

How do schools across Wales respect the rights that young people have in Wales?

In many places across the world children and young people have a specific set of rights which is separate from their human rights which helps keep them safe and secure throughout their childhood. In Wales in specific children and young people have 54 rights that help to provide children with a safe and loving childhood and help them to become respectable members of society. A right is a claim or entitlement that a person has based on laws, ethics or social convention. Rights are fundamental to society and are important in law, ethics and politics everyone in the world has rights some of which being children's rights which I will discuss today, human rights, employment rights and rights relating to death. It is important for everyone to have rights because we are all human beings and we have inherent values.

In Wales, a rights-based approach to education is a very important factor within legislation and policy. The Welsh Government's Education (Wales) Act 2021 is a significant example, which places a strong emphasis on children's rights and well-being. The act backs up the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) into Welsh law, making it a legal requirement for public bodies, including schools, to consider children's rights in all decision-making processes. Additionally, the Curriculum for Wales framework emphasizes the importance of embedding children's rights across all aspects of teaching and learning, encouraging schools to promote a culture of respect, equality, and inclusion. Through these legislative and policy measures, Wales demonstrates a commitment to fostering a rights-based educational environment where children are empowered to participate, express themselves, and access quality education in a safe and supportive setting. Children's rights are an especially important concept in Wales as many things have been put into place for children to feel like they know their rights and that their rights are being fulfilled.

Many different legislative pieces show the different ways in which a child's rights can be shown and respected. One of the biggest legislative pieces is the United Nations convention on the rights of the child (uncrc). In the uncrc there is 54 articles that cover all aspects of a child's all rights are of equal importance to every child and some of which being article 31 which is the right to relax and play which gives the child the rights to be able to have a school and life balance. The next one is article 13 which is the freedom of expression which gives children the right to freely express their thoughts and feelings and express who they are without the fear of being judged or ridiculed by adults or peers. The next one that's very important is article 19 which is the right to be safe from violence which helps them to live a happy and healthy childhood which is safe and makes them feel loved. Another big article is article 28 which is a child's right to education. In the UK children have the rights to free education from the age of 5 to the age of 18 which helps them be able to develop many different skills like social skills and educational and mental skills which will help them in their later life. The next article that is discussed is article 80 which is the right to the protection of identity. This one in particular is important as it helps children to be able to live a private life without the fear of their information or self being shared with others. The rights for the protection of identity could also be interpreted as the right to identify in a specific way or to identify with a certain thing. The next big point that the uncrc made is article 27 which is a child's right to a sufficient standard of living. which means that they are well fed and have a safe home and are able to be safe where they are living. It also could mean that they are going to be provided with opportunities

that will enhance their childhood. The next article is article 42 which is their right to know their rights. This is important for them so that they are able to from a young age know that they are being treated fairly and what is right. The final article that is mentioned on the UNICEF website is article 24 which is the right to health and the right to health services which is vital for a child's life as they will need health services in order to thrive. In Wales and across the UK children have over 50 different rights that all people around them must follow in order for the children's rights to be fulfilled and to make sure they grow up in a safe and loving environment so that they are able to thrive as they are growing up which they are given under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) where in 2011 Wales was the first place in the UK in order to put the UNCRC under a part of their domestic law. The UNCRC plays a vital part in the rights of children as it was their legislation that was put into place in order to keep children and young people safe. The UNCRC is a list of rights that all children and young people across the world have which is that all children and young people aged 18 and under have the right to be safe, to play, to have an education, to be healthy and more importantly to be happy. The UNCRC has four key articles which make up the basis for the rights that they set out which are a child's right to non-discrimination which is article 2 and means that they have the right to be whoever they are and look however they look without having to be punished or segregated for it. The second one is the commitment to the best interests of the child which is article 3 which means that every adult in a child's life must do what is best for that child that will keep them the safest and make sure that all their rights are being fulfilled. The next one is a child's right to life, survival and development which is article 6 which means that every child has the right to live their lives without consequence. And the final key article is article 12 which is a child's right to be heard which means that a child has every right to stand up for what they believe in and to be able to have a say in things that affect them now and things that may affect them in their future. (UNICEF website accessed on 25th March 2025)

Within the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child the organisation UNICEF is the only organisation that works for children that is for children that is recognised by the conventions. It is important to note that all the United Nations members except for the United States of America have ratified the convention. The United Kingdom ratified the convention on the 16th December 1991 and it is now known as the most widely ratified human rights treaty in history. UNICEF operates in over 190 countries and territories and provides immunization and disease prevention services, administering treatment for children and mothers with HIV, enhancing childhood and maternal nutrition, improving sanitation, promoting education and finally providing emergency relief in response to natural disasters. UNICEF has 9 different ways that they help children and young people the first of which is child protection and inclusion they strive to make sure that every child grows up in a safe and inclusive environment. UNICEF has partnered with many organisations all around the world as well as organisations in Wales to promote policies and expand access to services that protect all children all across the world in a desperate bid in order to protect children and give them the best life they possibly can. The second way that they help them is child survival as they believe that every child has the right to live a safe and happy and secure life.

There are many case studies that show places and people using children's rights, one of which being the rights of children and young people (Wales) measure 2011. This measure requires Welsh ministers to pay due regard to the rights of children in all decision-making processes. This legislation was first of its kind in the UK that demonstrates a concrete example of respecting children's rights at a legislative level.

The next piece of the case file is young people's participation in school decision making. In Wales has actively worked to create avenues where children and young people can be involved in decisions that affect them. One of the prominent initiatives is the Children's Commissioner for Wales, who has played an active role in advocating for children's participation in societal decisions. The School Council initiative in Wales is an example of how children's rights to participation are respected. The initiative allows students to have a say in decisions regarding the curriculum, school policies, and other school-related matters. By having an official platform for student voice, schools in Wales ensure that the views of children and young people are not only heard but are acted upon in some instances.

The next case file is safeguarding and protection of children's rights. This is important as The Children Act 1989, which has influenced UK law broadly, remains key in Wales, and there have been additional local initiatives that focus on the safety and protection of children. Wales has developed a robust safeguarding framework, including the Wales Safeguarding Procedures. One of the significant developments in safeguarding children's rights in Wales has been the Wales Safeguarding Procedures. These procedures ensure that child protection services are in place, with special attention given to children's right to protection from abuse, neglect, and exploitation.

The final case file I would like to discuss is the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018. This case file shows that children with disabilities have the right to receive an education that meets their needs, as well as to have equal access to opportunities and support. In Wales, there have been specific efforts to ensure that children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) are respected and included in educational settings. Case Study: The Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018. The Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018 is a landmark piece of legislation that enhances the rights of children with additional learning needs (ALN). The Act emphasizes a more inclusive, child-centered approach to learning, ensuring children and young people with ALN have their needs assessed and met effectively.

These case studies highlight how Wales has developed a strong legislative and policy framework to respect and uphold the rights of children and young people. By creating laws and policies that align with international standards, such as the UNCRC, and focusing on areas like participation, healthcare, education, and protection, Wales has made significant strides in ensuring that children and young people are respected as rights-bearing individuals.

While Wales has made a lot of progress in respecting and upholding the rights of children and young people, several barriers and issues still persist in fully ensuring that their rights are respected across all areas of society. One of which being the lack of awareness and understanding of children's rights. Despite the fact of the UNCRC into Welsh legislation, there is still a lack of understanding and awareness of children's rights, particularly among the general public, educators, and some public services. Children's rights are often seen as concepts, and there may be insufficient training for professionals in sectors such

as health, education, and social services on how to implement and respect these rights in practice. This puts many people at a stand still with their knowledge as campaigns are often limited leaving many children and their families unaware that they have rights or what their rights will be under the Wales laws and as there is lack of training for practitioners and professionals about children's rights it could lead to a gap in practical applications on how children and young people are treated.

The next barrier that is happening in Wales is the challenges in the implementation of the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018. The Additional Learning Needs (ALN) Act 2018 sought to improve education access for children with additional needs, but its implementation has faced several barriers. Schools and local authorities often face difficulties in adequately meeting the needs of these children due to a lack of resources, insufficient staff training, and inconsistent practices across the country. The issues that come with it is the inconsistent implementation of the ALN reforms across Wales, leading to unequal support for children with additional learning needs. There are also delays in their ability to provide support and assessment which then leaves children without the resources that they will need to succeed in life and be able to get through their education.

Furthermore another barrier is the barrier in child participation in their decision making which could effectively lead to a better future for them. Although the rights of children to participate in decisions affecting them are enshrined in law, children and young people often face significant barriers in engaging meaningfully in decisions about their lives. The nature of systems, the reluctance of adults to truly listen to young people, and lack of age-appropriate platforms for participation all hinder children's ability to exercise this right. The issues that come of this is Adult-centered systems often dismiss the views and opinions of children, limiting their participation in decision-making and the Lack of accessible platforms for children, especially marginalized groups, to express their views meaningfully in areas such as policy, education, and healthcare.

The final barrier is discrimination and inequality. Discrimination, whether based on ethnicity, disability, gender, or other factors, remains a significant issue for many children in Wales. While laws are in place to promote equality and inclusion, children from marginalized or vulnerable groups continue to face systemic barriers that restrict their access to their rights. The issues that this causes is Racial and disability discrimination continues to affect children's access to education, healthcare, and protection. Stereotyping and bias within institutions, including schools and the justice system, can result in the unequal treatment of children, especially from ethnic minorities, disabled children, and those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. While Wales has made significant strides in promoting and respecting children's rights, there remain challenges that hinder their full realization. Addressing these barriers requires continued education, systemic change, resource allocation, and fostering a culture where the rights of children are fully respected and integrated into all aspects of society.

Respecting and promoting the rights of children and young people in Wales involves a range of strategies that aim to incorporate the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) into both policy and practice. Many things have helped with the effectiveness of respecting children and young people's rights in Wales the first of which being professional training and development: Ensuring that professionals, including teachers, social workers, healthcare providers, and

policymakers, receive regular training on children's rights and how to integrate these principles into their work. This helps to create a shared understanding of children's rights among those who interact with children regularly (Welsh Government, 2019). The second one being curriculum integration: Introducing children's rights into the school curriculum helps young people understand their rights and responsibilities. By embedding rights-based education in schools, children are better equipped to advocate for themselves and others (UNICEF, 2014). The third one being Consultation and engagement: Actively involving children and young people in the decisions that affect them is a key strategy. This can include consultations, youth forums, and feedback mechanisms, ensuring that children's voices are heard in policymaking (Welsh Government, 2018). The fourth one is Youth representation: Promoting the inclusion of young people in governance structures, such as youth councils, can help ensure that their perspectives are considered in decisions regarding their rights and well-being (Children's Commissioner for Wales, 2020). The fifth one is Accessible services for all children: Ensuring that all children, particularly those from marginalized or vulnerable groups such as children with disabilities, LGBTQ+ youth, and those from minority ethnic communities, have access to services that meet their specific needs. This can include accessible healthcare, educational support, and social services (Disabled Children's Partnership, 2020). The sixth one is Mental health services: Expanding mental health services for children and young people, addressing increasing concerns about youth mental health, and ensuring that children's right to well-being is prioritized (Public Health Wales, 2021). Implementing strategies that respect and promote the rights of children and young people in Wales requires a concerted effort from all sectors of society, including government, education, health, and civil society. By incorporating the UNCRC into Welsh law, fostering youth participation, providing inclusive services, and ensuring accountability, Wales can create a more rights-respecting environment for children and young people. These strategies, supported by strong legal frameworks and policies, can help safeguard children's rights in Wales for generations to come.

In conclusion well Wales have got better at respecting children and young people's rights there are always ways that could be improved but it also goes to show that children's childhoods have been changed for the better because of the introduction of children's rights

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