

Inclusive Practises in Primary School Settings

Supporting Pupils with Additional Learning Needs
(ALN)

Practical Guidance for Teaching Assistants

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Purpose

Inclusive education aims to ensure that all learners, regardless of their ability or their backgrounds have equal opportunities to take part, learn and succeed within mainstream education (UNESCO, 2024). In Primary schools across Wales and the UK, many pupils are now experiencing Additional Learning Needs, (ALN) that can affect how they access the curriculum, communicate and engage with their peers and adults.

The purpose of this leaflet is to provide practical, researched guidance for Teaching Assistants (TAs) working with pupils with ALN in the primary school settings. TAs play a critical role in supporting inclusive education by helping pupils access learning, participate and supporting well being within their classrooms. This leaflet will explore the characteristics and experiences of children with ALN, the things they may face in school, and evidence based inclusive strategies that can help support them in many ways. It will also examine the role of legislation and policy in shaping inclusive practise in Wales and UK.

The aim is to equip TAs with practical tools and help them create supportive, inclusive classrooms where pupils with ALN feel valued, capable and feel they can participate fully in their school life.

Why inclusive practise matters?

Inclusive practise does not just benefit pupils with ALN but all learners in the classroom. It helps promote diversity, encourages empathy between their peers, and supports their social side. Research shows that when inclusive approaches are put in place effectively, pupils with additional needs show improvements in their academic outcomes, confidence and social participation (Education Endowment Foundation, 2024).

Inclusive education aligns with principles of equity and children's rights, UNICEF, (2022) is recognising that every child has the right to access education that meets their individual needs.

Pupils with Additional Learning Needs may experience a range of difficulties that can influence their learning.

These may include:

- Learning Difficulties
- Communication and language challenges
- Social and Emotional Needs
- Sensory or Physical disabilities.

In Wales, the ALN system recognises that some pupils require additional support beyond the standard classroom provision to access learning effectively (Welsh Government, 2022).

TAs are key professionals within primary school classrooms. Their roles may include:

- Supporting individual pupils or smaller groups
- Assisting teachers with the lesson delivery
- Helping pupils understand instructions and tasks
- Supporting behaviour and emotional well being.

Effective collaboration between the teacher and TA is very important for ensuring pupils with ALN receive appropriate support (Education Endowment Foundation, 2025).

This leaflet will focus on mainstream primary schools in Wales, where inclusive education aims to support pupils with ALN within general classrooms wherever possible

(Welsh Government News, 2025).

Key Characteristics



As explained by Vo and Webb (2024), Pupils with ALN represent a highly diverse group. Some may have diagnosed conditions such as Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), dyslexia, or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), while then the others may find their difficulties without formal diagnoses.

Common characteristics may include:

- Difficulty reading, writing or processing information
- Challenges communicating and their language
- Sensory sensitivities
- Difficulty with concentration or behaviour
- Challenges with social interaction

However, it is important to emphasise that pupils with ALN also possess unique strengths, talents and different abilities that should be recognised and nurtured (Estyn, 2022).

In addition, pupils with ALN may experience differences in how they can process information, respond to instructions and organise their learning. For example, some pupils may require core time to understand tasks or may benefit from repeated explanations and visual aids. Others may struggle with working memory, meaning they may find it hard to retain multiple pieces of information at once. TAs can support these pupils by breaking them into smaller steps and checking their understanding regularly. This type of support can help pupils feel more confident and reduce the things like frustration during classroom activities.

We must always take it on board that pupils with ALN learn in different ways to their peers.

Some learners respond better to visuals such as diagrams, pictures, or colour-coded instructions.

Strengths, Needs and Lived Experiences



While pupils with ALN may experience learning challenges, many also show a lot of strengths, such as:

- Creativity
- Strong visual thinking skills
- Persistence
- Unique problem-solving approaches

Recognising these strengths is important for building confidence and motivation. Many pupils with ALN may also experience frustration if they struggle to keep up with peers or if the classroom environments do not meet their needs. Positive relationships with a supportive adult can improve pupils experience at their schools.

Impact of Social Exclusion

Pupils with ALN may face a higher risk of social exclusion or isolation within the school setting. Difficulties with communication or behaviour may make it harder for that individual to form friendships or participate fully in group activities. Research shows that inclusive classroom environments and supportive peer relationships can reduce feelings of isolation and improve pupils sense of belonging (Pollak et al., 2023). Social inclusion is an important factor in pupils overall well being and academic development. When pupils feel accepted and included within their groups, they are more likely to participate in classroom activities and develop a positive attitude towards learning. However, pupils with ALN may sometimes be excluded from group activities if tasks aren't adapted to their needs.

This can lead to feelings of frustration, loneliness, or reduce their confidence. TAs can play an important role in supporting social inclusion by encouraging cooperative learning activities and helping pupils develop their communication skills. Research highlights the importance of early identification and targeted support for pupils with ALN (Nuffield Foundation, 2024). It has been confirmed that inclusive teaching approaches that benefit all learners are often more effective than strategies that focus only on individual pupils. Furthermore, collaboration between teachers, TAs, and specialists such as speech therapists or educational psychologists is essential for supporting pupils effectively.

Barriers to Inclusion

Despite efforts to promote inclusion, pupils with ALN may still face several barriers within school settings.

Systemic barriers refer to challenges within the education system itself. These can include:

- Limited school funding for support services
- Shortages of specialist staff
- High teacher workloads
- inconsistent access to resources

Challenges can make it difficult for schools to provide sufficient individual support (Karlin, 2024).

Physical and class environments may also become a barrier to inclusion. Examples can include the following:

- Noisy classrooms that overwhelm pupils with sensory needs
- Crowded classroom layouts
- Limited quiet spaces for regulation
- Lack of accessible learning materials

Creating the supportive physical environments is an important aspect of inclusive education.

Attitudes and beliefs about disability or learning differences can influence inclusion. As stated by Johnston et al., (2019), negative assumptions about pupils abilities may lead to lower expectations, which can then limit learning opportunities.

Promoting positive attitudes and recognising pupils' strengths can help create a more inclusive school culture.

Teaching Assistants and teachers may also experience challenges such as:

- Limited training on supporting specific needs
- Unclear roles within classrooms
- Lack of time for collaboration and planning

Providing professional development and clear communication can help overcome these barriers.

When barriers to inclusion are not addressed, pupils with ALN can experience the following:

- Reduced participation in classroom activities
- Lower academic achievements
- Decrease in their confidence
- Feeling of isolation

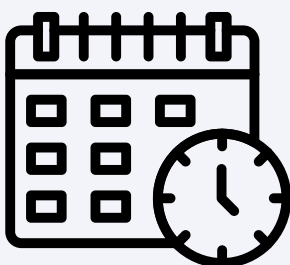
Addressing barriers is essential for promoting both learning and well being (Gawish and Main, 2021).

Another environmental barrier that can affect pupils with ALN is the pace of classroom learning. In many primary school settings, lessons follow a fixed timetable that may move quickly from one activity to another. Pupils who require additional time to process information may struggle to keep up with these transitions. This can result in incomplete work, confusion about instructions, or increased anxiety.

Teaching Assistants can support pupils during transitions by providing reminders, visual schedules, or additional explanations to ensure they understand what is expected.

Furthermore, access to appropriate learning materials can influence pupils' ability to engage with classroom activities. Some pupils may require adapted resources such as larger print texts, simplified instructions, or digital tools to support reading and writing tasks. Without these adjustments, pupils with ALN may experience unnecessary barriers that limit their participation.

Providing accessible materials is therefore an important aspect of inclusive classroom practice (University of Oxford, 2024).



Evidence Based Inclusive Practises

Inclusive education involves changing and adapting teaching methods, classrooms environments, and communication strategies to ensure all pupils can participate in their learning, (UNESCO, 2023). The following practises are supported by research and can help the TAs within the classroom effectively support pupils with ALN.

Positive Behaviour Support

What is it?

As explained by The Challenging Behaviour Foundation, (2022) Positive behaviour support focuses on understanding the reasons behind behaviour and promoting positive alternatives.

Strategies can include the following:

- Clear routines
- Positive reinforcements
- Consistent expectations

Why it works? Supportive behaviour approaches improve both behaviour and emotional well being.

How it supports pupils with ALN – Teaching

Assistants can help by:

- Modelling appropriate behaviour
- Providing praise for positive actions
- Supporting pupils during emotional difficulties.

One strategy involves scaffolding learning.

Scaffolding refers to the support provided by adults or peers that helps pupils gradually develop independence in completing tasks. For pupils with ALN, scaffolding may involve modelling how to complete an activity, providing guided practice, or offering prompts that help pupils recall relevant information. Over time, this support can be reduced as pupils gain confidence and develop new skills. This approach helps pupils remain engaged with learning while avoiding feelings of overwhelm.

Assistive technology can also play a valuable role in supporting pupils with additional learning needs.

Tools such as text-to-speech software, digital writing supports, or interactive learning apps can help pupils access the curriculum more effectively. These technologies can be particularly helpful for pupils who experience difficulties with reading, writing, or organisation. By incorporating digital tools into classroom learning, practitioners can provide alternative pathways for pupils to demonstrate their understanding and participate in activities alongside their peers.

Differentiated Instruction

What is it?

Differentiated instruction involves adapting teaching methods, tasks, or resources to meet pupils diverse learning needs within their classrooms. Examples can be as followed:

- Simplifying Instructions
- Providing visual aids, communication boards
- Offering alternative ways to complete tasks.

Why it works? Differentiated instruction allows pupils to engage with learning at appropriate levels, reducing frustration and increasing motivation (Goyibova et al., 2025).

How it supports pupils with ALN – Teaching Assistants can help by:

- Breaking tasks into smaller steps
- Providing visual support or prompts
- Checking understanding during activities.

Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

What is it?

UDL is an approach that aims to design lessons that are accessible to all learners from the start (Morin, 2023).

UDL focuses on 3 principles:

1. Multiple ways of presenting information
2. Multiple ways for pupils to express learning
3. Multiple ways to engage learners

Why it works? UDL reduces the barriers to learning by providing flexible approaches that accommodate different learning styles.

How it supports pupils with ALN – Teaching Assistants can help support UDL by:

- Providing visual or hands-on resources
- Offering alternative ways to demonstrate their understanding
- Encouraging participation through different activities.

Inclusive practices are most effective when they are implemented consistently across the school environment. Collaboration between teachers, Teaching Assistants, and specialist professionals ensures that pupils receive coordinated support. Regular communication between staff members allows strategies to be reviewed and adapted according to pupils' progress and changing needs. Research highlights that collaborative teamwork within schools is a key factor in the successful implementation of inclusive education (Armstrong, 2015).

Evaluating Inclusive Practise

The strategies discussed offer several strengths. They can help promote flexibility in teaching, allowing educators to respond to pupils individual needs. Inclusive approaches also benefit the wider classrooms by supporting diverse learning styles.

Additionally, these strategies encourage relationships between teachers, TAs, specialists to ensure that pupils receive consistent and coordinated support.



Despite the benefits, there are still some challenges that remain. Research suggests that inclusive practises require time, training and specific resources, which may not always be available.

We see that schools can often struggle with such as: Limited funding, Staff shortages and lack of specialised training. These factors can have a big effect on how effective strategies are implemented.

Another consideration when evaluating inclusive practices is the level of training and professional development available to practitioners. Teaching Assistants often work closely with pupils with ALN, yet they may not always receive specialised training in areas such as communication difficulties, autism spectrum conditions, or behaviour support strategies. Providing ongoing training opportunities can help practitioners feel more confident in implementing inclusive approaches and responding to pupils' individual needs.

Reflective practice is an important aspect of improving inclusive education. Practitioners should regularly evaluate the effectiveness of the strategies they use and consider how these approaches influence pupils' engagement and learning outcomes. Reflection may involve discussing strategies with teachers, reviewing pupil progress, or seeking advice from specialist professionals. Through reflective practice, practitioners can continue to develop their skills and ensure that support strategies remain effective and responsive to pupils' needs (Newell, 2024). Some people argue that pupils with significant needs may benefit from specialised settings where resources and expertise are more concentrated (Department for Education, 2026). However, many studies highlight that inclusive education can be successful when adequate support is provided.

Implications for Practitioners

For Teaching Assistants, effective inclusive practice involves:

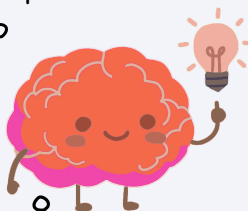
- Maintaining high expectations for all pupils
- Adapting support according to individual needs, for example for the children to all complete the same piece of work but adapting it for each group's needs
- Working collaboratively with teachers
- Engaging in ongoing professional development.

In the setting that I work in the school ensures that inclusive education is taking place for each pupil within their classrooms.

For example some students may need adapted timetables with different start and finish times to their peers, others may need specialist equipment such as communication boards where the teachers and TA will all be encouraged to use these in areas within the schools, and other pupils often are able to access quiet spaces, leave the classroom when overwhelmed, or require additional support from support staff wherever it is possible.

Overall, research suggests that inclusive approaches are most effective when they combine flexible teaching, supportive relationships and collaborative teamwork.

TAs play an essential role in ensuring that inclusive practices translate into meaningful support for pupils with ALN (Owen, 2026).



Teaching Assistants can also support inclusive practice by building positive relationships with pupils. Establishing trust and open communication helps pupils feel safe and supported within the classroom environment. When pupils feel comfortable approaching adults for help, they are more likely to ask questions and seek clarification when they encounter difficulties. Positive relationships can therefore contribute to improved learning engagement and emotional wellbeing.

In addition, maintaining consistent routines can benefit pupils with ALN.

Predictable classroom structures help pupils understand expectations and reduce anxiety about upcoming activities. Teaching Assistants can support routines by providing reminders about classroom rules, explaining transitions between activities, and helping pupils prepare for changes in the daily schedule. These strategies create a more stable and supportive learning environment for all pupils.

Legislation and Policy



Inclusive education in Wales is guided by several key policies and legal frameworks.

Equality Act 2010

The Equality Act 2010 protects individuals from discrimination based on characteristics such as disability.

Within the schools, this can mean that pupils with disabilities or ALN must receive reasonable adjustments to ensure that pupils gain equal access to education (Department for Education, 2013).

Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act

2018

This legislation introduced a new system for identifying and supporting pupils with additional learning needs.

The key principles to this legislation include:

- Early identification of needs
- Collaboration between professionals
- The creation of Individual Development Plans (IDPs)

The Act emphasises the importance of inclusive education and coordinated support (Welsh Government, 2018).

Conclusion

Inclusive education is essential for ensuring that all pupils, including those with Additional Learning Needs (ALN), are able to gain access to meaningful learning opportunities within their mainstream primary school setting.

This leaflet has highlighted the diverse characteristics and experiences of pupils with ALN, as well as the other barriers that can limit their participation in their education. It has also explored strategies such as differentiated instructions, Universal Design for Learning and positive behaviour support, which can help practitioners create a more inclusive learning environment.

Teaching Assistants play a crucial role in implementing these approaches through collaboration with teachers and different professionals.

By applying inclusive practices and maintaining the high expectations, practitioners can support pupils with ALN to help develop their confidence, participate fully in their settings and achieve their potential.

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