

# Aspiring to include versus implicit ‘othering’: teachers’ perceptions of inclusive education in Wales

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**Wales, one of the four nations of the UK, is currently undergoing major education system-level reform. From the curriculum, through to a new additional learning needs (ALN) system, there is a renewed focus on inclusive education. Research has shown the importance of teachers’ attitudes towards inclusion in creating inclusive learning environments. This research study is based on data from a survey of teachers in Wales (n = 253) exploring their perceptions of inclusive education. Thematic analysis of open-text responses revealed that while teachers were able to articulate the ‘ideal’ of inclusion, these positive ideals were often caveated by both implicit othering of learners with ALN and by the explicit limitations of behaviour, training, and finance and resources. This article critically evaluates the implications of teacher perceptions of inclusive education in Wales, suggesting that without a change in teacher attitudes, the vision of an inclusive education system may be compromised.**

**Key words:** inclusion, Wales, additional learning needs, special educational needs

## Introduction

Inclusive education seeks to value diversity as part of a common humanity and to accommodate differences in learning within regular classrooms.

It has also established itself as a key focus of education research, policy and practice globally. The Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994), which gave major impetus to the agenda of inclusive education, promoted the idea as the best way of addressing inequalities in society. In 2006, the United Nations General Assembly confirmed the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), which included a significant commitment to inclusive education (UN, 2006). As of September 2021, 164 countries have signed the convention and 182 have ratified it.

Wales, one of the four constituent nations of the UK, is currently undergoing major education system-level reforms and initiatives (Harris et al., 2020; Knight & Crick, 2021; Welsh Government, 2020a). Within these reforms is a renewed commitment to inclusive education (Knight & Crick, 2021; Welsh Government, 2020a). However, while commitments to inclusion may be articulated in national-level legislation and policy, research has shown the importance of teacher attitudes towards inclusion as a key driver of shaping emerging inclusive education practice. Therefore, this article uses data from a national-level online survey of the teaching workforce in Wales to understand teachers' attitudes towards inclusion. It aims to provide a critical evaluation of the potential barriers to an inclusive education system in Wales.

### *Inclusive education and the importance of teacher attitudes*

It is important to understand that the basis of 'inclusive education' is different to that of 'special education', which tends to marginalise certain groups of learners by emphasising specialised practices. By contrast, inclusive education is concerned with the issue of rights and the recognition of responsibility for all learners within a school community (Nilholm, 2021). Given the disproportionate representation of learners from lower socio-economic backgrounds and disadvantaged groups in segregated education, it is apparent that schools can exacerbate the experience of disadvantage and reproduce or reinforce social inequalities (Francis et al., 2017). Inclusive education, therefore, is put forward as a socially just system of education that benefits individuals as well as society as a whole (Arduin, 2015).

Teachers are viewed as critically important to the establishment of inclusive education. Students who experience learning difficulties have been found to benefit more from positive relationships with their teachers and to experience greater harm from negative relationships (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). It is important for all learners to be viewed as competent and capable of learning. Exclusionary practices, however, arise from teachers

lacking confidence as practitioners and feeling that they are not sufficiently competent to teach everyone in their class. This contributes to the variability that is seen in inclusive practices, whereby some classrooms and schools are more inclusive than others (Florian & Graham, 2014). The implementation of inclusion is largely dependent on positive attitudes, since this predicts willingness on the part of teachers to adapt their practices (Norwich, 1994).

### *The Welsh context*

In Wales, the education system is distinctive in the diversity of its learner population, in terms of socio-economic status, but also in terms of language, culture, race, religion and additional learning needs (OECD, 2014). Wales has a high proportion of low performers (OECD, 2017) and a persistent link between socio-economic disadvantage and educational attainment (Power et al., 2020; Taylor et al., 2013). The OECD (2014) found that the quality of assessment practices and the capacity of teachers to employ differentiated teaching strategies for diversity were underdeveloped, while teachers' understanding of learners' diverse needs has been identified as a further area of challenge that requires improvement (Estyn, 2018).

Wales is currently undergoing major educational reform, which is designed, in part, to meet these identified challenges (OECD, 2020). Since 2015, Wales has been developing a new bilingual, purpose-led national curriculum for learners aged three to 16 years, co-constructed with practitioners, in line with international trends towards school autonomy in determining curricular content, child-centred pedagogy and a focus on so-called '21st century' skills (Crick & Golding, 2020; Crick & Priestley, 2019). The new Curriculum for Wales (to phase in from September 2022) and Additional Learning Needs (ALN) reforms (enacted in 2018, but phasing in from September 2021, which move away from the former special educational needs programme) have both been designed with explicit aspirations of 'inclusion' (Knight & Crick, 2021).

In the new Curriculum for Wales, emphasis is placed on 'raising the aspirations for all learners' (Welsh Government, 2020b). The curriculum guidance has been developed to 'support schools to design inclusive school curricula' (Welsh Government, 2020b). The new curriculum promotes subsidiarity and agency for teachers and schools to design their curriculum based on the specific needs and circumstances of their learners (Crick & Golding, 2020), thus allowing all learners to be included within the teaching and learning activities.

Furthermore, the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act (2018) provides a legislative framework that aims to ‘deliver a fully inclusive education system for learners in Wales’ (Welsh Government, 2018). The curriculum guidance states that:

‘the legal framework established by [the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act] will play a crucial role in enabling the curriculum to deliver strong and inclusive schools’.  
(Welsh Government, 2020b, p. 20)

Yet, despite the importance of teachers’ attitudes and perceived efficacy to implement inclusive education, and in the context of major system-level reform, no research to date has investigated teachers’ attitudes towards inclusion in Wales.

Therefore, the proposed research aims to answer the following questions:

- How do teachers in Wales perceive and understand inclusive education?
- What do teachers in Wales perceive as the barriers to inclusive education?

By answering these research questions, we intend to provide a critical evaluation of teachers’ attitudes towards inclusion in Wales, as well as highlighting potential areas for improvement which may be required to support the development of an inclusive education system in Wales.

## **Method**

An online survey was developed to answer these research questions. This approach was chosen as it allowed the research team to access teachers from across Wales during the Covid-19 pandemic, while providing participants with anonymity to share their opinions on the research questions. The survey was launched on 1 June 2021 and remained open for one month.

### *Participants*

The sample was drawn from 253 teachers working in Wales. 56.5% were from a primary setting (ages four to 11), 22.5% from a secondary setting (ages 11 to 18), 10.7% from a special school setting and the final 10.3% from various other school settings including all-age schools (ages four to 18) and further education (FE) settings (ages 16+). Teachers from all of Wales’s 22 local authorities were represented in the sample.

Participants were reached by an initial email to all schools in Wales in June 2021, requesting leaders to distribute the survey link to teaching staff. The survey link was also circulated on social media platforms (Twitter and LinkedIn) and through professional teaching networks. This (convenience) sampling method was not designed to capture a representative sample; rather, data were sought to illuminate general patterns and trends among teachers in Wales.

### *Survey*

The research questions were operationalised using an online questionnaire hosted on Qualtrics. Participants were asked demographic questions followed by questions on the topic of inclusion. A series of open-ended questions were asked to gain a more in-depth understanding of teachers' attitudes towards, and practices of, inclusive education. First, participants were asked '*How would you define inclusive education?*' followed by '*What are the benefits of including children with ALN in the classroom?*' and '*What are the difficulties of including children with ALN in the classroom?*' In order to answer the research questions, this article will focus on the responses to these open-ended questions.

### *Data analysis*

Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was used to organise and analyse responses to open-ended questions and to determine the common perspectives among the participants. Following the phases as detailed by Braun and Clarke (2006), the research team initially read through all the data before generating initial codes and labels. The team then met to discuss themes and ideas collectively, before each returning to the data to review these themes.

Three main themes were identified regarding the topic of inclusion: (a) inclusion for all; (b) beneath the ideal: the 'othering' of ALN; and (c) limits to inclusion. The third theme was further broken down into subthemes of (i) behavioural issues; (ii) training and preparedness; and (iii) physical and financial constraints.

### **Results: inclusion for all (the ideal)**

The initial theme to be extracted from the data was the understanding that inclusion is a means to include all students regardless of need or circumstance. This is best summarised by the following quotation: '*All students, regardless of their ability or needs, are able to access the curriculum in ways which best suit their needs*' (senior leader, secondary school).

This theme presents the ‘ideal’ understanding of inclusion and encompasses the understanding that through inclusion diversity can be celebrated and embraced: *‘Recognising and celebrating diversity’* (senior leader, primary school). This idea of embracing diversity was found in quotations from teachers highlighting that students can *‘learn from each other’* (classroom teacher, secondary school) and that *‘all children have qualities that their peers can learn from’* (senior leader with responsibility for ALN, primary school). This concept was also applied to the benefits beyond education, and the positive impact on future society was also acknowledged: *‘A more inclusive society that recognises difference and works together with all reasonable and necessary accommodations’* (classroom teacher, all-age school). Furthermore, those who wrote about *‘inclusion for all’* referred to the idea of belonging and the benefits of friendships: *‘Develops friendships between all children and a sense of belonging’* (headteacher, primary school). Teachers wrote about all learners feeling *‘welcomed’* and *‘valued’* within their setting.

Only 10 teachers mentioned rights. While two teachers commented on the *‘right for a child to be included’* (headteacher, special school), the rest commented more generally on the *‘right to education’*.

### **Results: beneath the ideal: the ‘othering’ of ALN**

However, while the ‘headline’ messages about inclusion from teachers broadly indicated a positive understanding of the ideal of inclusion, themes also emerged indicating caveats, exceptions and tensions within this conceptualisation. This is best summarised by a teacher who defined inclusion as *‘All learners having full or partial access to mainstream education as far as possible’* (headteacher, primary school). Responses often expressed the view that the ‘ideal’ of inclusion should be met *‘where possible’*. This idea was discussed mostly with regard to the placement of students in mainstream or special school settings:

*‘For some ALN pupils inclusion in mainstream school would be highly beneficial. However, for other ALN pupils it would be highly inappropriate for the pupil and cause much distress’.*

(senior leader, special school)

This was reiterated by teachers who highlighted the need for *‘equity’*; in the context of more detailed responses, they argued that equitable education would involve segregated provision for pupils. This is best summarised

by one teacher's response to the question 'How would you define inclusive education?':

*'Enabling all pupils to have equitable access to education. This does not necessarily mean that all are taught in the same classroom or have access to the same resources, but would mean that we equitably target the personalised resources that pupils need so that all pupils have an opportunity to be the best they can be'.* (senior leader, special school)

Alongside the placement of students with ALN, further themes also suggested limitations to inclusion, in both teachers' attitudes and practices.

Questions which focused on the potential benefits of an inclusive classroom also presented important data in terms of the nuances of language use, and in terms of the influence of competing education discourses. Many respondents noted that an inclusive classroom has the potential to develop tolerance in learners. In many instances, tolerance was being used here to signify understanding of difference: *'It helps children learn about diversity and encourages tolerance and understanding'* (classroom teacher, primary school). One respondent suggested that inclusive classrooms can become *'an authentic representation of society'*, in which *'all children develop more understanding and [are] tolerant to other people'* (senior leader, primary school). Here, the notion of tolerance was used as a signifier for the celebration of diversity, and in this sense presumably aligns with broader liberal values that schools and teachers aim to nurture in their learners. Indeed, the four overarching purposes of the new Curriculum for Wales note the need to develop young people who *'respect the needs and rights of others, as a member of a diverse society'* (Donaldson, 2015). In part, the use of the word tolerance in the data can be seen as supportive of this system-wide aspiration.

Yet *tolerance* can also convey a further inflection of meaning, in the sense of being able to accept or *tolerate* a situation which is sub-optimal. Some uses of the term in the data, in response to the question about the potential benefits of an inclusive classroom, linked it with 'acceptance' in general terms, or more specifically with the act of 'acceptance building for mainstream learners'. Here, the notion appears to be that in an inclusive classroom, learners with ALN can perform a useful function for *mainstream* learners. This functional utility for *mainstream* learners was elsewhere noted as helping to *'develop other pupils' understanding of children*

with ALN' in ways that might more effectively '*prepare them for challenges that lie ahead in life*' (senior leader, primary school). Thus, an additional use of the word *tolerance* in the data gestured towards a certain *othering* of learners with ALN, crystallised through the notion that, by including them in a classroom setting, *mainstream* learners can be helped into a state of *acceptance*. This notion is distinct from the use of *tolerance* as a cipher for the celebration of difference. Arguably, it has a more problematic relationship with the philosophy of inclusion.

The data also indicate a linked, potentially problematic use of the idea of *role modelling* in inclusive classrooms. In some instances, the identification of which learners in an inclusive situation might be role models was left open: '*Pupils learn from each other, role modelling takes place, behaviours are influenced, tolerance is promoted*' (classroom teacher, secondary school). More often, the role modelling was presented as much more uni-directional:

*'ALN children see their peers as good role models for speech, language and behaviour'* (senior leader, primary school) '*More able learners can very effectively model the learning/behaviour*' (senior leader, primary school) '*It is important for ALN pupils to have good role models to emulate*' (headteacher, primary school) '*Benefits to learners with ALN: good learning and behaviour role models around them*' (classroom teacher, primary school)

There is a competing discourse here that is centred on the modelling of *excellence* in education. This discourse identifies *best practice* (in this case, in the behaviour and skillsets of learners) and aims to present it clearly for others to emulate. It sets out to clarify aspirational models, and, once again, is difficult to reconcile with an inclusive philosophy. Indeed, the benefit of an inclusive classroom here is presented as a space in which the *deficiencies* of ALN learners can be *rectified* by the easy and proximate availability of normative role models.

### **Results: limits to inclusion**

Teachers also articulated a number of limits to the inclusion of children with ALN in mainstream classes. This theme has been broken down into three subthemes of (i) behavioural issues; (ii) training and preparedness; and (iii) physical and financial constraints. Although these subthemes are interrelated, they have distinctive characteristics that teachers identified



as challenging aspects of the inclusion of children with ALN in their classroom.

### *Behavioural issues*

Challenging behaviour was a key issue raised by teachers. Some detailed these challenges to a greater extent, whereas others simply responded '*Behaviour*'. Nonetheless, issues relating to disruptive or aggressive behaviour were perceived as significant challenges to the inclusion of children with ALN in mainstream classrooms, as well as a hindrance to the teachers' ability to teach. This is captured in one teacher's response: '*If a child has behavioural problems and disrupts the teaching and learning of themselves and others*' (senior leader, primary school).

Responses that highlighted issues relating to behaviour often referred to the '*management*' of behaviour and pointed out that this was exacerbated by lack of funding, resources and members of staff allocated to support learners with ALN. There were also fears that pupils with ALN may present '*aggressive*' or '*violent*' behaviour that could put teachers' and other pupils' safety at risk:

*'Potential disruptive behaviour which may take more than one member of staff to deal with. Potential violence against other children and staff. The time it takes to deal with potential situations and the impact this has on the rest of the class and on getting through daily activities'*.

(classroom teacher, primary school)

Responses indicated that teachers did not feel that mainstream school settings were appropriate for pupils with ALN whose behaviour disrupted the learning of other pupils. Most of the responses relating to behavioural issues implied that the inclusion of pupils with ALN would have a negative impact on the learning environment for other pupils and teachers' ability to deliver the lessons in mainstream education. However, there were some responses that acknowledged potential behavioural challenges and attributed this to lack of training on how to manage these challenges appropriately.

### *Training and preparedness*

Lack of training, or inadequate training, also commonly featured in responses to questions regarding the difficulties that teachers face when including children with ALN in classrooms. Some respondents felt that it was beyond their ability and expectations as a teacher to accommodate more '*severe*' cases of

ALN, citing this as a reason for separate educational settings for some children with ALN. As one participant put it: *'[There is] not enough training for mainstream staff'* (senior leader, special school).

Many respondents felt that the complexities of additional learning needs were difficult to meet alongside teaching mainstream pupils, and that grouping children with different needs and abilities into one class would be detrimental to their learning as a whole:

*'Teachers do have to be adept at differentiation – which isn't just the changing of a worksheet or additional scaffolding for a learner but is actually quite complex ... There is no getting away from the fact that it does require careful planning and skilful teaching and a very mixed ability class with a number of pupils with differing ALN needs can be very challenging for the teacher'* (senior leader, secondary school)

These complexities were articulated in several ways, including references to ALN appearing on a broad spectrum which teachers' current level of training, skills and understanding of the additional needs cannot sufficiently support in order for each child to *'meet [their] full potential'*. Others argued that there should be clear provision in initial teacher education and training to ensure that teachers were equipped with the appropriate skills and knowledge to support children with ALN:

*'There needs to be more of an emphasis when training teachers. I feel that those training to be teachers need to do a module of work in a special school or support ALN pupils in a secondary school as part of their training'* (ALN coordinator, secondary school)

Teachers related their lack of training or ability to deal with additional learning needs in the classroom to lack of funding and resources; these ideas were often grouped together in responses, along with lack of time to plan effectively for lessons.

#### *Physical and financial constraints*

Lack of funding and resources was seen as a *'huge barrier'* to the inclusion of children with ALN in the classroom. Although respondents had indicated positive views of inclusion and ALN in previous questions, they went on to express serious concerns about how this would be implemented in practice with insufficient funding and resources. These constraints were

reported to have a negative impact on the necessary time to ‘prepare adequately’ for individual learners and their particular needs, especially those whose needs are complex:

*‘In mainstream settings there is often a lack of training, funding and as a result not enough staff or the best resources available and this can impact all learners’* (classroom teacher, special school)

It was also noted that the current level of workload for both teachers and health care professionals was particularly demanding, leading to further perceived difficulties of inclusion:

*‘Lack of funding, specific training for staff, lack of resources, spaces, specialist teachers. Outside agencies ... are in short supply or are over worked’* (classroom teacher, primary school)

Inadequacy of funding and resources was a key barrier to the inclusion of children with ALN, with many teachers stating that the current financial constraints would not allow for the proper support of children with ALN. This was also related to the amount of time that teachers felt they were able (and unable) to allocate to individual pupils, particularly in relation to (mis)behaviour and ‘complex’ needs that they felt would distract from the teaching of other mainstream pupils:

*‘The theory of the reforms is lovely but if nothing changes on the ground with resourcing to make this work it will just be bods in offices tutting at teachers over another initiative they have to make work with notional help’.* (classroom teacher, all-age school)

Teachers highlighted several interconnected limitations to their ability to include children with ALN in their classrooms and felt that without adequate funding they were not equipped with the appropriate training to do so.

## **Discussion**

Thematic analysis of the open text responses revealed that while teachers were able to articulate and understand the ‘ideal’ of inclusion, these positive ideals were often caveated by both implicit othering of learners with ALN and the explicit limitations of behaviour, training, and finance and resources. This section will explore these results in relation to the research questions,

before drawing conclusions about the implications of this for the emergence of inclusive education in Wales.

*How do teachers in Wales perceive and understand inclusive education?*

Conn and Hutt (2020) previously examined beliefs about inclusive practice held by policy and practitioner communities in education in Wales. They distinguished between superordinate (deeply held personal constructs) and subordinate beliefs (loosely held personal constructs that are easily altered). They found that for practitioners whose roles were not focused on ALN, the idea of inclusion was subordinate:

‘the idea of what is in the best interests of a *specific learner* appeared to operate as the superordinate idea that could subsume the idea of inclusivity’.  
(Conn & Hutt, 2020, p. 13)

This finding is echoed in the present study; while an understanding of the ‘ideal’ of inclusion is shown, this appears to be a subordinate belief which is altered easily when teachers consider the practicalities of inclusive education. Interestingly, critical policy analysis of Welsh policy documents on inclusion also found that while ‘headline’ messages about inclusion were aligned with an ideal of inclusion, inconsistencies were apparent both within and between policy documents (Knight & Crick, 2021). This is reflected in the subordinate belief about inclusion that the teachers in the present study demonstrated, and highlights the need for further exploration of how tensions in policy messages about inclusion may be translated into practice.

The European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education (EADSNE, 2012) developed a ‘profile of inclusive teachers’ which identified a framework of core values necessary for preparing all teachers to work in inclusive education. Within this, it is argued that teachers must understand that ‘learner diversity is to be respected, valued and understood as a resource that enhances learning opportunities and adds value to schools, local communities and society’ (EADSNE, 2012). Yet the results from the present study suggest that this belief was lacking in teachers’ understanding of inclusion. Learners with ALN were often depicted as being able to benefit from interaction with their peers without learning needs who could act as ‘role models’; and that these learners may, in turn, benefit by learning to ‘tolerate’ learners with ALN. Together this portrayed a sense of ‘othering’ of learners with additional needs. Given the importance

of teachers' attitudes in establishing inclusive learning environments (EADSNE, 2009, 2012; UNESCO, 2009), it could be argued that more needs to be in done in Wales to shape teachers' attitudes and beliefs about the value of all learners. EADSNE (2012) proposes that diversity can be used in 'learning approaches and styles as a resource for teaching'; thus it is important that teachers understand the value of having a diversity of learners in their classrooms.

*What do teachers in Wales perceive as the barriers to inclusive education?*

Perhaps unsurprisingly, key themes in the data were the limits and barriers to inclusion. The most prominent of these were behaviour, training and financial resources. This finding reflects the Salamanca Statement, which emphasises that '[c]hanges in the policies and priorities cannot be effective unless adequate resource requirements are met' (UNESCO, 1994). Previous research has also shown that teachers have reported a shortage of the resources needed to support inclusive education (for example, Avramidis et al., 2000; Boyle et al., 2012; Sharma & Desai, 2002). Yet the way forward is perhaps more complex than simply increasing funding and resources. Research has shown that increasing the amount of available resources has no, or little, effect on teachers' attitudes (Center & Ward, 1987; Chiner & Cardona, 2013). Saloviita (2020) argues that beyond financial and physical resources, one of the most important requirements for inclusive education is for teachers to have positive attitudes towards inclusive education. In support of this, Carlson et al. (2012) found that teachers' passion for inclusivity was the driver of an inclusive education environment, even when support systems and resources were not in place.

It could be proposed that resources in the form of training could help to address the issue of attitudes; however, 'additional training of teachers does not necessarily change their attitudes' (Saloviita, 2020). Positive impact on attitudes has been found through providing administrative support to teachers and increasing collaboration between teachers (Ahmmed et al., 2014; Chiner & Cardona, 2013; Larrivee & Cook, 1979; Minke et al., 1996). Therefore, improving resources in these areas could be argued to have a more beneficial impact on teacher attitudes, and consequently the aims of inclusive education, than additional training or more generic additional resources.

It could be argued that training on how to support students with specific individualised needs and differences reflects a medicalised approach to education, as it involves identifying deficits and suggests intervention in an attempt

to ‘normalise’ diverse learners. This, therefore, does not conform with a social model of disability and inclusive education ideals which seek to value and not differentiate diverse learners. EADSNE (2012, p. 21) argue that training for teachers on the topic of inclusion needs to involve critical reflection on their own beliefs and practices:

‘There is a need for activities that challenge stereotypes of all kinds and develop sensitivity based on a deep understanding of issues surrounding diversity and the ability to apply this understanding in action’.

Behaviour was also highlighted as a limitation to inclusion. Prior research has echoed the correlation between teachers’ attitudes and behavioural issues (Sharma et al., 2012). Teachers’ perceived efficacy to manage behavioural issues effectively has been found to predict teachers’ attitudes towards including students with disabilities (Vaz et al., 2015). Yet the amount of prior contact with students with ALN has been found to correlate positively with teacher attitudes (Boyle et al., 2012; Wilkerson, 2012), suggesting that the negative impact of behaviour perhaps indicates a misconception about the inclusion of learners with additional needs, rather than the reality. The prominence of behavioural issues as a limitation to inclusion is shaped by the practical considerations of supporting learners with ALN, as opposed to the philosophical position about the beneficial nature of inclusive education. This further highlights the subordinate, rather than superordinate, nature of teachers’ beliefs about inclusion.

## **Conclusions**

The emerging reforms of the Welsh education system aim for a ‘fully inclusive education system’ (Welsh Government, 2018; 2020b). However, the inconsistency and tensions about what ‘inclusion’ means in Welsh policy (Knight & Crick, 2021) are echoed in teachers’ attitudes towards inclusion. A recent policy statement restates a commitment to an inclusive education system in Wales, but puts greater emphasis on the concept of equity as a driver for change (Welsh Government, 2020a). This research suggests that equitable practices can be constructed by teachers as segregated and exclusionary in nature. Without a change in teachers’ attitudes towards inclusion, the aspiration to an inclusive education system may be futile. While teachers in Wales appear to have an understanding of inclusion in its ideal form, their perceptions of the practicalities of inclusive education act as barriers to this ideal. While an obvious solution to this issue may be to prioritise ALN as part of initial teacher education and in-service training, it is important that this training does not service a medicalised perspective

on learning, and that it acts to promote teachers' critical self-awareness along with an understanding of inclusion as a human right. Furthermore, teachers should be encouraged to view the value of diversity as a tool to enhance their teaching and learning activities.

### **Ethics statement**

This study was approved by the Swansea University College of Arts and Humanities Ethics Committee (approval no. SU-Ethics-Staff-150421/327).

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