

Respecting Children and Young People's Rights in Wales

Children's and young people's rights in Wales have been a significant focus in the last few years, especially regarding their rights within educational settings. Different theoretical frameworks, legislations and policies that underpin children's and young people's rights within Wales will be the focus throughout this essay, along with looking into different case studies and effective strategies for promoting and protecting children's and young people's rights and what the barriers and issues that may apply when implementing these policies and practices in schools. Human Rights refer to certain rights and freedoms that are given protection by law, as stated by the Welsh Government (2021). Children and young people have an extra set of rights laid out by the UNCRC, though many countries have different age ranges for children and young people who would follow these rights. Within Wales, the age of children is up to the age of 18 according to NSPCC (2024), with young people being classed as ages 16 - 24 under the Welsh Government (2022b) young person guarantee, although young people are seen as up to 24 the UNCRC is in place to support children up to the age of 18 through those up to the age of 24 may have other rights like set out in the young people guarantee.

The human rights theory has been a long-discussed issue with years of backstories to it. Human rights are rights we have for simply being human and range from the simple right to life to others, like the right to food and education, which are protected by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as stated by the United Nations (2024). The UK adopted these rights by creating the Human Rights Act 1998 within this act, there are 19 individual articles (legislations.gov.uk, 2004) rather than the original 30 individual articles covered by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which are there to protect human lives, though these rights may not always be followed as they are not legally binding according to The British Institute of Human Rights (2023). These rights were made with a focus on adults and left children vulnerable as they aren't legally binding, which led to the creation of the UNCRC, which is a legally binding document. A theorist that could link to rights, especially the teaching of rights, is Bronfenbrenner, whose theory talks about the system of relationships and how they are affected by the environment around them. Bronfenbrenner's first level of interaction is the microsystem, and the second level, the mesosystem, includes children's most intimate relationships like children's parents and teachers, which is where children would be most influenced, according to Guy-Evans (2024). Although his theory doesn't directly link to children's rights, it could be said that his understanding and teaching of different levels of interactions could show where children should be taught and shown their rights which according to his theory would be the first two levels their parents and teachers, this is where children would most benefit from the teaching of rights and would end up with a better understanding.

There are many different legislations, policies, and organisations that support children's and young people's rights. The UNCRC, also known as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, is a legally binding agreement that outlines the fundamental rights of each child regardless of race, religion and abilities outlined by UNICEF (2022). The UNCRC is one of the most important pieces of legislation out there that protects children's rights within the UK. The UNCRC is put in place to protect children who are up to the age of 18 and consists of 41 articles outlining the rights each child and young person has within the UK with the four main articles being Article 2, the right to non-discrimination Article 3 commitment to the best interest of the child, Article 6 right to life, survival and development finally Article 12 the right to be heard. Children's rights are already protected in Welsh law under the Rights of Children and Young Persons Wales Measure 2011, showing Wales's commitment to children's rights and the UNCRC. The measure further underpins the UNCRC, putting a duty on the minister to have consideration for the UNCRC when developing or reviving legislation and policies outlined by the Welsh Government (2022a). This whole legislation shows Wales's commitment to supporting and protecting children's rights in Wales, with each article having an effect on children's well-being and safety throughout their lives. The new curriculum for Wales is statutory guidance aimed at helping schools develop their own school curriculum, leading learners to develop towards the four purposes: ambitious, enterprising, ethical and healthy students explained by the Welsh Government (2022). Improving education is the main goal of the curriculum for Wales, with nothing being seen as more essential than the experience, knowledge and skills that young people need for employment, lifelong learning and active citizenship. The new curriculum is there to set clear statements about what is important within education, having four main purposes set out for each school to follow. The four purposes are there to set high expectations for the promotion of individuality and national well-being, tackle ignorance and misinformation and encourage critical and civic engagement. The Welsh government states that curriculum development should be at the heart of practitioners, schools and national efforts that are there to seek to raise standards, tackle the attainment gap and ensure an education that is a source of national pride. It is also stated that this curriculum is an important vehicle for embedding the UNCRC in teaching and learning for children and young people and giving them an understanding of their rights as outlined at hwb.gov.wales (2024). Although the curriculum for Wales doesn't directly state rights within its guidance, it being a curriculum based around children, it would be suggested that schools would involve children's rights in their educational plan along with the guidance mentioning at one point that the curriculum is a vehicle for UNCRC, therefore, should be used throughout the curriculum. Children in Wales is an organisation that works along with the Welsh Government and others to ensure that children's and young people's rights are the main focus of policy and decision-making, as stated by Limegreentangerine (2025). Children in Wales prioritise ensuring children and young people have a voice in Wales, fighting for equal and reliable services and advocating for policy reforms. They offer a membership that can be used by individuals, including students and organisations who want to be involved in improving the lives of children and young people as well as families in Wales. The membership involves things like high-quality and diverse training

courses and online events, webinar recordings, an online resource library and downloadable magazines, a magazine available for all members to contribute to be able to share good practices and advertise your work and finally be able to influence and contribute to policy and consultation responses for children in Wales (childreninwalesmembership.org.uk, 2025). Children in Wales's mission is to build a Wales where all children and young people have their rights met (Limegreentangerine 2024b). To do this, they provide various training from safeguarding to Equality, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion, with new training available often, as shown on Eventbrite (2025). They also provide government-funded courses which are free to sign up for as well as setting up events like conferences to support people in learning about children and young people's rights and how to apply them day to day (Limegreentangerine, 2024a). Children in Wales is an amazing organisation that is there to support children and young people along with parents, practitioners and any organisation that wants to learn about children and young people's rights in Wales and how best to support these rights and involve them in children and young people's lives.

A case study that looks at a special school in Wales talks about how they approach ensuring equity within their school. The school is a small special needs school that supports 66 children with different types of additional needs from the age of 11 to 18. The school sets out to have happy, safe and secure students who have the opportunity to develop their talents, thrive in a caring and supportive community and are equipped with the skills to become the best that they can be to make a beneficial impact on society. The pupils from this school tend to have financial issues, so the governing body made the decision to provide all pupils with free school meals. They also provide experiences for the pupils that are at no cost, so financial barriers are not an issue. There are many strategies this school uses to provide these students with access to all educational experiences. The school's charity has received grant funding and donations thanks to the efforts of. In order to reach the school's mission they are adamant that outdoor learning experiences and school trips to culturally significant locations are crucial therefore, with the help of the finance committee, the headteacher makes sure that most of the budget goes towards supporting these trips as well on the upkeep of the of the school five cars. In order to support the development of the Welsh curriculum, the school has also hired members of staff from the Storey Arms Outdoor Education Centre three days a week. School meals are all completely free, including breakfast, healthy snacks and lunch as well as offering free uniforms, though students have the right to choose if they would like to wear their own clothes instead this includes PE kits, any specialised kits for outdoor activities and any clothes needed for work experience. When a student is in need of new clothes, they are provided discreetly to the student and are based individually to make sure all their needs are met. According to the report, student are encouraged to take pride in their appearance, with the school providing free haircuts to help them. The school also has strong and encouraging ties between the home and school. To promote good working connections, the school often host coffee mornings with parents; these mornings are there to help parents better meet and understand their children's social and emotional needs. The school also provides free transport for these parents if they are unable to

get there by their own means. Food kits were sent out to families in need within the school community during the pandemic by the school thanks to fundraising efforts and food donations from nearby businesses. This means that even for families in need, these teaching techniques are still available. The schools also support their students by supplying laptops to each student to help aid their studying, which were given by the local government. Each week, there are well-being visits to a variety of scenic and culturally significant locations, developing healthy relationships and effective social communication skills are the main goal of these visits. The school gives all children a chance to take one present home at Christmas and also holds a raffle where students take parents' home for their parents or siblings, and during easter, the school also holds an easter egg hunt. The school makes sure that every student has a variety of pleasant experiences that help them build confidence and get them ready for their next stage of life. Students are given the chance to learn to ride public transport, and staff accompany them on trips they need to take in their daily lives, with the school paying for the staff and students' transport. The school also helps older students apply for temporary driving licences as well as supplying them with free driving lessons and receives tutoring for driving theory exams. The school also offers certificates in building, landscape gardening, home cooking, climbing and barista training, along with providing Duke of Edinburgh bronze and silver awards. Following key stage 5, they are assisted in making career decisions and encouraged to pursue further education, training and employment. Finally, the case study talks about the impact the school's strategies have had over, and it shows that the funding strategies have been noteworthy. Data from the school monitoring shows that almost all students have improved prosocial skills and fewer obstacles to learning. It's also shown a decrease in negative incidences and a decrease in exclusions. Nearly all students show better focus in class and have higher reading and numeracy skills as a result of the relationships and trust created by the school's activities, as well as showing a better attitude towards learning. Because the students feel trusted, they also show an increased ability to control their emotions as well as help other younger students control their emotions, assisting them and sharing their regulation techniques when others are dysregulated. Finally, the school's peaceful atmosphere and students' attitude have greatly improved during lunch and breaks. The staff and students have a good relationship and are willing to express their emotions, and an improvement to the school ethos and culture has been facilitated by staff through trauma-informed practice (Estyn, 2024). This case study demonstrates how children's rights should be integrated into schools, giving children and young people all the opportunities to thrive and develop to the best of their abilities. It teaches children and young people that they should be treated the same as others and be given the same opportunities as their peers without the worry of discrimination or unfair treatment for being different. This school's approach to education meets so many children and young people's rights these including Article 28 right to an education, Article 3 the best interest of the Child, Article 23 children with Disability, Article 27 adequate Standards of living, Article 29 Goals of education, Article 31 leisure, play and culture (unicef.org.uk). This school does an amazing job at supporting all these rights and giving their children and young people the best chance in life.

There are a few main barriers and issues that affect the implementation of policies and practices related to children's and young people's rights in educational settings. One of the barriers that affect children's rights is the lack of awareness that adults have of children's rights and, therefore, don't have the knowledge to be able to support children in understanding them and teach children what their rights are, for this be changed there is a need for training and awareness given to better support these children (Byrne and Lundy, 2019). Another issue relating to children's rights in practice is child participation, though one of the children's rights is to be heard, and this is recognised as important, children are often left out of decision-making, left without a voice and not taken seriously and when children's voices aren't being listened to they find it hard to want to participate (Paul, 2023).

Numerous strategies exist to support the teaching of children and young people's rights. One way is a cross-curricular approach where children's rights are brought into each area of learning these rights could be used in many different ways Article 30 the right to speak your own language, could be incorporated into a math lesson where children look into the percentage of different languages spoken. For older children, a task could be set where children have to design a home that meets articles 24 and 27, where children have a right to clean water, healthy food and a clean environment, along with everyone's right to a proper home. Another way to incorporate the rights is when talking about expectations in class and behaviours, it's stated, like in article 2, that everyone has the same rights no matter what under the age of 18. This could be an amazing way to incorporate rights into children's daily lives it would have to made sure that all the children have a full understanding of what each right means and why they are following a task linked to it. For younger children, an amazing way to incorporate rights is with storytelling. Those reading books could range from books about children's rights to similar stories like The Three Little Pigs that you could link back to Article 27. A way for older children to get involved with implementing rights in their schools is through schools developing children's rights steering groups where you gather the thoughts of the children within the school and ask them what issue they believe needs to be looked at the most and how they feel these issues could be resolved. All children have the right to be listened to and the right to share their ideas this approach would leave children with pride in how they have been able to contribute to their school and make it better by being able to share their ideas daily informally without the fear of not being listened to (wales.children.legal.admin,2024). All these approaches are beneficial ways for schools to progress in becoming rights-respecting schools and with the right support from staff and practitioners' children will be able to become more aware of their rights and be able to stand up for themselves. Though these are only some of the strategies that could be used, there are many more that schools could develop and each school will have their own ways that would for them to teach children and young people their rights.

In conclusion, this essay has looked at children's and young people's rights in Wales. It stated what human rights were and that children have additional rights which are protected by law. It talked about how Bronfenbrenner's theory could be linked to

support why children's rights should be taught in schools and in home environments. It outlines different legislations, policies and organisations linked to children's rights and how they support the understanding of children's rights with the UNCRC linked to all areas of children's rights policies and organisations being the most influential piece of law linking to children and young people's rights in Wales. This essay also looks into a case study of a school that had set out its education to fulfil all the children in their needs and how they try their best to support their students to the best of their abilities so they can get the best start in life and thrive later on in their lives. Finally, this essay looks at the barriers to implementing rights into education and the ways rights can be implemented in many educational settings. It shows that one of the main barriers to teaching rights is knowledge between staff and practitioners and how more training and awareness are needed in order to best support children in their understanding of rights. To end this essay, it outlined strategies that can be used to implement children's and young people's rights in schools with there being various ways this could be accomplished, from a cross-curricular approach for older children to reading stories for younger children. Overall this essay presents many findings on children's and young people's rights in Wales and shows that this is starting to become a big focus within Wales.

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