

What is Additional Learning Needs (ALN)?

According to Dauncey (2016); Dewis Cymru (2020); Welsh Government (2021b) ALN is when a child has difficulty in learning significantly more than children of a similar age or they have a disability which could limit them to understanding the education provided to them by mainstream schools.

In 2018 the ALN and Education Tribunal (Wales) bill came into force and became an Act, it replaced the Special Educational Needs (SEN) system (Welsh Government (WG), 2018). The aim of the Act was to ensure children and parents became included in decisions made about them and had equal opportunities to reach their full potential (WG, 2018).

What is Down syndrome and how is it diagnosed?

Down's syndrome also known mainly as Trisomy 21 is a genetic condition and occurs when there is an extra chromosome in some or all cells before your born (NHS Wales, 2021a). Babies will inherit one chromosome each from their parents, but they can sometimes have 3 copies of the chromosome which is called a Trisomy (Public Health England, 2018). According to Public Health England (2018) there are several different types of Trisomy's that can appear in the body which can lead to different medical conditions.

In the NHS antenatal screening examination there are tests available which detects if there is a high or low chance the baby will have Down's syndrome, it will involve a blood test and a scan on the stomach (NHS Wales, 2021b). If there is high chance of your baby having Down syndrome then there are two tests available which could detect the condition these are the Chorionic villus sampling (CVS) and amniocentesis (GOV.UK, 2021).

The CVS procedure tests the placental tissue which contains genetic information (DNA) from the baby's cells, and the amniocentesis procedure tests the amniotic fluid, but both tests carry the risk of miscarriage (GOV.UK, 2021).

Down syndrome - Supporting Children with Additional Learning Needs (ALN)



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How does Down syndrome affect children's health?

Children with Down's syndrome can sometimes have problems with their health because of congenital anomalies for example heart problems, hearing loss, vision problems, Alzheimer's disease, respiratory illnesses, and a higher chance of developing leukaemia (Mencap, no date; NHS Wales, 2021a).

Children who were born in the 1980s with Down syndrome typically only lived until they were 25 years of age, but recent reports suggest some live up to the age of 70 (BBC News, 2016).

According to BBC News (2016) around 750 babies in the United Kingdom (UK) are born with Down syndrome each year. Between 1998 and 2017 there were 1,556 babies born with Down syndrome in Wales and most of these children were born to younger women (NHS Wales, 2021a; Bird, no date). Down's syndrome is not usually inherited, and all women have the chance of having a baby with this condition, but it increases with age (NHS 111 Wales, 2021).

The statistics from NHS Wales (2021a) shown in Image B state how the number of children born with Down syndrome rises as women mature in age.

Article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) all children have the right to play and should have equal opportunities to participate in all activities (UNICEF, no date).

Conclusion - Every child should be celebrated whether they are born with or without a disability, we should be embracing diversity and accepting everyone into our society and treat everyone as equal.

Image B

Source: NHS Wales (2021a)

Maternal age related rates per 10,000 total births and frequency of babies affected by Down Syndrome (Trisomy 21), Wales, 1998-2017

Maternal age group (yrs)	Number of Cases	Gross rate	Frequency based on CARIS gross rates
<20	54	10.1	1 in 985
20 to 24	140	9.7	1 in 1027
25 to 29	189	10.0	1 in 1003
30 to 34	327	18.6	1 in 538
35 to 39	506	58.2	1 in 172
40 to 44	312	177.2	1 in 56
45+	28	265.9	1 in 38
<35	710	12.6	1 in 792
35+	846	80.1	1 in 125

Produced by Public Health Wales Observatory, using CARIS and NCCHD (NWIS)

Further reading -
Down's Syndrome Association:
<https://www.downs-syndrome.org.uk/>

Disability discrimination is when you are treated differently or less favourably than someone without a disability (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2020).

What barriers do children encounter with ALN?

One of the barriers children face in society is appearances, they are judged from the beginning about their disability, and this can prevent them from having equal access to education and further opportunities, this can also be referred to as 'The Social Model' (Crutchley, 2018).

Swansea Association Independent Living (SAIL) (2022) describes the Social Model of Disability as a barrier in society that prevents people who have a disability to have the same equal rights as a non-disabled person, for example no access to lifts for wheelchair-users, no sign language interpreter for a deaf person or no audio-format for a visually impaired person.

For many years people who have a disability have been treated differently, they are sometimes portrayed as worthless and weak, and this can have a fundamental effect on their mental well-being and feel excluded from society (Thomas, 2020). According to Thomas (2020) the media often describe disabled people as susceptible and you must feel pity for them, to overcompensate for their impairment and to socially accept them into society. Furthermore he states we are trying to put barriers between disabled and non-disabled people and view disabled people as objects and they are not worthy enough to be in our society. In 2019 a study was undertaken to establish why parents considered a termination when they found out their child was Down syndrome, some couples stated that they were concerned about acceptance from society and the attitudes people had towards people with this condition. Other couples claimed they did not have up to date information about the condition from health professionals and were given negative feedback about their quality of life (Lou et al., 2019).

What support strategies are in place for children with Down syndrome?

The Welsh Government (2021b) state schools and local authorities must use different support strategies to assist children with ALN, they say all children develop new skills and knowledge differently, and it not only depends on the age of the child but the way in which they process information. Mays (2017) suggest there are several learning strategies that should be used depending on the child's development, for instance repetitive language, visual cards, sign language, picture exchange communication system (PECS), electronic devices and communication boards. Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) is primary aim is to teach communication, it is when an individual chooses a picture of what item they want and then the recipient will pass that item to them, this can then support children in putting together full sentences (PECS, no date); Belisle et al. (2018).

'I have one more chromosome than you. So what?'
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HwxjoBQdnOs>

Source: You Tube (2015)

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