

Introduction

According to Welsh Government (2019) the new Additional learning needs (ALN) statutory support system is produced to support learners that present significantly greater difficulty in learning and, or a child with a disability that obstructs the learner from making use of the setting for their education. The ALN legislation can be found in the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018, and the core aim is to provide appropriate support to learners with ALN (Welsh Government, 2018). Dauncey's research briefing (2016) discusses that current systems no longer facilitate learners with ALN and so reviews and reforms have taken place to advance current support. NHS Wales (2022) states that autism disorder is diagnosed when children or adults display social impairments, and NHS claims that one in one hundred individuals has an autistic disorder in the UK as the spectrum is so wide.

Identification of diagnosis

Children with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) will display signs of difficulty in social interactions, including challenges in communicating, and having concerns with their behaviours and emotions (Autism Wales, 2015). However, nice (2022) asserts issues when considering the possibility of autism in young children as there is a risk that autism may be missed in learners as signs and symptoms can be difficult to recognise, for example if the learner is verbally able. This is supported by Yates and Couteur (2016) that states to identify ASD it is essential for practitioners and all working professionals have sound knowledge of ASD, asserting the advantages of early identification and how this is recognised to maximise children's potential. Similarly, National Collaborating Centre for Woman's and Children's Health (UK) (NCCWCH) (2011) describes the term 'autism' as qualitative differences and impairments in shared interactions combined with limited interests. According to Autism Wales (2015) there are a range of various signs that practitioners and, or parents can look out for that could be considered as ASD. This aligns with the launch of a new National Integrated Autism Service (IAS) as part of the ASD strategic plan from Welsh Government developmental services to improve provision of autism diagnosis (Underwood et al, 2021). Furthermore, NCCWCH (2011) states the purpose of the diagnosis assessment is to establish whether the developmental and behavioural concerns can be attributed to autism or an alternative diagnosis. It is the duty of the practitioner and head of setting to create a referral to the specialist to attain a diagnosis.

Barriers and Challenges

Autism Wales (2015) states the essential component of a child centred approach is working in partnerships with parents and carers. Evidentially, developing the same approaches in early years settings and at home is beneficial as research shows children with ASD work better with consistency and routine. Moreover, Krischler and Cate(2018) asserts the main responsibility of the teachers is to implement an inclusion policy and that it is critical that the teacher's characteristics ensure the success of inclusive practice within the setting. Although teachers and classrooms more generally support inclusive practice, according to Cate et al (2018) it is suggested that teachers often feel unprepared and have concerns about their competence to accommodate children with ASD. This is due to lack of knowledge and teacher training availability of inclusive methodologies. Similarly, Smeets and Roeleveld (2016) research found that around 20% of learners in mainstream settings that have not been diagnosed with an ALN, require special attention, putting great pressure on the teachers. In turn lowers their motivation levels and as a result, the special needs for the children may not always be catered for. However, Leonard (no date) discusses the development of the Special Educational Needs Act (2004) and how it was developed with the intention of shifting education from segregated to inclusive, and transforming education for children with ALN. Wiener and Tardif (2004) cited in (Leonard, no date) reported that teachers found fewer behavioural problems and more positive outcomes were identified for children with ALN educated in inclusive classrooms.

Strategy

Every child is different, in order to choose an appropriate intervention to accommodate learners with ALN. There are steps practitioners need to take before working with the child. According to FLIPP the Switch (2016) advises practitioners to collect data on the learner's behaviour, with this, form a hypothesis and what the function of the behaviour is. This will lead the professional to start considering what intervention may work best for the learner. One early intervention FLIPP the Switch, (2016) considers is Antecedent based interventions, which is something that happens before something else, which can include priming the learner, a prompt delivery and visual schedules. Crosland and Dunlap (2016) states Antecedent procedures involve manipulating aspects of the classroom environment to evoke desired response. Antecedent procedures consist of providing the learner with ALN to visually preview activities through visual schedules, prior to the student engaging in the activity. Data from Crosland and Dunlap (2016) implies children with autism had a positive response to visual schedules and found increases in on-task encounter during activities. However, (Ledford et al, 2018) found that antecedents interventions are more successful for individuals of an older age and less successful for learners in the beginning of the early years. Moreover, the key is to be consistent with the intervention and integrated into regular routine by service providers such as teachers and parents, reinforcing the importance of parent roles as teachers themselves and that parent, teacher partnership (O'reilly et al 2012).

Conclusion

While the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018 has been designed to promote inclusion of all children within classrooms and accommodate each learners needs, there are challenges that teachers face in Wales today. The importance of teacher and parent close working partnership is fundamental for providing the best possible practice for a child with additional learning needs, this aligns with UNCRC article 5 which supports the responsibility of parents and carers to provide guidance in their child's life.

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