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Assignment Number: ECEY6010

Assignment: Critically analyse two appropriate early years curricula with a focus on a specific area of interest – ALN.

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AI Statement:

Throughout the duration of this assignment I acknowledge the use of the following

- <https://copilot.microsoft.com/chats/uWfmGxnT1d6Cv1bTnZhjv> using the following prompts:
 - To check my own text for grammatical and syntactical mistakes and for suggestions to rephrase my own work.
 - Find and summarise data in relation to India and Wales' early years curricula and their viewpoints of the unique child.

Part 1: A Critical Analysis of India's Early Years ALN Landscape Against Wales' Rights-Based ALN System.

This analysis examines two early years curricula, Wales' statutory early years framework and India's National Early Childhood Care and Education Framework (hereafter ECCE), to explore how each system conceptualises inclusion, early identification and developmentally appropriate practice.

Wales non maintained early years sector and India's ECCE system, spanning Anganwadi services for children aged birth to six and preschool provisions for ages three to six, sit at opposite ends of the policy and practice spectrum. In Wales, non maintained settings operate within a high ambition, rights based statutory framework, where the *ALN Act 2018* and ALN Code 2021 require early identification, statutory Individual Development Plans (hereafter IDPs) and inclusive practice (Estyn, 2018; Welsh Government [hereafter WG], 2024a). In contrast, India's ECCE system is not part of *The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2009* (hereafter RTE) and is delivered through non binding schemes. Further more it is policy driven rather than rights driven, with inclusion positioned as aspirational rather than a legal requirement (Kaul and Bhattacharjea, 2019; Chattopadhyay and Aneja, 2021). Despite longstanding programmes such as the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) and multiple national policies, India's ECCE delivery remains fragmented, with key components of the Nurturing Care Framework not comprehensively included in services (Prasad, 2025). Taken together, these analyses demonstrate that in the absence of statutory entitlements, early intervention in India is shaped less by coherent system design and more by the variable capacity of practitioners, the advocacy power of families and the resources available locally, reinforcing fragmented non statutory provision, (Agrawal *et al.*, 2021; Chattopadhyay and Aneja, 2021; Prasad, 2025).

Chattopadhyay and Aneja (2021) state that India faces substantial ALN relevant challenges with 164.5 million children aged 0–6 , of which 74% living in villages and 12% of children aged 2–9 experiencing neurodevelopmental disorders. Malnutrition remains severe, with 46% underweight, 38% stunted and 19% severely wasted, safety risks are high, including widespread physical, sexual and emotional abuse.

Early intervention systems are fragmented, with limited screening and weak convergence across sectors (Chattopadhyay, 2021).

In contrast, Wales operates a statutory ALN system from birth to 25 years under the *ALN Act 2018*, with 22% of learners identified with ALN (WG, 2023a). Poverty remains a key driver, affecting 28% of children (WG, 2024a). Early identification is strengthened through universal health visiting and Flying Start outreach and regulated quality assurance through Estyn and the Curriculum for Wales (WG, 2022; WG, 2024b; Donaldson, 2018). Wales therefore provides a more coherent, rights-based and integrated ALN system compared with India's fragmented ECD landscape.

Wales' framework of inclusion, grounded in the *ALN Act 2018*, the statutory ALN Code 2021 and WG's adoption of the social model of disability, create a coherent, rights based and legally enforceable system that stands in marked contrast to India's fragmented, policy driven early childhood landscape (WG, 2018; WG, 2021; GOV.UK, 2024). Clear statutory expectations for ALN, safeguarding and curriculum delivery stand in opposition to India's outstretched diverse ECCE system, where practitioners often have minimal specialist training and no statutory mechanisms equivalent to Wales' IDPs. Although Wales benefits from strong legal protections it also has its challenges of insufficient investment and workforce capacity, whereas India has limited legal protections however strong community based practices. Both systems ultimately demonstrate that policy ambition alone is insufficient without sustained funding, workforce stability and political commitment to make inclusion a lived reality.

Evidence from Kaul and Bhattacharjea (2019) reinforces this contrast, framing inclusion as a systemic responsibility requiring children, families, preschools, and schools to be "ready" for one another, rejecting deficit views and emphasising the importance of developmentally appropriate, play based Early Childhood Education (hereafter ECE) for equitable participation. Their analysis demonstrates that India's ECE is uneven in quality, dominated by rote, formal teaching and marked by significant variation between Anganwadis, the core community based ICDS delivery program, and private preschools. Many children, particularly those from marginalised communities, enter school without foundational skills due to misalignment between

preschool experiences and primary expectations (Kaul *et al.*, 2017). These developmentally inappropriate practices undermine language, self regulation and problem solving, compounding early disadvantage for learners with ALN (Satapathy, 2020). ECCE is excluded from the *RTE Act 2009*, resulting in highly inconsistent provision between private schools, many of which prioritise early academia and Anganwadis centres, which focus primarily on nutrition and health, this divergence further entrenches inequitable starts in life (Kaul and Bhattacharjea, 2019; Kaushal, 2021).

World Bank Group (2021) identify major systemic gaps across India's fragmented early years provision with inconsistent pedagogy, weak quality assurance and monitoring and large disparities in teacher training. These variations produce unequal developmental opportunities which are magnified by geography, income, caste and gender. Balasubramanian and Banerjee (2024) state further that equity is further undermined by intersecting marginalisation, with Dalit, Adivasi, Muslim and rural disabled children the least likely to access or complete schooling. Weak early identification, ambiguous policy language and confusion between inclusion, integration and mitigation further delay support. Limited specialist provision, minimal developmental screening and the absence of clear pathways for children with disabilities and or ALN mean emerging needs are rarely identified and even when recognised services are often underfunded or unavailable (World Bank Group, 2021; Hossain, 2025). This is reflected in Rao *et al.* (2021) who highlight that weak regulatory mechanisms and the lack of systemic monitoring fuel uneven quality across public and private preschool services.

Within this landscape the widespread reliance on rote learning, particularly in low-fee paying private preschools, undermines language development, executive functioning and engagement, disproportionately harming disadvantaged learners (Rao *et al.*, 2021). The ECE impact Study evidences early academic drilling offers limited developmental benefits and exacerbates inequities (Kaul *et al.*, 2017). Together, these ECCE practices reproduce cumulative disadvantage, delaying identification and widening inequity, with children with ALN most affected due to the absence of inclusive pedagogy, adapted environments and multi agency support (World Bank Group, 2021; Rao *et al.*, 2021)

UNICEF evidence echoes these concerns demonstrating that children with disabilities across Asia and the Pacific, almost half of the global total, face stigma, inaccessible environments, institutionalisation and significant data gaps that hinder early identification and service design (UNICEF, 2021; UNICEF, 2025). Many are denied education, responsive care, protection and play, leading to marginalisation and reduced opportunities to survive and thrive, all of which lead to under representation in classrooms, low school attendance and exclusion (UNESCO, 2026; Taneja-Johansson *et al.*, 2023).

Balasubramanian and Banerjee (2024) argue that India's inclusive education reforms are ambitious but weakened by ambiguous language, contradictions and conceptual slippage between *inclusion*, *integration* and *mitigation*. This lack of clarity, combined with omissions of key legislation such as the *RTE Act 2009*, creates uncertainty around implementation pathways and weakens accountability. Their critique highlights a dual track system in which inclusive education is promoted rhetorically while segregated special schools continue to receive funding, reinforcing beliefs that some children do not belong in mainstream settings. Inadequate teacher training, large class sizes and limited practice based learning further constrain inclusive practice. Furthermore they argue that the National Education Policy (Government of India, 2020) frames inclusion through a human capital lens, overlooking caste based inequity, gender disparities, disability discrimination and rural urban divides. As inclusion is non native to India and largely imported from the Global North they call for culturally grounded, socially just approaches that centre disabled children's lived experiences and redesign systems rather than retrofitting learners into existing structures (Argawal *et al.*, 2021; Balasubramanian and Banerjee, 2024).

Kaushal (2021) and Argawal *et al.* (2021) similarly identify deep inequities in India's early years provision. Anganwadi Centres (AWCs) follow the Aadharshila, a highly structured, play-based curriculum guide, designed to support the holistic child (MWCD, 2026). However despite promoting the holistic message Aadharshila follows a rigid sequence of four weeks of initiation and induction, 36 weeks of active play and eight weeks of recap and reinforcement (MWCD, 2026), a format that mirrors wider concerns about prescriptive, age graded curricula in Indian ECCE that assumes typical developmental progression, offers limited flexibility and relies on specialist training to adapt activities (Alwani, 2019; Gupta, 2019, p. 69). Although

AWCs provide wide coverage, they lack qualified staff, educational materials and adequate infrastructure, whereas private preschools offer stronger learning environments but remain unregulated, deepening disparities in access and quality. Fragmented provision, socio-economic disadvantage, gendered barriers and uneven infrastructure restrict participation for disadvantaged children and limit early identification and support for those with ALN. Similarly Kaushal (2021) and Argawel *et al.* (2021) emphasise that human and physical resources are essential for developmentally appropriate early education and recommends strengthening the preschool system through closer integration of AWCs with primary schools, improved infrastructure, a better-qualified workforce and regulatory oversight of the private sector (Chandra *et al.*, 2017). These recommendations contrast sharply with Wales' already formalised, statutory early years system.

Wales operates within a rights-based, regulated framework in which early childhood education is embedded in national policy (WG, no date). The Curriculum for Wales (WG, 2024) establishes a coherent Birth–16 continuum, with funded non-maintained provision required to follow national curriculum guidance (WG, 2022b). Statutory inclusion and early identification are ensured through the *ALN Act 2018* and ALN Code 2021, which place legal duties on settings to identify, plan for and review children's needs. Regulatory oversight is also stronger; Estyn and CIW jointly inspect early years provision (Care Inspectorate Wales, 2026; Estyn, 2024), ensuring consistent quality assurance absent in India's unregulated private sector. While Delhi focused recommendations call for targeted investment in disadvantaged districts, Wales already embeds equity through the Pupil Development Grant – Early Years (WG, 2025) and Flying Start (WG, 2026a).

Agrawal *et al.* (2021) further highlight the multiple intersecting risk factors disproportionately affecting vulnerable children in India, including high levels of neurodevelopmental disorders, limited outreach for early intervention, crime and violence against children, and environmental hazards such as unsafe water and air pollution that impair cognitive development. A high burden of malnutrition and fragmented governance weaken developmental outcomes, with half of children living below the poverty line. Despite strong policy intent, the absence of a unified implementation framework undermines quality and equity. In contrast, Wales provides a coherent statutory early years and ALN system with legally mandated

duties for early identification, multi-agency coordination and equitable provision (Senedd, 2018).

Chandra (2021) adds that equitable access to quality ECCE in India is constrained by linguistic, socio-economic and geographic diversity, low stakeholder awareness and the absence of regulatory frameworks under the *RTE Act 2009*. Strengthening system, process and provisions is essential to ensure developmentally appropriate ECCE nationwide an infrastructure Wales already has in place.

Part 2: The Unique Child: A Critical Evaluation of Assessment, Progress Tracking and Age-Stage Developmental Models.

The principle of the unique child is rooted in developmental and sociocultural theory, recognising that every child follows an individual developmental trajectory shaped by their biology, relationships and environment. Constructivist theorists such as Piaget (1952) emphasise children as active meaning makers, while Vygotsky (1978) highlights the role of culture, language and social interactions in shaping learning. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory positions each child within nested systems of family, community and society, underscoring that development is relational and context dependent. Together these perspectives frame the child as competent, agentic and embedded within a wider ecology, requiring early years systems to respond to individual needs, identities and lived experiences rather than expecting children to fit predetermined structures.

Wales operationalises the unique child principle through a rights based statutory framework, where the Curriculum for Wales and the Early Years Framework require practitioners to recognise each child's individual development, wellbeing and identity (Welsh Government [hereafter WG], no date), with the *ALN Act 2018* mandating early identification and personalised planning through statutory IDP's (Senedd, 2018). This creates a coherent system in which individuality is proacted by law and supported through regulated quality assurance and multi agency duties. In contrast, India's Early Childhood Care and Education (hereafter ECCE), shaped by the National ECCE Curriculum Framework (Ministry of Women and Child Development [hereafter MWCD], 2026) and National Education Policy (hereafter NEP) 2020 articulates child-centred, developmentally appropriate practice but lacks the statutory mechanisms, workforce capacity and regulatory coherence needed to realise the "unique child" in practice. Large class sizes, limited training and fragmented governance mean children's individual developmental pathways are often overshadowed by structural constraints, resulting in a system where the principle is aspirational rather than embedded (Malik and Hasan, 2024).

The principle of the unique child directly challenges linear, age related assessment models, development is non-linear and context dependent (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Vygotsky, 1978; DfE, 2021), a position reinforced in Welsh policy where the

Curriculum for Wales emphasises that children develop along different pathways and at different rates, requiring assessment To be responsive rather than norm-referenced (WG, no date; WG, 2023a). This tension is particularly visible when comparing India's early years offer with Wales' play based curriculum. Each system adopts distinct assessment approaches that shape how children's progress is understood.

In India, the dominant method of assessment in both Anganwadi Centres (hereafter AWCs) and low fee paying private schools is the developmental checklist, a tool grounded in age and stage related milestones (Chandra *et al.*, 2017; Chandra, 2021). MWCD (2026) state that until the age of three development is measured using four categories, cognition, language, motor and physical and social and emotional skills. Analysis of Indian ECCE highlight that developmental checklists and assessment cards are limited tools, criticised for their rigidity, age graded assumptions and poor alignment with children's non linear developmental trajectories, particularly in under resourced Anganwadi settings (Kaul *et al.*, 2017; Hossain, 2025; Malik and Hasan, 2024).

Additionally there is a wide body of evidence that undermines the use of developmental checklists and assessment cards, with NHS and government guidance emphasising that children develop at different rates (Gov.uk, 2026; NHS, 2026), Welsh policy rejecting age related expectations (WG, no date) and developmental theory demonstrating that learning is non linear and context dependent (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Vygotsky, 1978).

Age and stage related models risk pathologizing difference by positioning some children, especially those with ALN, as behind rather than developing along an alternative pathway. Norwich (2023) argues that developmental norms and linear progression models, such as checklists, fail to account for variability in children with ALN and can in fact reinforce deficit based views and thinking. International research further critiques milestone based tools as reductionist and misaligned with holistic practice (Dahlberg *et al.*, 2013; Kaul *et al.*, 2017).

Although developmental checklists and milestone cards are widely referenced in Indian ECCE literature, multiple studies demonstrate that systemic developmental monitoring is largely absent in practice. Argawal *et al* (2021) report major gaps in

early identification, screening, evaluation, evidenced by the lack of national-level data on children's developmental status across literacy, numeracy, physical, social and emotional and learning domains.

Mondal and Mondal (2025) similarly argue that India's ECCE systems lack coherent developmental monitoring, with NEP 2020's ambitions undermined by weak implementation, fragmented provision and the absence of mechanisms to evaluate the children's progress or the quality of ECCE delivery. Malik and Hasan (2024) reinforce this critique, highlighting the absence of a standardised assessment system across India's diverse ECCE sector.

Kaushal (2021) identifies a consistent pattern across the literature stating assessment is either absent, inconsistent or not systemised, particularly in Anganwadi Centres and low fee paying private pre-schools where staff, training, resources and pedagogical guidance are limited. Hossain (2025) further notes that monitoring and evaluation remain persistent challenges in NEP 2020 implementation, with no child level assessment method described. Collectively these studies reveal a structural deficit in India's early years assessment landscape, where developmental checklist exist on paper but are not embedded within a coherent system of progress tracking, early identification or multi agency response.

By contrast Wales' play based Curriculum for Funded Non-Maintained Nursery Settings (2023) and the Curriculum of Wales promotes narrative observation including learning stories, annotated observations and practitioner reflection as core methods of assessment (WG, no date). In Wales, assessment is embedded within play based pedagogy, with observation occurring through the child's self initiated play rather than adult directed tasks (WG, 2023a; WG, no date; Pascal *et al.*, no date). This approach aligns strongly with the unique child principle as it foregrounds the child's interests, dispositions, communication styles and cultural identities. The *ALN Act 2018* and *ALN Code 2021* mandate early identification, coordinated assessment and IDPs. Regulated oversight and CIW ensures that assessment practices are monitored for quality and consistency and accountability mechanism that is absent in India's fragmented ECCE system.

Observational assessments and practitioner reflection are central to high quality early years practice. They provide a holistic, contextual understanding of each child's

development. Welsh policy positions observation as the primary assessment, both the Curriculum for Funded Non-Maintained Nursery Settings and the Curriculum for Wales emphasises that children's development follows different pathways and at different rates, making observation essential for capturing authentic learning rather than age related expectations (WG, no date; WG, 2023). Research demonstrates that observational assessment provides richer insight into wellbeing, engagement and executive functioning (Pascal and Bertram, 2022; Whitebread, 2021).

Observation led assessments are particularly valuable for ALN learners, they identify communication preferences, sensory patterns, contextual factors and uneven developmental trajectories that standardised tools often miss (Norwich, 2023). Practitioner reflection strengthens this process enabling educators to analyse patterns, challenge assumptions and adapt provision responsively, supporting inclusive, relational pedagogy. However, observational assessment is time sensitive and requires skilled practitioners capable of interpreting behaviour through a developmental and relational lens (Education Endowment Foundation, 2021; Halder *et al.*, 2024). In under resourced settings, limited training high workloads and fragmented provision make sustained observation difficult, resulting in delayed identification and inconsistent tracking of emerging needs, a pattern evidenced in studies of early years provision where practitioners report insufficient capacity to conduct and maintain meaningful, continuous observation (Halder *et al.*, 2024).

Progress tracking systems can either support or undermine the unique child principle. When used flexibly, they can support practitioners to notice patterns, adapt provision and collaborate with families. When used mechanistically, they reduce learning to checklists and narrow indicators, a concern highlighted in critiques of curriculum implementation where tracking tools risk distorting holistic intentions (Gatley, 2020; Estyn, 2023). Welsh statutory framework ensures that progress tracking is not solely pedagogical but embedded within coordinated support pathways (WG, 2021). By contrast, India's ECCE lacks unified assessment frameworks, with AWCs, private preschools and primary schools using disparate tools, a risk identified in curriculum critiques where fragmented approaches undermine coherence and equity (Donaldson, 2015; Gatley, 2020). This fragmentation combined with broad or ambiguous policy language around inclusion, contributes to inconsistent assessment outcomes and reinforces inequity, a pattern

also noted in UK early years guidance where available practices lead to uneven experiences for children and families (Department for Education, 2023).

Critically, the unique child principle demands assessment systems that recognise variability, cultural context and diverse developmental trajectories. India's reliance on age and stage based checklists reflect systemic constraints, including limited training, ambiguous policy language and fragmented governance, resulting in assessment practices that often reimpose normative expectations rather than respond to individual developmental pathways. In contrast, Wales' statutory, rights based infrastructure, supported by observation led assessment within the Curriculum for Wales, creates a more enabling environment for inclusive, child centred assessment and early identification of ALN. However it must also be acknowledged that even in Wales the challenge remains to ensure that assessment practices genuinely honour the unique child rather than subtly reinstating linear or normative models of progress. Estyn (2023) inspection evidence highlights this risk, demonstrating that tracking practices can narrow learning when misaligned with curriculum intentions, indicating that accountability pressures can compromise the flexibility that is central to play based, child led assessment.

THE GREAT EARLY YEARS CON: OVER QUALIFIED, UNDER PAID AND OVERLOOKED – THE REALITY OF WALES' EARLY YEARS WORKFORCE



By: Jo McDonough on 13th June, 2026



Image 1: Teacher stress
(Website image: Unsplash, 2026)

As an early years practitioner with many years under my belt, I can confidently say that the early years workforce has never been expected to carry so much for so little. Expectations of being curriculum experts, safeguarding leads, ALN specialists, behaviour analysts, family support workers and child development professionals all rolled into one (Audit Wales, 2026). Yet many of us earn minimum wage or wages that barely match those of supermarket staff.

Let me be clear; this is no criticism or bemoaning of supermarket staff, the country needs you, however there is an understanding that you can leave the job at the door which can't always be said for the early years workforce. The emotional load, the safeguarding concerns, the ALN responsibilities, the family crisis, the disclosures, the paperwork and the worry all come home with us. They sit with us at night, they follow us into weekends, they shape our wellbeing, our mental health and our families (Social Care Wales [hereafter SCW], 2026).

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Yet as qualification expectations rise and responsibilities multiply and with policy professionalisation not being matched by funding, one uncomfortable question keeps surfacing;

Are we over-qualifying early years practitioners for minimum wage work?

And if so,

Who exactly is benefiting from this system?

Professionalism Without Pay: A Political Choice, Not an Accident

Welsh government continues to demand higher qualifications from early years practitioners while refusing to fund higher wages that should reflect that level of expertise. Instead, they roll out new childcare initiatives despite the sector screaming that there is no funding (Senedd, 2022), no staff and no physical space to deliver them, just this week Plaid Cymru declared they are ahead in their plans for rolling out free childcare for all, with no clear plan of how this is actually going to happen (Storey and Bagnall, 2026).

“Professionalisation” has become a convenient and cheap political slogan, a way to label the workforce as “critical infrastructure” when it suits the narrative, and “unskilled” when budgets are drawn up.

Meanwhile;

- *The ALN code is an unfunded mandate (Audit Wales, 2026).*
- *Safeguarding duties are increasing (Welsh Government [hereafter WG], 2021; SCW, 2025).*
- *Curriculum reforms require time, training and reflective practice (Audit Wales, 2026; Estyn, 2023).*
- *Flying Start expansion is happening without workforce expansion (Audit Wales, 2026;*

As Audit Wales (2026) makes clear, this is not a workforce problem but a systemic failure by those who hold the purse strings, with practitioners expected to uphold national priorities on little more than practitioner goodwill while receiving neither the resources nor the structural support required to deliver them. Even Welsh Government's own Flying Start evaluation describes rapid programme expansion without any reference to workforce expansion, reinforcing workforce concerns that the offer is growing faster than the staff needed to deliver it (WG, 2026b).

The Human Cost: A Workforce in Crisis

Wales is currently in the midst of an early years recruitment crisis, with a high human cost that is impossible to ignore (SCW, 2025). The national workforce consistently reports overwhelming emotional strain, rising burnout, deteriorating mental health and the sheer impossibility of “leaving the job at the door”. The Early Education and Childcare Coalition [hereafter EECC] (2026) and SCW (2026) have repeatedly warned that practitioners are leaving the sector in record numbers, citing low pay, lack of recognition, high responsibility and unsustainable workloads with a further 31.5% of practitioners considering leaving (SCW, 2026).

This accumulated pressure is having a detrimental impact on the children in our care, particularly when experienced, dedicated practitioners are leaving their roles due to chronic underfunding, limited training and development and a lack of guidance or support. Every departure represents not just a staffing gap, but a loss of expertise, stability and relationships for the children who need them most, and the irony? The lowest paid staff are often supporting the children with the most complex ALN needs (Estyn, 2023; SCW, 2026; EECC, 2026).

If this were any other sector, it would be called exploitation.

Follow the Money: Underfunding Per Child

Multiple national bodies have warned that Wales’ early years funding model is no longer fit for purpose, with per-child funding failing to keep pace with inflation, qualification requirements, ALN responsibilities, safeguarding expectations and curriculum reform (Audit Wales, 2026; Early Years Alliance, 2025; Barca, 2026).

While we are discussing qualifications, here is the kicker, there is no minimum qualification requirement for support staff working in schools (Siraj and Kingston, 2019; Engage Education, 2023; Careers Wales, 2026). Yet early years practitioners, who support children at the most developmentally critical stage, are expected to hold increasingly high level qualifications. The National Minimum Standards require early years practitioners to hold recognised

childcare qualifications, with assistants needing level 2 and at least half of practitioners and all managers required to hold a level 3 or above. Flying Start are held to higher account and are typically required to have level 3 – 5 and above, to meet the programs professional standards (SCW, 2022; Care Council for Wales, no date; WG, 2023), all for wages that barely scrape above minimum wage. In an international comparison Scotland has introduced a national pay floor for early years, Ireland has tied funding to qualification levels and have created a national pay scale and New Zealand pays degree qualified early years practitioners on par with school teachers (Scottish Government, 2025; Department of Enterprise, Tourism and Employment, 2025; Ministry of Education, 2025). Wales cannot deliver world class outcomes on bargain basement budgets.

A Workforce Strategy That Matches the Curriculum

However ambition without investment is just rhetoric. Wales needs a national pay scale, funding that reflects qualifications, recognition of ALN responsibilities with protected time for observations, reflection and planning. With the added parity of esteem with school based colleagues. In reality practitioners are delivering one of the most ambitious curricula in the world (Elias, 2026), yet are paid nothing like the colleagues teaching the very same national curriculum. Other countries have done it, Wales can too.

A Challenge to Policymakers

So here is the challenge being offered to Welsh Government;

- Stop professionalising us on paper while devaluing us in practice.
- Stop calling us “critical infrastructure” while funding us like an afterthought.
- Stop expecting degree level expertise for minimum wage.

If Wales truly believes in early intervention, inclusion and children’s rights, then it must start by valuing the people who deliver them. Without a respected, fairly paid, well supported workforce, every policy ambition, ALN reform, Flying Start Expansion, curriculum implementation, will collapse under its own weight. Most important of all our children of Wales deserve better than that.

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