

AI Cover Sheet

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Inclusion within Curriculum for Wales and Curriculum for Excellence (Scotland)

Introduction

Curriculum refers to the planned and guided learning experiences provided with educational settings and involves the organisations of objectives (Murray 2022), contents, teaching approaches, assessment and training for practitioners (UNESCO 2025). Inclusion is an important principle within education because all children should have opportunities to participate, access learning and make progress regardless of their needs or abilities (Jardinez and Natividad, 2024). This is supported by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989, which states that all children have a right to education and participation (UNICEF, 2022). This assignment will critically analyse how the Curriculum for Wales (CfW) and the Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) promote inclusion, while also considering limitation for each approach.

Inclusion within Curriculum for Wales

Inclusion is a central principle within Curriculum for Wales because it aims to ensure that all learners can progress from their individual starting points (Welsh Government, 2021). The curriculum provides schools with flexibility to design learning around the needs of the children (Welsh Government, 2020a; Hughes and Lewis, 2020). This is important because children learn in different ways and may require different forms of support to access learning (Sewell, Kennett and Pugh, 2022). For example, children with additional learning needs may require this flexibility which may involve adapting resources, communication methods and learning environments. Additionally, the Curriculum for Wales promotes children voice and participation (Welsh Government, 2020), reflecting article 12 of the UNCRC, which states that children have the right to express their views and have them considered in decisions that affect them (UNICEF, 2022). Research suggests that inclusive education is strengthened when children are active participants rather than passive receivers of support (Black-Hawkins, Maguire and Kershner, 2021; Esteban, 2022).

However, although the Curriculum for Wales promotes flexibility and inclusion, this does not guarantee that inclusion will be achieved in practice. Davies *et al.* (2024) highlighted that due to greater autonomy and reduced clarity, there may be gap between policy and practice. Schools may interpret curriculum guidance differently, resulting in variation between settings (Evans, 2023). This implementation of curriculum can be a challenge as some schools have greater access to support, training and leadership and resources than others (Murphy, Greenway and Conn, 2024b) which may affect how effectively they can put the inclusive elements of the Curriculum for Wales into practice and meet children's needs. Children may experience different levels of inclusion depend on the school they attend. This is reflected in Evans (2023), who highlights that children's experiences can differ significantly between schools, with the curriculum experiences shaped by teachers and leaderships rather than the curriculum. Oversby (2016) adds that factors such as relationships, school culture and policy pressures can influence the way the curriculum is interpreted, creating variations in how it is implemented. As a result, creating gap between policy and practice.

The Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018 supports inclusion by requiring children's needs to be identified and supported appropriately. This is important because effective inclusion within Curriculum for Wales depends on children receiving support that is responsive to their individual needs while still allowing them to access the wider curriculum (Welsh Government, 2020b). Almeqdad *et al.* (2023) argues that inclusive practice should focus on extending learning opportunities for all children rather than creating separate experiences for particular groups. The Curriculum for Wales guidance suggests that inclusion is most effective when support is embedded within everyday practice rather than viewed as additional intervention (Welsh Government, 2020). Szumski, Smogorzewska and Karwowski (2017) found that inclusive practice can also benefit children without ALN, suggesting that inclusion may have an impact on the whole classroom. Overall, this shows that inclusive practice with CfW should be embedded within everyday learning, to ensure diverse needs are recognised and supported, in line with the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018.

However, some children experience greater difficulty in learning and development compared to their peers, the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal

(Wales) Act 2018 requires provision that is additional or different to what is normally available. As a result, these children need differentiated curriculum to ensure equity. Murphy, Greenway and Conn (2024b) highlight that schools are already developing wider range of provision to support children with complex need, in line with CfW emphasis on responsive pedagogy. Additionally, Power, Newton and Taylor (2020) found that the flexibility of the Curriculum for Wales can create challenges for practitioners, as they may need decide whether children should follow the same curriculum as their peers or need more specialised support. This shows that in the Curriculum for Wales, schools need to balance giving all children access to the same wider curriculum while making sure support is in place to meet individual needs. Lindner and Schwab (2020) highlight that some children need significant adaptations in order to access the curriculum. This can be difficult within the Curriculum for Wales because some children may need more support that mainstream classrooms are able to provide (Chow, De Bruin and Sharma, 2023). These concerns are particularly important as the CFW is still relatively new and there is limited evidence regarding the long-term impact on inclusion (Welsh Government, 2025a; Knight and Crick, 2021; Evans, 2023). This suggests it is difficult to determine whether the inclusive principles will be implemented consistently across schools in the future.

Inclusion with Curriculum for Excellence

According to Hedge and Mackenzie (2016) Scottish education is built on ideas of fairness and inclusion, stating that all children including those with severe learning disabilities should be seen as individual who deserve respect and value. Curriculum for Excellence was developed to provide all children in Scotland with equal opportunities to learn and achieve (Education Scotland, 2024b). Inclusion is a key principle within the curriculum, with an emphasis on ensuring that every child can access learning regardless of their background, abilities or additional needs (Education Scotland, 2017b). One of the strengths of CFE is the focus on meeting the needs of individual children. The Curriculum promotes personalised learning and encourages practitioners to adapt learning experiences to suit the child's interest and needs (Scottish Government, 2008). This approach supports inclusion because it recognises that children learn in different ways and may require different levels of support. This is further strengthened by the Education (Additional Support for

Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004, by ensuring that support is available to any child who faces barriers to learning, rather than limiting support to those with a diagnosis.

However, research by Constantinides (2026) indicates considerable variation in educational variation across Scotland, with rural schools continuing to experience challenges such as staff shortages and limited access to specialist support and resources. Similarly, the OECD (2021) review of the CFE highlights that due to high level of autonomy, along with unclear responsibility and lack of structure has led to differences in children's experiences. Additionally, Bignell *et al.* (2025) research found that teachers are experiencing increasing workload pressures, partly due to the growing diversity and complexity of children's needs with planning and preparing often being completed out of school hours. Overall, this shows that although the CFE aims to promote inclusion, evidence shows that's difference in resources, implementation and teacher capacity mean that inclusion is not experienced equally across all settings.

Education Scotland(2024a). Inclusion within the curriculum for excellence is also reflected in the four capacities, successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors. These capacities are intended to support all children to develop, knowledge, and skills regardless of their individual circumstances and ability. Similarly, the OECD (2021) state that the CFE holistic development across the four capacities, suggesting that achievement extends beyond academic outcomes to include confidence, participation and contribution, therefore supporting a broader and more inclusive understanding success. Edstrom, Gardelli and Backman, (2022) support this view that inclusive education is enhanced when children are given varied opportunities to participate and succeed, highlighting that inclusion is based on different forms of participation, including belonging, interaction, autonomy and involvement rather than limited to academic outcomes.

However, while the four capacities promote a broader and more inclusive understanding of achievement within CFE, they can also present challenges in ensuring inclusion is effectively supported in practice. OECD (2021) identifies several challenges, these include lack of clarity within the broad CFE framework, mismatch between the aims and assessment approaches. As a result, it becomes more difficult to consistently identify and monitor children's progress.

Compare and Contrast

Both Curriculum for Wales and Curriculum for Excellence place inclusion at the centre of their framework (Welsh Government, 2021; Education Scotland, 2017b). The longer history of Curriculum for Excellence provides an opportunity to consider whether the inclusive aims of Curriculum for Wales are likely to be achieved in practice (Evans, 2023). Both curriculums promote flexibility, personalised learning and a commitment to ensuring that all children participate and make progress regardless of their needs or abilities (Welsh Government, 2021; Scotland Education, 2017b).

However, the long-term evidence on CFE suggests that the inclusive principles within the curriculum does not automatically result in inclusive experiences for all children. The OECD (2021) review found that while the CFE promotes inclusion, implementation varies across school. Similarly, Constantinides (2026) highlighted differences in access to support and resources in rural areas. Additionally, Bidnell *et al.* (2025) found that increased workload pressure can affect practitioners' ability to meet the diverse needs of children. This raises the question on whether the curriculums flexibility promotes inclusion by allowing practitioners to respond to individual needs or whether it has created inconsistencies that has resulted in unequal experiences for children. Although the Curriculum for Wales promotes progression from individual starting points and encourages schools to design learning around the needs of the children (Welsh Government, 2021), there is limited evidence on regarding the long-term impact (Evans, 2023). This suggest that as the curriculum is quite new, it remains unclear whether schools will be able to implement the inclusive principles of the curriculum. The experience of the CFE questions whether CFW can fully achieve the inclusive aims, or if resources, support and teacher capacity will continue. This shows that inclusion relies not only on curriculum design but also on effective implementation in practice. This reflects the Donaldson (2015) report that the reform should build on existing inclusive approaches such as child-centred practice and routes for learning.

Conclusion

In conclusion, both Curriculum Wales and Curriculum for Excellence places inclusion at the centre of their frameworks, emphasising flexibility and recognising the unique

child. However, evidence from the Curriculum for Excellence suggests that inclusion may not always translate consistently into practice, with variation influenced by resources, practitioner expertise and wider factors. This highlights concerns about the extent to which Curriculum for Wales will achieve its inclusive aims, given a similar reliance on autonomy and interpretation of the curriculum. Overall, inclusion is shaped not just by curriculum design, but by how effectively it is implemented in practice, highlighting the importance of sustained support, clarity and professional development to ensure inclusion and equitable outcomes for all children.

Assessment to support the unique child within the Curriculum for Wales and the Curriculum for Excellence (Scotland)

Introduction

Assessment is essential in education as it helps practitioners understand how children learn, identify their needs and plan appropriately (Fife Council, 2017; Welsh Government, 2020b). The concept of the unique child emphasises that each child is an individual who develops at their own pace and in their own way (Department for Education, 2025a). Similarly, Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory highlights that development is shaped by the environment such as relationships, cultural influences which result in varied outcomes (Tong and An, 2024). This reflects article 6 of the UNCRC, which emphasises children's right to development and recognises that development occurs in different ways depending on individual circumstances (UNICEF, 2022). This assignment will critically analyse how Curriculum for Wales (CfW) and Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) use assessments to support the unique child.

Assessment supporting the unique child within Curriculum for Wales and Curriculum for Excellence

Curriculum for Wales and Curriculum for Excellence places observation as a central assessment method, emphasising assessment as an ongoing, embedded process within everyday practice rather than formal testing (Welsh Government, n.d.; Scottish Government, 2011). Observation is also an important method within both curricula where it is used alongside practitioners' judgement to evaluate children's learning (Welsh Government, n.d.; Scottish Government, 2011). Through observations practitioners gather evidence of children's progress across a range of experiences and use this information to support learning (Education Scotland, 2024b; Scottish Government, 2011; Welsh Government, 2020b). The Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Act 2021 and the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004, reinforces this by requiring assessment approaches that support ongoing children's learning progress. Additionally, Cengiz and Altindag (2022) highlight that

observation provides a holistic picture children's development. Observation enables practitioners to assess learning beyond what can be measured through formal assessments (Peterson *et al.*, 2020; Macy, 2023). This approach reflects the curricula aim to develop capable, confident and healthy individuals who engage positively in their learning and contribute to their communities (Education Scotland, 2024a; Welsh Government, 2022a). This supports the unique child as both curricula emphasise responsive, observation led assessments that recognise and responds to children's individual progress and needs (Department for Education, 2025a; Scottish Government, 2011).

However, research suggests that in the absence of sustained guidance, effective support structure and professional learning for practitioners, challenges may arise with the ambition for both curricula (OECD, 2020; Welsh Government, 2022b; OECD, 2021). According to Phung and Michell (2022) assessment based on teacher judgement may be subjective, which affect consistency and reliability. Therefore, making it difficult to compare children's progress across settings. Additionally, Urhahne and Wijnia (2021) study found that judgement may differ depending on the practitioner's experiences and understanding of the child with inexperienced practitioners over-estimating a child's ability. This highlights how observational assessment is vulnerable to variation in practitioner expertise. Without a clear framework and sustained professional learning, observational assessment risk becoming inconsistent (OECD, 2021; Welsh Government, 2021b). This may limit their capacity to provide an accurate picture of children's learning, therefore restricting practitioners' ability to recognise and respond to each unique child's individual needs.

Additionally, practitioners bias may affect the observation assessment, as interpretation of children's learning may be influenced by practitioner's prior experiences, expectations and beliefs (Louis and Betteridge, 2020). While observation aims to provide a holistic understanding of the child (Arnott, 2021), research by Phung and Michell (2022) shows that observational assessment based on practitioner judgement are likely to be subjective and inconsistent, particularly in the absence of structured frameworks. Practitioner may interpret children's interactions differently due to factors such as cultural background, communication style and individual needs (Louis and Betteridge, 2020), resulting in variations in the

practitioner judgement. This reflects the influence of the halo effect, where an overall view of a child shapes how their individual interactions are judged (Schmidt, Kaiser and Retelsdorf, 2023). This shows a limitation of observation as an assessment method, as practitioner's bias may limit its ability to capture the unique child and their individual learning.

The flexibility is considered essential as the ALN Code in Wales and the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 recognise that some children have greater difficulty in learning than majority of the others of the same age and may require alternative provision (Welsh Government, 2021a). Symeonidou, Loizou and Recchia (2022) highlight that observation provide insight into children's participation and development, making it a key tool for understand children with additional needs. Similarly, Bass and Bonawitz (2024) state that children in early stages of development often demonstrate understanding through play, exploration and interaction, making observation a developmentally appropriate assessment method. This allows practitioners to gain a broader understanding of children's strength, interest and learning needs (Education Scotland, 2024b). Therefore, this shows that observation is valuable for children who may struggle to demonstrate their abilities through more structured assessment approaches (NAEYC, n.d.).

Curriculum for Wales emphasises that observation should be used to understand children's progress over time, with progression steps providing key reference points for professional judgement. Rather than measure children against age related expectation (Welsh Government, 2020b). This aligns with Donaldson (2015), who emphasises that assessment should support individual learner progress rather than rely solely on standardised approaches. While both curricula promote observation-based Curriculum assessment, Curriculum for Wales emphasises individual progression whereas Curriculum for Excellence provides more structured guidance through experiences and outcomes (Education Scotland, 2017a). These benchmarks provide practitioners with a framework for assessing progress while still allowing flexibility in how learning is demonstrated (Education Scotland, 2026), which may support greater consistency in assessment. This shows support for the unique child because progress is viewed as an individual journey rather than comparison with peers, enabling a more individualised understanding of children's learning and development.

However, while both curricula assessment framework emphasise individual progression, progression itself is not a simple process, as children develop and understand at varying rates and in different ways (Hughes, Makara and Stacey, 2020). Welsh Government (2025) report found that limitations in time, resources and staff capacity, alongside the differences in practitioner confidence and unclear progression steps particularly for children with ALN, restricted the consistent implementation of observation. Similarly, within Curriculum for Excellence, OECD (2021) highlights that the guidance is open to interpretation, with professional's judgements varying across schools, which may lead to inconsistent observational assessments. In both curricula, assessment framework such as progression steps and experiences and outcomes support practitioners (Welsh Government, 2020b; Education Scotland, 2017a). However, it remains dependent on practitioners' interpretation, which may lead to variation across schools (OECD, 2021; Welsh Government, 2021b). This shows concerns about the extent to which observational assessment can reliably capture the learning of the unique child, particularly those with ALN, when implementation varies widely.

Additionally, it could be argued that the intended role of observation as a method of assessment is sometimes lost in translation as research shows gap between policy and practice (Davies *et al.*, 2024). Both curricula support play based and child-centred approach to assessment, with observation as a key method for understanding children's learning and development (Welsh Government, n.d.; Scottish Government, 2011). However, practitioners may remain influenced by traditional methods of assessment models which prioritise attainment and measurable outcomes (Welsh Government, 2020b; Schildkamp *et al.*, 2020). Accountability pressure within education systems often leads teachers to focus on traditional methods of practice (Schildkamp *et al.*, 2020). This shows a potential inconsistency between child-centred observation-based assessment approach within both curricula and the realities of classroom practice. Observation may be driven by the need to collect evidence for progression frameworks, resulting in the focus on the unique child and their individual learning being limited.

Conclusion

In conclusion, both Curriculum for Wales and Curriculum for Excellence places observation at the centre of assessment to support the unique child, focusing on ongoing and child-centred approaches. Observation helps practitioners understand children's learning holistically and supports practitioners to recognise individual progress. However, its effectiveness can be limited by the subjectivity of practitioner's judgement, as well as differences in experience, understanding and beliefs. Wider pressures, such as accountability and lack of resources may also affect how observational assessment is implemented in practice. Although both curricula move away from the standardised assessment approaches and support more individualised assessment, there is still a gap between policy and practice. Overall, observation has a strong potential to support the unique child, but how it works depends on the practitioner and the wider context in which assessment takes place, including available support, resources and system expectation.

Acklima's Blog

If children need to feel safe before they can learn, why are we still getting it wrong?

Introduction

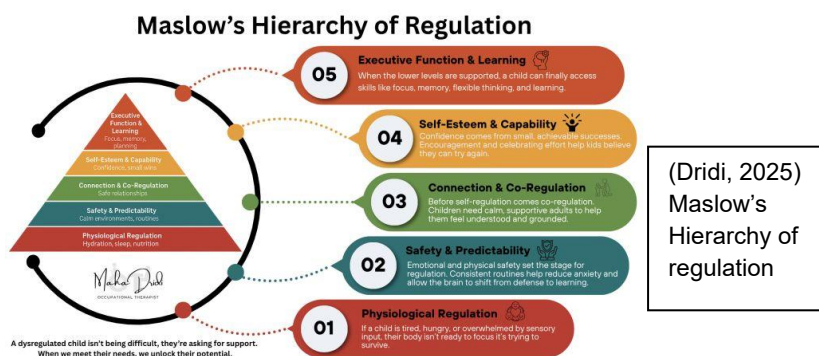
If children need to feel safe before they can learn (Porter *et al.*, 2021), why are we still expecting them to engage with learning before their emotional and sensory needs are fully met?

In every school I have worked in, this message is widely accepted. It appears in training, written into policy and is often discussed when considering children's needs (Department for Education, 2025b). However, in practice it is not always consistently applied. Many children are still expected to meet academic demands while managing anxiety, dysregulation or sensory overwhelm (Fisher *et al.*, 2026). This raises an important question, if we genuinely believe safety underpins learning, why does this not always shape daily practice?

This question feels particularly relevant in the current educational context. There is increasing recognition that many children are presenting with heightened levels of anxiety (Rapee *et al.*, 2023), difficulties with emotional regulation and complex sensory needs. At the same time, schools face ongoing pressure in relation to attendance, attainment and assessments (Department for Education, 2025c). This shows that the focus can shift towards measurable outcomes, sometimes at the expense of recognising whether a child is actually ready to learn.

Why feeling safe and secure matters

Maslow argues that basic needs, safety, relationships and self esteem must be met before higher level learning can occur (Frei-Landau and Levin, 2023). Similarly, Bowlby emphasised the role of secure



relationships in supporting children's development (Behrens, Jones-Mason and Forslund, 2025). Additionally, recent neuroscience has highlighted that children learn best when they feel emotionally secure and regulated (Lindenbach *et al.*, 2025)

This shows that learning is not just cognitive, it is influenced by emotional and relational factors. A child who feels unsafe or overwhelmed may still complete tasks, but this does not reflect meaningful engagement or understanding. In such cases, learning may be surface level with no depth (Stokes, 2022), driven by compliance rather than genuine readiness

A parent's perspective

As a parent, this is something I consider carefully. When attending parents evening my main concern is not always academic performance. Instead, I want to know whether my child is happy, feels safe and has positive relationship with pupils and staff.

These factors provide insight that attainment data alone cannot capture. A child may meet expected levels academically while struggling emotionally. Equally a child who is not meeting expected targets may still be developing sense of belonging or confidence. When children feel valued and supported, they are more likely to develop positive attitude towards learning. They become more willing to take risks, make mistakes and engage with challenges (Culver, 2025). However, when learning is associated with stress or pressure it can harm children well-being (Dilbar, 2024), children may begin to withdraw, avoid tasks or develop negative perceptions of education.

A practitioner's perspective

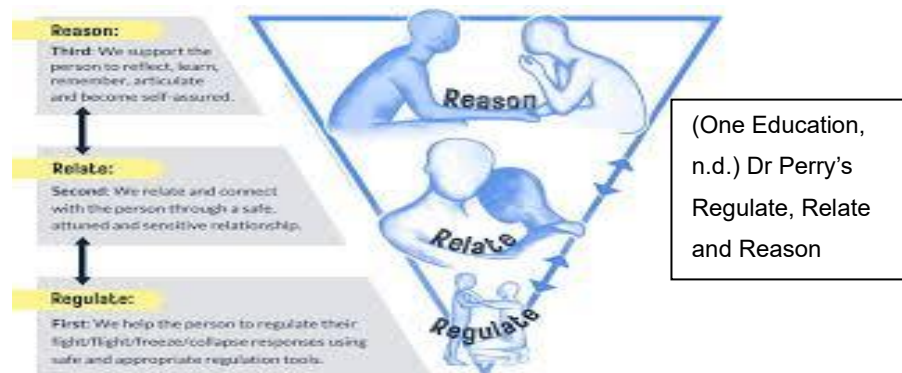
My experiences in practice reinforce the importance of regulation before learning. When children are dysregulated, their ability to engage meaningfully is limited (Heart, 2025). While children may complete their work, it is not always an accurate reflection of their ability or understanding.

Expecting children to work in this state can also impact relationships and damage trust. Over time, children may associate school with pressure or failure, which can contribute to anxiety and avoidance (Dilbar, 2024). This highlights the importance of recognising emotional readiness as a key factor to effective learning.

On the other hand, when children are given time and support to regulate, outcomes tend to improve. Once they feel calm and secure, they are better able to engage and demonstrate their capability. Although this process may require time, it supports more meaning and sustaining learning (Pandey *et al.*, 2017).

Regulation as part of learning

It is important to recognise that emotional and sensory regulation is not separate from learning. When children are supported to understand their emotions and develop ways to manage them, they are also learning important skills. These skills help to build confidence, self-awareness and long-term wellbeing (Welcare, 2025).



The Curriculum for Wales reflects this by placing Health and Wellbeing alongside other areas of learning and experiences. It highlights the importance of children becoming healthy and confident individuals (Welsh Government, 2020a; Welsh Government, 2026), suggesting that well-being should be part of everyday classroom practice rather than something added on separately.

Challenges in practice

Even though there is evidence and guidance, it is not always easy to place well-being at the centre of learning in everyday practice. Schools are often working within systems that prioritise attainment and measurable outcomes (Department for Education, 2024), which can make it more difficult to consistently focus on children's emotional and sensory needs.

From my experience, this is not because practitioners lack understanding and awareness. Instead, it reflects the reality of working within a system where there are multiple demands. While there is strong understanding of importance of well-being translating this into consistent practice can be challenging (Lelkes, Bouch and Holmstrom, 2021).

What do we need to change?

If we are serious about recognising safety as the foundation of learning, then this must move beyond theory and be reflected more clearly in everyday practice. It is not enough to say we value well-being; it needs to be visible in the decisions we make and the environments we create.

This means:

- Recognising that emotional regulation is not optional, but essential for meaningful learning.
- Prioritising strong supportive relationships as central to children's development.
- Understanding and responding to sensory needs as part of inclusive practice.
- Embedding well-being throughout the school day, rather than treating it as an add-on.
- Asking not only what this child is achieving? But also, is the child ready to learn right now?

Conclusion

Children learn best when they feel safe, secure and understood, but challenge is applying this consistently. As practitioners and parents, we need to question whether safety, relationships and regulation are truly prioritised. If we genuinely believe it matters, then it should shape our everyday practice.

So, the question remains: next time you plan, teach or support a child, will you prioritise what they achieve, or also whether they are ready to learn in order to achieve their best?

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