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Citation

Stewart, Sarah (2023). Curriculum for Wales: Children's Rights. University of Wales Trinity St David.

URL

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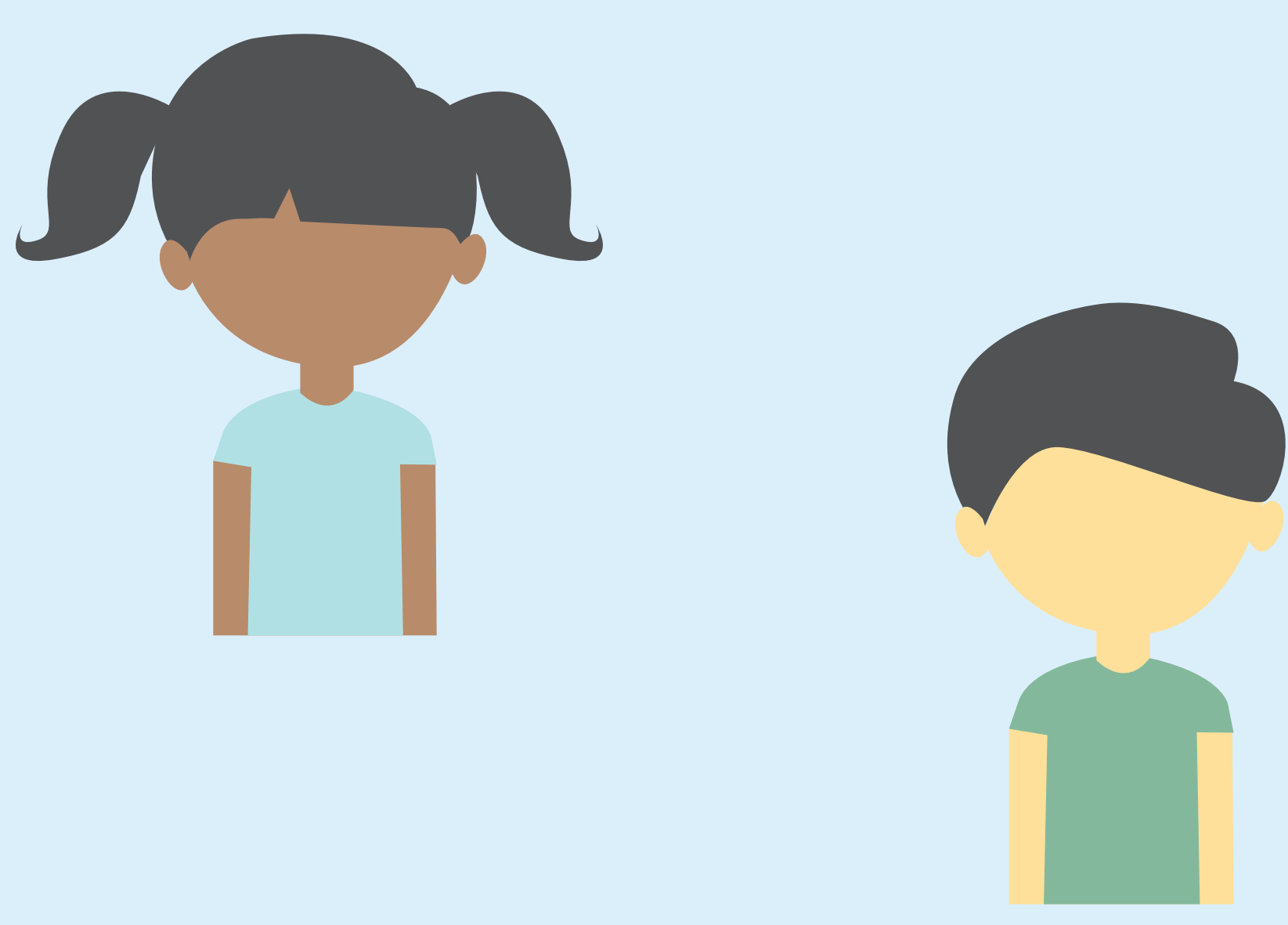
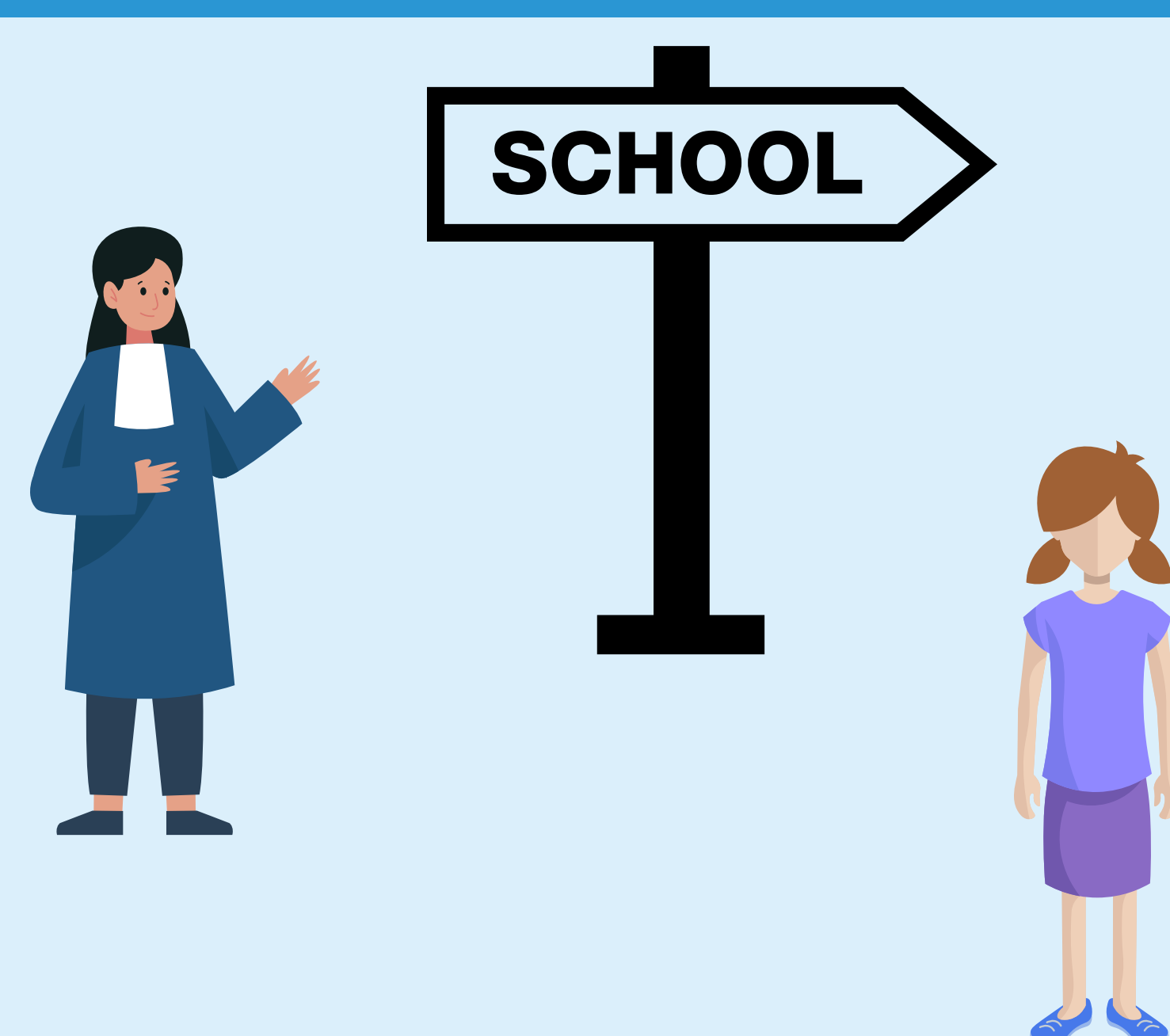
Curriculum for Wales

Children's Rights

This case study explored the role of children's rights in the Curriculum for Wales (CfW).

It looked at:

- **education policy** in Wales
- **curriculum guidance** for teachers
- what teachers said about their **practice**.



This summary sets out **7 key findings** from the study drawing on:

- critical analysis of curriculum guidance
- 60 teacher questionnaires
- 3 teacher interviews

It's a **snapshot of how teachers in this study thought about children's rights within the CfW.**

1 The UNCRC continues to be placed as an important part of education policy...

Education policy makers continue to promote Wales as a **progressive leader** in children's rights.

School leaders must now **ensure all school staff understand children's rights** according to the UNCRC.

Teachers made close links between **the four purposes** at the heart of the curriculum with a **systematic opportunity for school children to access a full human rights education.**

2 ... but does it go far enough?

There's still a worry that **there's no extra law** if children's rights aren't being met. Others argue that **the UNCRC also has its own flaws.**

Teachers said children's rights would be **more important** in the new curriculum, **but** just three said this meant they would need to make changes to their practice.

Research suggests a **gap between policy and teachers' practice**, so this study indicates that **there may still be limitations in teachers' awareness of areas for rights development which may continue into CfW.**

... if you were an effective teacher, that's something that you'd be doing anyway, even if [...] teaching the old way.

3 Teachers highly value children's rights as a way to enable the holistic development of the whole child. They were enthusiastic about their perception of a more prominent role for human rights education within the CfW.



In the study, teachers:

- expressed **positive views** about children's rights, were **aware of the UNCRC** and said it was an **important part of being a teacher**
- identified a **shift in the teacher's role** in the CfW
- emphasised rights to **keep children safe** and promote belonging
- included their **own ideas of rights** for children e.g. love, happiness

This is similar to curriculum guidance which is based on the UNCRC, but some theorists suggests that **this can result in too much focus on protection over other important aspects like participation.** This may feel more comfortable for adults. Teachers tended to **think broadly** about rights. Some theorists suggest teachers may use a 'common sense' approach instead of a carefully considered **professional framework in which they are actively developing pedagogy for rights.**

4 Teachers are key to how children experience their rights in school. They are most effective when they understand how to teach about, through and for rights confidently and expertly.

Research suggests that effective human rights education means teachers need **strong knowledge and understanding about rights** as well as *how* to teach in a way which means **children experience rights-fulfilment** in school and **become more able to claim their rights.**

Whilst teachers said they were confident teaching 'about' rights, **they were less confident teaching 'through' and 'for' rights.** Senior leaders in the study said that the link between how teachers thought about rights and how it shaped their pedagogy **may be difficult for many teachers to explain.**



5 At the core of the CfW is a shift in adult-child power dynamics. This calls for a different type of teaching pedagogy.

Teachers stressed that **children would have more of a voice and a choice** in the CfW, but in the guidance, participation is defined broadly as **different levels of participation that the teacher can choose.** Few teachers in the study recognised their role as a potential 'gatekeeper' to participation or reflected on **how their own view of children's competence** might affect this. Teachers were enthusiastic about structures and processes such as school councils and pupil surveys and **did not tend to focus on the impact of teachers' own pedagogy.**

Teachers shared **whole-school examples of rights-practice** e.g. rights charters, assemblies, mascots which they felt created a shared discourse of rights within the school. This study suggests that whilst a whole-school approach is beneficial, it can **mask the extent to which children really get to experience and claim their rights in school.** As little is known about how teachers enact rights in this way, **it may be difficult for teachers to know how to develop a more transformative rights-approach through their practice.**

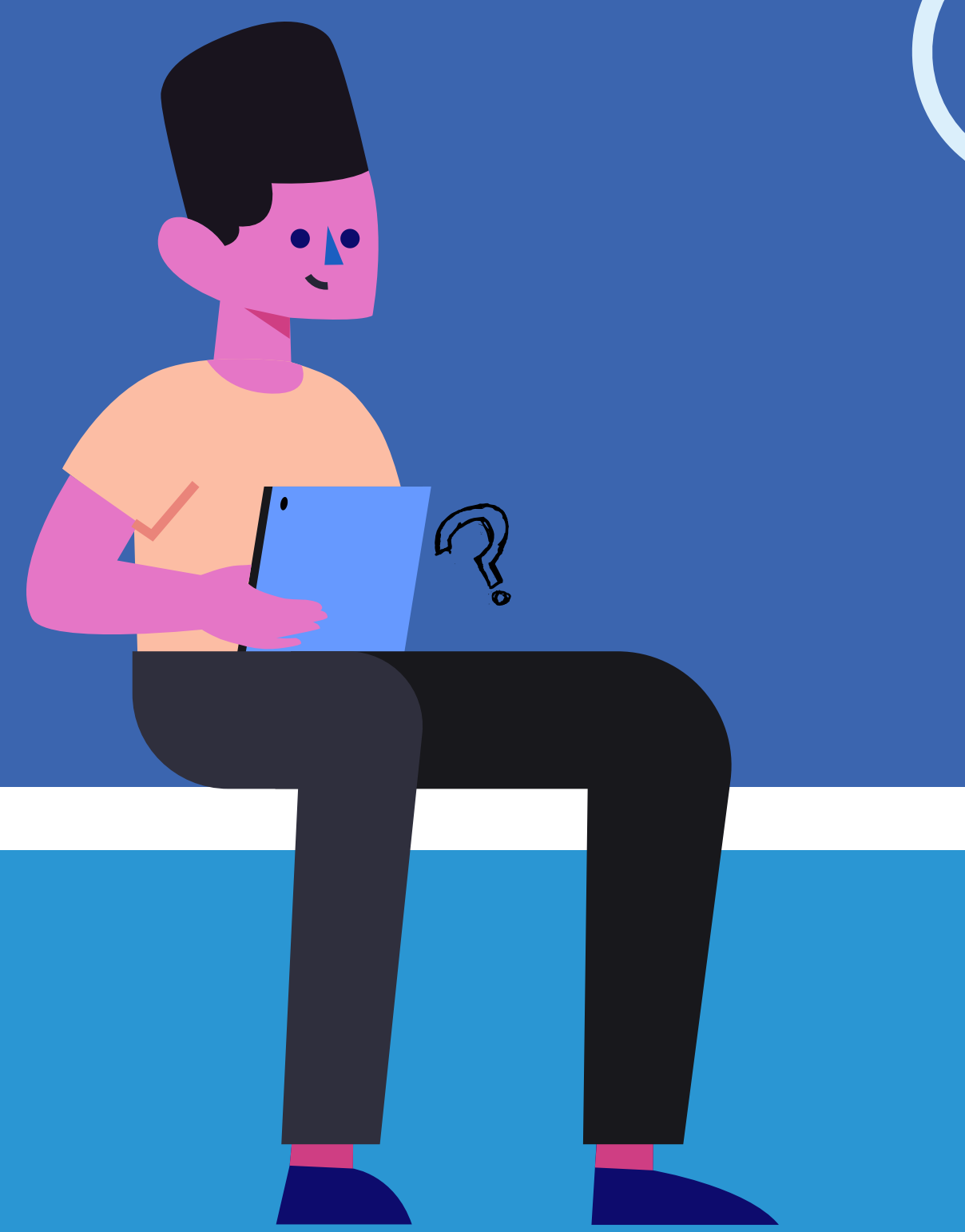


6 The UNCRC is a legal framework for rights which can become confused with teachers' own moral and ethical views.

Guidance links children's rights with their **developing capacity as citizens.** Critics say this can lead to valuing children's rights for advantageous reasons only. Many teachers in the study said it was important that **children learn about both rights and responsibilities to teach positive morals** (rather than suggesting rights are conditional on being responsible). Some previous studies suggested that linking rights to citizenship can lead teachers to over emphasise responsibilities. Some teachers were **concerned that rights-discourses might make it harder to protect children or manage their learning.** In a few examples, teachers linked responsibilities to children becoming 'duty bearers' towards other children, **confusing legal and moral aspects.**

7 There's commitment to the broad concept of children's rights. Teachers may have gaps in their professional understanding or experience barriers accessing the types of professional learning most likely to enhance practice.

Teachers' practice is shaped by the school environment, and influenced by a complex social, cultural, economic and political context. Previous studies found the UNCRC wasn't well understood by all teachers in Wales. This study proposes that **teachers need time for and access to forms of professional learning** to enable a human rights education approach at a deeper level. To successfully move beyond teaching 'about' rights, teachers will need to develop a more cohesive theoretical and professional framework for their practice in which they critically reflect on their own moral and ethical framework for rights. Policy and guidance tends to sidestep the issue of teachers' values and beliefs, **but studies suggest this is key to teacher-enactment of children's rights within their practice.**



Children's rights is contested area which continues to develop. The work of the teacher is complex. **Embedding a human rights education approach in school curricula can support a socially just and inclusive vision of education, one in which teachers are key agents of change in the transformation of society.** It is not yet known the extent to which the CfW will achieve this aim. Further support and intervention during this early phase may aid teachers' enactment of an aspect of practice to which many teachers are deeply committed and which is set at the heart of the Curriculum for Wales.

