

Inclusive leadership

Part one

‘A two-year-old who attends a flying start nursery has extremely low attendance and is at risk of losing their placement. Mum is a single parent and ex addict; the health visitor has communicated that she is very anxious. They have recently been removed from the social services register.’

Inclusion is recognised as a social justice- orientated within education. Inclusive leadership allows everyone to feel they are able to participate, whilst feeling valued and a sense of belonging. It is an environment created by leaders that allow all diversities to feel safe and not have to hide or compromise their identities and values (Ferdman *et al.*, 2021, p.16). Inclusive leadership is paramount to improving education. Inclusive leaders take the time to communicate effectively across the board, including students, other staff members, parents and members of the community. Effective communication as an inclusive leader brings people closer together, into a trusting and safe environment where they feel heard (Childhood Education International, ND).

According to UNICEF (ND) the importance of an inclusive leader bringing families together, like families in the scenario, are for reason such as, enabling children in education a fair opportunity to learn and develop essential skills that are needed to help them thrive. Inclusive environments bring people together and create opportunities for diverse groups to flourish in the same environment. However, when a non-inclusive practice is in place this can impact a child’s mental health, engagement, and lead to bullying. It can also lead to judgements from OFSTED that are recorded as ‘serious weaknesses’ in a practice (Yates-Harold, 2000 and Department for International Development, 2018). To promote an inclusive setting, leaders should continuously preach the importance of inclusion to community members and peers, being mindful of the need to adapt and work together to meet changing needs of inclusion, this creates an inclusive approach as staff are aware of adapting situations to meet the needs of parents or children as individuals rather than as a whole (Childhood Education International, ND).

Within the scenario Inclusive Leadership is vital, there are many aspects of this scenario that will be in the hands of leaders. Leaders hold the power to include, put people at ease and help them feel included. Moreover, leaders have an influence on other professionals and have more power to speak up and impact the outcomes and performance from other peers and professionals (Bourke and Titus, 2020). In order to become an inclusive leader, leaders should have the courage to speak up and break the barriers that put people at risk of exclusion. Speaking up would be vital in this scenario as it highlights an anxious parent, who would need support in having a voice and being heard (Bortini *et al.*, 2016, p.6 and Childhood Education International, ND). Moreover, an inclusive leader would work in collaboration to empower others to speak up too and ensure a safe space is available for staff, families and children; by doing this leaders are recognising the importance of hearing those around them, and not underestimating the importance of challenges that may seem small. Instead encouraging the community, families and co-workers to speak up and have a voice (Qualtrics, 2024 and Palazzo, 2019).

According to Blaenau Gwent (ND) when supporting a child from a difficult background, the flying start programme has its advantages. Flying start are able to work with multi agencies to support the child, this can be done through using the enhanced health visitor service, speech and language support and access to parenting programmes that can support a child's well-being and supporting a child and parent after families have split up. As an inclusive leader it is vital to work alongside these professionals and engage with the family to be able to offer the correct support programmes (Blaenau Gwent, ND and Welsh Government, 2019). However, there may be barriers that prevent collaboration between professionals or parents, an inclusive leader must find ways to overcome these challenges. This can be done through connecting on a one-to-one level, offering support, clarifying expectations and showing empathy to a situation (Carucci and Velasquez, 2022).

According to Brookes (2016) despite the powers an inclusive leaders has they still face barriers, these barriers can sometimes be the policies that are in place or even the resources, training, and knowledge of the setting. In this particular scenario the attendance policy implemented by flying start challenges the support the family needs. Policies should be developed accordingly and with an inclusive leadership mind, that enables a child to thrive, and ensure that family involvement is

implemented (UNESCO, 2023). However, in this this case, according to Welsh Government (2019) flying start state that any attendance that falls below eighty percent is at risk of losing their placement, meaning some children who really need support from flying start could become delisted, due to attendance. In contrast to this policy, Inclusive attendance (2024) believe that letters and penalty fines which highlight poor attendance does not support a family or find a solution. The flying start attendance policy is a macroeconomic policy, which does not consider the individual needs of the child, therefore in this scenario the child is at a disadvantage due to his parents struggles and mental health (Welsh Government, 2019 and Dieye, 2020).

It would be the duty of an inclusive leader to support attendance, by collating and monitoring the child's attendance, and following the correct procedures in place, furthermore, ensuring the family feels welcome and included into the setting (Welsh Government, 2018). This can be done through using effective communication such as phone calls, letters, and regular contact with the family to show inclusive behaviours and a supportive attitude (Welsh Government, 2019, Inclusive attendance, 2024 and Sakiz, 2015). In order to support the family as an inclusive leader, Childhood Education International (ND) believes that by showing awareness of potentially being bias, ensuring meritocracy, and decentralising from the situation should all contribute to support decision making. All decisions made should have the child's best interest at heart. An inclusive leader would recognise that a child's best interest would depend on circumstances and consider what is most beneficial to the child's well-being, for example in this scenario the child needs as much support possible, due to the nature of events and history of the family (OECD, 2024, Freeman, 2022 and UNICEF, ND).

An inclusive leader should be curious to situations like the scenario. Ask questions, and have an open mind to the situation, along with a desire to understand the view of others. This approach leads to withholding judgement and the ability to learn more about the family, their barriers and the support they need (Ferdman *et al.*, 2021, p.12, and Bourke, 2016). Feeling valued and belonging are human needs and inclusive leadership has the power to enable this feeling amongst families, the community and peers (Randel *et al.*, 2018) According to Ferdman *et al.* (2021) without inclusion and someone judging a situation, this can lead to people not feeling safe or accepted. A non-inclusive approach can lead to a person not being their true authentic self and

having to hide their true identity. An inclusive approach would allow the child and parent to feel unjudged, and safe enough that they can thrive and do their best without feeling they have to hide who they are (Ferdman *et al.*, 2021 and Randel *et al.*, 2018).

In this scenario the parent suffers with anxiety, Mind (2024) states that when parents struggle with their mental health, they may feel that everyday tasks are harder and the ability to maintain routine is more difficult. This suggests that there is a link between the child's low attendance and the parents' ability to bring the child into setting. As an inclusive leader supporting absence and mental health as a collective should be done through encouraging an improvement in attendance, as well as supporting the mental health issue (Department for Education, 2023). This can be achieved through developing trust and having sensitive conversations. Ferdman *et al.* (2020) recognises an inclusive leader as someone who achieves trust through, acknowledging, connecting, and engaging with parents. In this scenario by acknowledging the barriers in the situation, this can lead to offering support such as links with the mental health support team or even extended professional support (Department for Education, 2023 and Ferdman, 2020).

A leader is seen as someone who is taken more seriously and has the ability to influence others, therefore has more ability to find support for the parent in the scenario. In this scenario an inclusive leader could use their 'power' to gain positive outcomes and provide support to reach goals, such as the mental health team. The power of leadership, when used correctly, can provide the foundations needed to become a better and more respected leader in practice (French and Raven, 1959 p. 150-167, and Lunenburg, 2012). In contrast to this when power is misused it can cause misconduct and develop a lack of trust between parent and co-workers. Additionally, power can lead to tunnel vision, resulting in leaders prioritising their own goals, rather than a practice as a whole (Slezak, 2024). According to Vantrappen and Wirtz (2017) this can be avoided through decentralisation; this theory is where you view a scenario through other people's eyes. However, it is important to be mindful that a leader remains in control of a decentralised situation, especially when the family is vulnerable, such as in the scenario (Sethy, ND and Vantrappen and Wirtz, 2017).

Ferdman *et al.* (2020) believes that to become an inclusive leader, there needs to be the ability to listen deeply and carefully, this allows for a connection between the parent and setting, developing a strong relationship and level of trust. Despite the increase in supporting mental health as an inclusive leader, according to Moore *et al.* (2022) the outcomes are not always sustained, due to parents being hard to reach, or not wanting to accept the support. According to Campbell (2011) inclusive leaders should be committed to reaching out to parents and continue to invite, support, and highlight the importance of a parent's views and how their involvement is highly valued.

In contrast to this, disadvantaged families are more difficult to encourage to engage in education. Former substance misuse families may feel pre-judged in a setting. Many support strategies that are offered to families with experience of substance misuse lack sensitivity. To overcome this barrier as an inclusive leader support should be tailored to a family's individual needs, showing inclusivity and allowing the family to feel supported in accordance with their person experiences (Early Intervention Foundation, 2019). In contrast to this, research shows that many practitioners have highlighted that they feel they lack the skills to support families who have experienced substance misuse, however it is the leader's responsibility to encourage, support and educate staff into understanding that families should be treated with a non-judgmental attitude. Practitioners should use the same skills they would for other families to develop trusting relationships. (Ferdman *et al.*, 2021, and Velleman and Templeton, 2018). According to Kaya *et al.* (2015) inclusive leaders will listen and understand scenarios without passing judgment, ensuring there is no discrimination or blame.

Burnham (2019) states that in order to prevent discrimination, leaders need to develop ways that measure and maintain positive progress. Burnham (2019) believes this can be done through open discussions with staff member regarding discrimination, facing heavy conversations that can lead to feedback, thoughts and allow all staff members to be on the same page, learn from the conversations and put it into practice.

Although substance misuse impacts the parent directly, an inclusive leader would consider the impact on a child. Leaders should monitor the progress and

development of the child with an inclusive approach; however, the focus should be on the child's well-being. An inclusive leader would work with the parent and child to maintain an unbiased parent partnership and continue to support, both parent and child on their continuing journey of recovery (NSPCC, 2023).

In this scenario the family have also recently been removed from the social services register. This could mean the family are in a position of needing additional support from the setting. An inclusive leader would consider the well-being of both mother and child and take extra steps in ensuring a safe space is available, where no judgement will be made and where the family can feel comfortable (Wilson, 2022).

According to Shapiro (2024) when an Inclusive leader prioritises well-being, they lead a setting strongly and can make positive impacts. In contrast to this, mental health and well-being struggles are on the rise, and this can have a detrimental impact on practice. Furthermore, the increase of well-being can mean leaders are expected to improve the overall mental health of parents and employees, ensuring they are supported and can flourish, despite the possibilities of their own mental health being impacted. The role of an inclusive leader is a heavy role, therefore prioritising a leaders own mental health can ultimately lead to further positivity and a happier practice (Shapiro, 2024 and Wilson, 2022).

In conclusion, the ability to foster an inclusive workplace, environment and attitude, there needs to be an element of collaboration. The collaboration of the leader, parents, staff members and the community all strengthen relationships and partnerships. In turn, contributing to a successful inclusive outcome. Beyond promoting involvement and belonging, inclusive leadership also includes equity and fair treatment across the board. Displaying an inclusive leadership attitude allows a workplace to improve and understand the importance of being inclusive and the positive impact it has in a working environment (Welsh Government, 2019, Ferdman *et al.*, 2020 and Wilson 2022).

Critical analysis of inclusive policies.

During this assignment there will be a critical evaluation of a micro policy. The policy that will be used is the Ysgol Pen Rhos 'curriculum policy'.

A policy is a plan of guideline that is put into place to support decision making or an official plan that has been agreed to by the Government for settings to follow (Trowler, 2003, P.35-37 and Green, 2014). There are two types of policy, microeconomic and macroeconomic. A micro policy focuses on a setting as an individual practice; however, a macro policy is put in place by the government for the economy to follow as a whole (Potters, 2023).

Ysgol Pen Rhos (2023) Curriculum policy begins by highlighting that staff, children and parents are included to share the vision of the school and the curriculum that leads to the learning outcomes for the school. The UNCRC rights are stated to be at the heart of the school ethos and embedded into all policies. This approach promotes an inclusive practice, as by following the UNCRC, children are required to access a high standard of inclusive education that is non-discriminating (UNICEF, ND, European agency, 2024, and Ysgol Pen Rhos, 2023).

Promoting the UNCRC into schools is essential to an inclusive environment and although it is highlighted into this policy, the policy states that children are made aware of these right through modelled behaviour, and 'discrete teaching' within the curriculum. In contrast to this A Child's Rights Approach in Wales (2017) states that children should be provided with clear information and opportunities to learn about their rights, in ways that allow children to use their rights in everyday life. Policies are underpinned by the UNCRC, and the methods used to implement this into practice should not be 'discrete'. By taking this approach children are not fully involved in decision making, creating a non-inclusive environment (A Child's Rights Wales, 2017, Ysgol Pen Rhos, 2023 and Welsh Government 2024).

The rights of a child are tailored to protect children; however, it is an adult's responsibility to provide the protection, non-discriminating and non-judgemental practice for children. Working in collaboration with parents and children would be an inclusive approach to achieve this outcome, which the policy states they implement (The Scottish Government 2024). Department for Education (2021) believes that working in partnership with parents is one of the most important elements to

providing an inclusive practice. It creates the foundations for children to thrive, regardless of culture or background (The Scottish Government, 2024 and Department for Education, 2021). In contrast to this, according to Morin (ND) it is not always common knowledge to families that their involvement in education is crucial, thus highlighting the importance of policies such as Ysgol Pen Rhos (2023) curriculum policy, which preaches the importance of including families and valuing their views and input.

Also written into the curriculum policy is that the school 'aims' to promote inclusion and diversity. The choice of word 'aims' suggests the school will work towards inclusion. However, Watts (2022) believes inclusion and diversity is an essential component to education and it should be prioritised. This allows everyone the opportunity to embrace their uniqueness, in a non-judgemental environment, leading to everyone having the opportunities to thrive and develop regardless of their culture or background. In contrast to this, there are practical barriers that can impact the implementation of an inclusive practice, this can be lack of knowledge and lack of funds to train staff, it could also include the need to prioritise and make adaptations to the curriculum, resulting in demands for resources and materials (Watts, 2022, Ainscow, 2020 and Newton, 2015).

Backing this up, the Ysgol Pen Rhos (2023) policy states that implementing the curriculum is an 'unswerving obligation', and their main focus is to provide children with an environment in which they can thrive and develop. However, the policy also states that this 'unswerving obligation' will support, include and ensure quality education to all children, regardless of, race, gender, culture or disability. The Welsh Government (2024) states that the curriculum is supportive of inclusion and diversity, moreover, policies such as this, highlighting the positive approach schools are able to take in ensuring children have an inclusive experience as well as the curriculum being a priority. Moreover, Ferdman *et al.* (2020) backs this up highlighting the importance of acceptance and inclusion as a priority, as it is believed without meeting the needs of those who are different, people may not feel the safety, acceptance or feel valued. These feelings can lead to lack of engagement and participation, thus not thriving to their full potential. This suggests that inclusion and the curriculum, are vital as a collective to meet the requirement of both (Ferdman *et al.*, 2020, and Welsh Government, 2024).

Furthermore, Lane (2008) highlights that there is no specific way to eliminate discrimination, racism or culture barriers, however policies such as Ysgol Pen Rhos (2024) curriculum policy, continuously highlight the importance of working together and collaborating, this impacts the mindset of those around them, educating children and families and having clear guidelines and rules in place that are essential for the well-being and inclusion of the school.

Microeconomic policies such as the Pen Rhos policy work in collaboration with macroeconomic government policies, the community and other stakeholders, this approach of collaboration means everyone is on the same page of implementing a safe, and inclusive practice that works hard to meet the needs of individuals from different backgrounds (Lane 2008, P.261 and Ysgol Pen Rhos, 2024).

Differentiation is believed by Pen Rhos to underpin learning and meet individual needs, considering differentiation in teaching tailors learning outcomes and maximises the inclusion in the school (Benjamin, 2024 and Ysgol Pen Rhos 2024).

According to Benjamin (2024) meeting individual needs and promoting inclusion drives pedagogy, however, sometimes proves difficult to manage in larger classrooms. Macroeconomic policies are government led expectations for all education, meaning microeconomic policies such as the Pen Rhos policy are faced with barriers when writing and implementing. The government do not consider, classroom sizes, funding or how realistic it may be to provide individual inclusive outcomes, leading people to question whether policy expectations are fair in promoting inclusive outcomes tailored to individuals (Bolton and Lewis, 2023 and Benjamin, 2024).

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How to promote inclusive leadership in EYS and why it is important.



(Psychology magazine, 2023)

An inclusive practice should allow children to embrace their identities and also have opportunities for them to be proud and show off their background and cultures. When Children of different cultures and backgrounds have an occasion, they should feel special and celebrated, this can be implemented in education. By doing this children will feel included and proud of who they are, whilst educating their peers on parts of their lives that are important to them. As practitioners we have a duty to understand important parts of a child's life and not just focus on the academic achievements (Thomas, 2024).

How to promote inclusion in practice.

An inclusive culture allows children to flourish and promoting this in setting starts with practitioners. When reflecting ask questions such as, how much do we know about culture? Do we take enough time to learn and explore other peoples background? How much effort is put into making children of other cultures feel valued? Change starts when practitioners are able to reflect. Regular learning about culture and inclusion should be embedded into the policies, this would mean practitioners can continue to work toward professional development, gaining relevant up to date training on the importance of inclusion and respecting culture. In contrast to this funds are not always available to allow staff to reach their full potential through training and educating. The knowledge a practitioner holds are naturally be passed onto pupils through learning and modelled behaviours, therefore investing funds into training for staff would be highly beneficial (Department for Education, 2014, Thomas, 2024, and Randel, 2018).

Staff can set model inclusive behaviours, through encouraging children to show empathy and understanding of other cultures, backgrounds and abilities. Another way to promote inclusive behaviours in education would be through stories, shared experiences and celebrating their peers' special occasions, however bearing in mind that all children learn differently, therefore practitioners should take care to listen, and implement different methods of learning (Thomas, 2024 and Lee, 2021).

Why is inclusive practice important?

Bringing activities, exchange of knowledge and experience into education allows for a joint view on culture and education (UNESCO, 2023). Working in collaboration brings everyone together to share their views. Becoming an inclusive practice is important as it means all children have a higher quality of education. Children learn to respect and understand diverse abilities and backgrounds (Open society foundation, 2019). An inclusive lifestyle helps those from different backgrounds to feel safe and valued, whilst increasing well-being and confidence (Me 2 club, 2024). From the opposite perspective, when children do not receive inclusive education, they are at risk of long-term struggles. This can include social anxiety, mental health concerns, or even barriers to employment. (Blog editor, 2021).

Inclusion is a basic right and promoting this is setting and through children's learning is essential. It is the duty of the practitioner to encourage and develop diversity in the setting. This should always be done respectfully and with the child's best interest at heart, celebrating children, their differences and promoting their rights (Blog editor, 2021, UNICEF, ND, and Lee, 2021).

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