

**Inclusive Practice in
Primary Schools:
Supporting Pupils with
Additional Learning
Needs (ALN)**

**A practical guide for
Teaching Assistants.**

In this leaflet, it is going to be looking at what it is like to have Additional Learning Needs in the primary schools. The purpose is to help inform Teaching Assistants on what inclusive practises there are available to help children, this will also help those practitioners to bring to light any potential barriers that these pupils with Additional Learning Needs might face and how to help them as soon as possible. These will all try to link in with the Welsh legislation and policy and show how these have

an effect on what help children will receive. According to the Welsh Government (n.d.) a young person has additional learning needs if they find learning harder than those of the same age as them and also have a disability that will affect the way in which they access learning. This would then lead to them having support which is called Additional Learning Provision (ALP) which would then lead to and Individual Development Plan (IDP) being put in place to ensure that the support a child is receiving is helping and that they are benefitting from it.

There are many different types of Additional Learning Needs some of these include:

- Dyslexia- this is where a person has difficulties with literacy skills and language related skills.

- Dyscalculia- this is where a person has a consistent difficulty understanding numbers.
- ADHD- challenges with attention, hyperactivity and impulsiveness.
- Speech and Language difficulties
- Autistic Spectrum Disorder- influences someone's communication and interaction skills and how they experience the world.
- Visual Impairment- where an individual's vision cannot be helped with glasses.
- Deafness
- Physical Difficulties- temporary or permanent challenges with mobility.

(Swansea Council, 2023). This list shows how additional learning needs can vary massively with

some needs being very subtle and others being a lot more complex.

This leaflet is going to help to show that primary school years are essential for a child's literacy, numeracy and social development and how the support that these children receive from Teaching Assistants is crucial for their development. It will also help those Teaching Assistants to understand the varying level of needs and how they can help.

Barriers to inclusion for ALN pupils in primary school

There are 3 different types of barriers that these pupils with ALN will come up against in primary school, these being: systemic barriers, attitudinal barriers and also environmental barriers.

Systemic Barriers

According to the Welsh Government (2025) it is stated that even though there should not be delays for children with Additional Needs to receive support whilst waiting for diagnoses, it still happens. The barriers that this causes is that children will often struggle within a school setting as they are not getting the support needed, as there is not any clarity about their needs during the waiting period. This is due to the school not understanding the needs of the child and are unsure what to put in place whilst waiting for the external assessments, due to the lack of teacher training. These waiting period barriers could also put extra stress on a child as it could lead to them feeling frustrated, misunderstood, anxious and also socially isolated.

Another systemic barrier would be the funding a school receives would have an impact on what

support children with additional learning needs would have. The Welsh Government (2024) states that there are worries that once the extra funding that is being received ends, schools would struggle to maintain current ALN services that are being provided to children. This would mean that there is a possibility that the Teaching Assistants hours would be reduced, therefore the 1 on 1 time that a child would normally receive would also be limited causing them to struggle in mainstream schools and leading to more stress and anxiety without the extra support. With this lack of funding that the Welsh Government (2024) states that the training that teaching assistants receive would lack the specialist ALN training that is essential for keeping up with the growing demand for help for these children with additional needs.

Attitudinal Barriers

Losberg and Zwozdiak-Myers (2024) help identify many attitudinal barriers that teaching assistants hold towards pupils with additional needs. They show how many Teaching Assistants hold the view that children with ALN should need to be removed from classrooms and have their own workspace which makes out that their differences must be managed by separating them rather than them being included. This shows how they believe that they cannot join in with meaningful class tasks. The article also shows how schools being heavily reliant on the 1 to1 support, unintentionally isolates these children from their peers and makes out that they do not have the capability of being independent like their peers which could also lead to them being rejected socially by of the same age and in the same classes.

Environmental Barriers

The third barrier that children with Additional Learning Needs face is environmental barriers. According to the study done by Kurowski et al.(2002) children with these additional needs struggle to learn in overcrowded classrooms. This causes them to become overwhelmed and increases the stress that they deal with, this is exceptionally hard for those pupils who need to have regular movement breaks and moments of calm as there is not, in certain schools, places for them to take these breaks. The article also states that the classroom equipment is often “outdated or inadequate”. This would mean that the schools would not have the necessary equipment to cater to the vast range of needs that children face, for example, a modern computer or access to a laptop to help children learn, where children struggle with worksheet heavy lessons. The main denominator in the environmental barrier section is the lack of funding that mainstream schools receive.

Without the necessary funding, schools would not be able better themselves for the children and the children would also not thrive in the setting and reach their potentials.

Inclusive practices for Primary ALN pupils

Universal Design for learning

Universal Design for learning helps to increase participation for children with Additional Needs. It does this by removing the barriers that they face by designing learning environments to fit their needs, for example with modern computers which would be able to help with accessibility to learning resources, bigger classrooms which would reduce stress levels and how overwhelming the rooms are. This article by Maynooth University UDL Teaching and Learning Fellows (2024) shows how UDL helps to support pupils by giving them choices about their learning which reduces the stress that comes with the “one size fits

all” tasks. This links to the Additional Learning needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018 as it states that schools need to make environments where every child can participate fully. The act helps to make sure that schools find barriers early and take them away so that pupils can engage with the content meaningfully.

Differentiation and Scaffolding

Another form of inclusive practises is differentiation and scaffolding, which is where a Teacher or Teaching Assistant adapts the way in which they teach to the individual needs of a pupil. According to the article by Awoyelu (2025) they explain that teachers and teaching assistants must match a pupils strengths and different needs which is crucial for those learners with Additional Learning Needs and they cannot all learn in the same way as each other so therefore the Teachers/ Teaching Assistants must be able to put in more time to make it as personalised as possible.

Differentiation in a learning environment helps to offer different levels of tasks and resources in order to help engage those with Additional Needs in learning. This is beneficial as it helps to promote progress in the children. Scaffolding helps show the Teaching Assistants how to break down the work into many different manageable steps for example; A task having sentence starters to help those children who struggle with the processing of their work and tasks in front of them. In these settings the teaching staff would continue to monitor the tasks with assessments in order for them to continually adapt learning materials to the needs of the child if they are struggling with certain activities. Awoyelu (2025).

Emotional regulation and Trauma-informed practise

There are many ways in which schools can help children with Additional Needs regulate their emotions and also implement

trauma informed practise, as it is even harder for ALN pupils to understand what they are feeling and regulate their emotions. According to the National Education Union (2024), “trauma-informed practise starts with understanding”. This would mean that teaching staff should be massively encouraged to speak to the child and ask them what happened to them rather than instantly put blame on them by asking what they have done. This helps to move the narrative to understanding the emotions rather than a “telling off”. This also then will help the child to understand their emotions more if they are being validated and understood, this also shows the child that the environment they are in is a safe one for them to be vulnerable with their feelings. In order for a school to be a safe environment, they need to offer support to the parents and build trusting relationships, offer safe places in the school for these children to go and calm down if they are feeling stressed and overwhelmed. This is

linked back to the ALNET Act (2018) as the act makes sure that schools are able to make environments where the children can feel safe and participate fully.

Strengths and Weaknesses of the Inclusive Practises

From looking into the different inclusive practises that Teaching Assistants can approach and use, there are a few strengths and weaknesses for each practise.

Universal Design for Learning

Strengths

The Universal Design for Learning has a good way of reducing the barriers faced which means that there are less children that are left out or excluded from the learning environment. This design also helps children engage more in the classroom as it can offer many ways for children to learn. This in turn helps children to feel

independent as they are able to see what learning pathway suits them best.

Weaknesses

There are a few weaknesses to this practise. This includes there not being much time for the learning materials and resources to be made as the teaching assistants can carry a heavy workload for the class. This also would be a struggle to implement if there isn't enough staff training for the teaching staff. Another weakness would be lack of funding for the schools to be able to buy the equipment needed to make the learning environment more accessible to all.

Differentiation and Scaffolding

Strengths

From looking at the research for differentiation and scaffolding it is

shown that it does help to support the diverse needs of the child. This is there to help reduce the stress that they feel with learning and helps to progress them further. A further strength is that Teaching Assistants are able to make tasks more manageable -An example would be breaking the task into smaller chunks rather than trying to do it all in one go-which helps those with Additional Needs who have struggles with processing work or way in which they organise the task that they have to do. Differentiation helps pupils have multiples ways in which they can complete tasks as it is tailored to each student which in turn improves the engagement as they know there are certain tasks that they can complete independently.

Weaknesses

The weaknesses for differentiation and scaffolding is that it could prove to be more time consuming for the staff to be able to make

many different versions of the same task which causes increased workload. Another weakness could be that not every teaching assistant would have to knowledge to be able to make the task or work suited to the children which requires strong teaching skills, which could then lead to putting more stress on the child if the Teaching Assistant does not know how to adapt.

Emotional Regulation and Trauma-Informed Practise

Strengths

From the research, it is shown that emotional regulation and trauma informed practise helps to create safe education environments for the children to learn in, this means that if children feel safe coming to school then it will improve the effort they put into the work in classes. Another strength is that teachers start to try and understand why children act in

certain ways rather than going straight to discipline. Also, children are able to feel safe because the schools are in contact with their guardians which means they are able to put plans in place to support the children in school and at home.

Weaknesses

The weaknesses to these practises would be that it requires a lot of extra training for the teaching assistants as it is a sensitive and intricate. Following on from this, weakness with the training would be that there would be more funding needed for schools to be able to go ahead with all of the extra training that is required. This could also take an emotional toll on teaching assistants if they come across sensitive emotional topics and do not have the knowledge on how to deal with the information themselves and also be able to help the child.

From looking collectively at the strengths and weaknesses of the three topics, it can be shown that there is not one individual inclusive practise that would work best, it would have to be a mixture of the three in order to provide the best, most safe learning environments for children with Additional Learning needs.

Practical recommendations for Teaching Assistants

There are a few different ways in which teaching assistants can work in the classroom to be able to support the children with Additional Learning Needs in the classroom. According to InclusiveTeach (2023) there are many main ways in which teaching assistants can help children in their class. These can include building good communication skills with the teacher trying to

understand what that aims of the lessons are and how they can support the children with the work. They should be able to promote the independence of the children so they do not end up relying on the teachers for support constantly, they would need to fade the support away so it is not so sudden and the children would be able to learn to adapt. InclusiveTeach (2023) also states that using guided questions rather than fully explaining what to do so that they don't have to constantly keep asking what to do. The Teaching Assistant would have to make sure that there are quiet working areas for the children when needed and they would have to reduce the visual clutter in the classroom so that the pupils could have a clear workspace which would help to lead to a clear mind.

IDP's are a brilliant and practical way of Teaching Assistants being able to physically track the work

that a child with Additional Needs is facing and the development that is happening whilst working, which could then be fed back to the pupils parents and the main teacher.

Legislation and Policy

Next is going to look at how the legislation and policy, that is currently in place in Wales, supports Inclusion for children with Additional Learning Needs.

ALNET Act 2018

From looking at this act it can be shown that it does support Inclusion for ALN children as it promotes schools to be able to use Individual Development Plans (IDP's) to help track a child's progress and provides them with a personalised support plan that will follow them as long as they are in education. This policy also focuses on ALN children being able to stay in mainstream

education, unless it is deemed unsuitable for that child. This will help those children to feel included and less isolated if they are able to stay in a mainstream school. Finally this act also follows a "Rights-based approach" which means that the act is there to make the children's rights better and lines up with the participation act and equality act. (Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018).

Equality Act 2010

The Equality Act 2010 is also good at being an inclusive policy for children with Additional Learning Needs as it has been put in place to protect those pupils that are disabled and makes it very hard for them to be discriminated against in the school environment. It is also there to make sure that there are adjustments put into place to make sure that ALN children are

having the opportunity to have equal opportunities and not be disadvantaged. (Equality Act, 2010)

From looking at all of the information brought together in this leaflet for Teaching Assistants it is shown the importance of inclusion for those pupils with Additional Learning Needs and the role that Teaching Assistants play in their educational journey. It shows the importance of the right training, the right policy and legislation in place. There is not just one way in which children with ALN can be included in schools so it is important that everything that has been looked over and researched is put in to practise, in order for those children to have the best chance at an inclusive education regardless of the issues they may face.

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