform, and cultural prejudices persist (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2020). Resolving these difficulties requires collaboration among educators, governments, families, and communities. Educational systems can create equitable environments that empower children and protect their rights by integrating interdisciplinary perspectives, continuous evaluation, and culturally responsive methodologies (Jones and Walker, 2011).

Reference list.

Alderson, P. (2008) *Young Children's Rights: Exploring Beliefs, Principles and Practice*. London: Jessica Kingsley.

Children and Families Measure (2010). Available at: <https://gov.wales/children-and-families-measure> (Accessed: 24 March 2025).

Cleaver, H., Cawson, P., Gorin, S. and Walker, S. (2009) *Safeguarding Children: A Shared Responsibility*. London: NSPCC.

CRIA (2011) *Children's Rights Impact Assessment Guidance*. Available at: <https://gov.wales/childrens-rights-impact-assessments> (Accessed: 24 March 2025).

Department for Education and Skills (2015) *Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice: 0 to 25 years*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-code-of-practice-0-to-25> (Accessed: 24 March 2025).

Equality Act (2010) *Equality Act 2010*. Available at: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents> (Accessed: 24 March 2025).

Equality and Human Rights Commission (2020) *Equality Act 2010: Guidance for Schools*. Available at: <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/advice-and-guidance/guidance-schools> (Accessed: 24 March 2025).

Equality and Human Rights Commission (2023) *Children's Rights in Great Britain: Executive Summary*. Available at: <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com> (Accessed: 24 March 2025).

Harvard Graduate School of Education (2023) *Family and Community Engagement in Education*. Available at: <https://www.gse.harvard.edu/family-engagement> (Accessed: 24 March 2025).

Jones, P. and Walker, G. (2011) *Children's Rights in Practice*. London: Sage.

Kanyal, M. (2014) *Children's Rights 0-8: Promoting Participation in Education and Care*. Abingdon: Routledge.

KiVa Anti-Bullying Program (2023) *KiVa Program Overview*. Available at: <https://www.kivaprogram.net> (Accessed: 24 March 2025).

Murphy, A. and Waters-Davies, J. (2022) *The Children's Rights Approach to Early Childhood Education: Policy and Context in Wales*. In: Conn, C. and Murphy, A. (eds.) *Inclusive Pedagogies for Early Childhood Education: Respecting and Responding to Differences in Learning*. Taylor & Francis.

Rights of Children and Young Persons Measure (2011). Available at: <https://gov.wales/rights-children-and-young-persons-measure> (Accessed: 24 March 2025).

Smith, E. (2012) *Key Issues in Education and Social Justice*. London: Sage.

SEND Code of Practice (2015) Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice: 0 to 25 years. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-code-of-practice-0-to-25> (Accessed: 24 March 2025).

UNCRC (1989) United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/child-rights-convention> (Accessed: 24 March 2025).

UNESCO (2023) Global Education Monitoring Report. Available at: <https://en.unesco.org/gem-report/> (Accessed: 24 March 2025).

UNICEF (2021) Rights Respecting Schools Award: Supporting Children's Rights in Schools. Available at: <https://www.unicef.org.uk/rights-respecting-schools/> (Accessed: 24 March 2025).

Welsh Government (2019) Anti-Bullying Guidance for Schools in Wales. Available at: <https://gov.wales/anti-bullying-guidance-schools> (Accessed: 24 March 2025).

Welsh Government (2021) Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Act 2021. Available at: <https://gov.wales/curriculum-assessment-guidance> (Accessed: 24 March 2025).