

Section 1

This assignment aims to critically evaluate inclusive leadership in a scenario within an early years setting. Garrison-Wade et al (2007) believes that creating and nurturing inclusive environments to support learning for every pupil is one of the most important challenges in education. Reza (2021) feels that the focus of inclusion has changed. Inclusion no longer focuses on additional learning needs but now focuses on all forms of exclusion, marginalisation and inequalities. Also as suggested by Ryan (2007) inclusion is more often being seen as an integral part of leaderships. He also suggests that the schools and communities will benefit from teachers, pupils, parents and other members of the community being included in schools' governance activities.

Ferdman states that "The ability to be inclusive and foster and sustain an inclusive culture in groups, workplaces and communities is a critical component of 21st century leadership." Also, Siraj-Blatchford and Hallet (2014) believe that collaborative leadership is now replacing hierarchical leadership, therefore staff are working collaboratively to complete tasks and achieve targets. Similarly, Shore et al (2011) believes that allowing broad participation and involvement from staff of all backgrounds ensures that inclusion fosters comprehensive thinking and consideration of larger issues.

Ferdman (2021) describes an inclusive leader as someone who provides fairness and equity, someone who listens to the voice of everyone and allows and encourages participation. Crisol-Moya (2020) refers to inclusive leadership as improving the learning conditions of every pupil, is committed to the values of inclusion will encourage and support all discussion among all members of the setting.

As suggested by Ferdman (2018) "Without the experience of inclusion, people who are different in notable ways from the traditionally represented groups may not feel quite as safe, accepted, or valued and may therefore be less likely to fully engage, participate, and contribute." Similarly, Nutbrown (2011) believes that inclusion within early years settings significantly impacts the individual's sense of belonging. Bortini et al (2016) suggests that if

practitioners act as role models, values each individuals needs and positively encouraging all to create inclusive environments then inclusion can be established within the early years setting.

The following situation has been encountered by a number of classroom staff who all individually used their roles as inclusive leaders to support each person involved in this situation. The people involved in this included the class teacher, two teaching assistants, the pupil and the mother of the pupil.

In September the new group of children had moved up from year 5 and had now started in Year 6 along with now having a new teacher and two new teaching assistants. One of the teaching assistants had noticed a pupil with her hands covering her ears and her head lent on the table. The teaching assistant approached the pupil and asked the pupil what was wrong, the pupil had replied saying it was too loud. The whole class at the time was allowed to have a chat with their friends to catch up after the six-week holiday. This volume of chatting is not usual in this learning space, therefore the teaching assistant believed that the girl was not used to this noise and was also tired coming back to school after a long break. The teaching assistant suggested that she goes to a quieter space such as the library so she can try to regulate her emotions without the surrounding noise.

Over the next few days on occasion the pupil would continue to cover her ears and place her head on the table and has had crying outbursts. In the morning we would have normally done a verbal check-in within the classroom with all the pupils. She would very rarely contribute to the verbal check-in but on occasion she would just say she is 'fine'. Two of the practitioners realised that this verbal check-in was not benefiting this pupil as she was very rarely willing to share or discuss her feelings. Therefore, one practitioner had suggested that she does her morning check-in separately with one staff member in a different room. Botril et al (2018) suggests that an inclusive leader must require the capacity to deal with emotions by taking them into account and to provide spaces for emotions to be peacefully expressed and shared. The pupil chose which learning space she felt most comfortable with being in and she chose the library as it was quiet. Over time the pupil became more open with sharing her feelings.

This strategy had been used for around 3 weeks and had slight positive outcomes for the pupil as she built a better relationship with one of the teaching assistants and she had felt more comfortable speaking to her about how she felt and as suggested by Botril *et al* (2018) if inclusive leadership is being used correctly it should ensure relationships are being built. The pupil would still often get upset and would still often cover her ears and cry with her head on the table. From being able to build a better relationship with this pupil we found out from her that she is missing her sister as she has moved away to university. Even though his strategy started to help the girl the practitioners had noticed that other pupils were asking her why she was going out each morning with a teacher. The girl did not want to tell them and would often shy away from the children when they asked. This had started to frustrate the girl as she felt different and isolated from the rest of the children. This isolation can, as suggested by Kelly (2014) children could become disconnected, upset, angry and have low self-esteem; and this mix of emotions could lead to anxiety or depression. One day the girl had an angry outburst and walked out of the classroom. The girl was sat in the library crying covering her ears rocking back and forth. One of the teachers had entered the library and sat with the girl. The teaching assistant explained that before we talk about what has happened, we need to try to calm and get into a better 'zone'. Within the setting we have developed a whole school approach to growth mindset. These zones represent a child's emotions; the green zone being where a child is happy and calm. The other three zones include feelings of anger, hyper and frustration and tired and sad. As a school "we teach children to understand their emotions and have developed a 'self-regulation tool' to support the learners move into the best zone for learning" (Llanrhidian Primary, 2021). As suggested by Blair and Diamond (2008) problems with the developing ability of children to regulate attention and behavior early in life and that these problems are interfering with positive adaptation and adjustment. To help the girl get into the yellow zone the practitioner had suggested taking deep breaths. As Prinsing (2021) suggests that deep breathing can help lessen stress and anxiety and by breathing slower and more deeply from your stomach, you signal your nervous system to calm down. Similarly, from research carried out by Seppala (2020) deep breathing normalised anxiety levels and can benefit mental health. During this time when the pupil was angry and upset little attention

would be paid to any conversation and as Vogel and Schwabe (2016) reported mild stress can facilitate learning and cognitive performance and that chronic stress impairs learning and is detrimental to memory. Once the pupil was in the yellow zone the practitioner discussed the situation and asked what happened. The girl had said she was frustrated with everyone asking why she was going out every morning and that she no longer wants to go out for verbal check-in.

The teaching assistant had shared this information with the other members of staff within the class. As a team we had decided we had to think of a more inclusive way for everyone to take part in a morning check-in and which way will benefit the children. Also, a way where the girl would feel confident to share and express her feelings and thoughts. The practitioners had decided to create an anonymous online form where only a member of staff can see the names and responses from the children. This form allows the pupils to express their feelings and share their thoughts privately, knowing that any concerns can be raised confidentially. Over time, when the pupils were getting used to this new method of sharing feelings and their thoughts, the practitioners found that they were more often receiving more open answers and children were expressing more honestly on how they were feeling. The girl had told us that she prefers check-in this way and she is happy using this online form. By giving children ways to allow them to express their feelings directly links to article 13 of the United Nations Rights of the Child UNCRC (1992) which states that every child has a right to be listened to and to express their feelings and views.

The girl one day had come in crying, and she sat in her seat and was banging her head on the table and covering her ears. One of the teaching assistants had suggested for her to go to her quiet area in the library to regulate her emotions. The teaching assistant tried supporting her to get into the yellow zone, however the strategies were not working. The girl seemed very cross and continued to cry. The class teacher went to contact mum and discussed what had been witnessed in the classroom. Mum had explained that she is extremely upset and anxious, she did not want to leave the house or leave mum today to come to school. The teacher asked why this may be, and the mother had explained that her sister had left for university and that herself and the dad had split up and had moved away. Due to this the girl had told mum that

she does not want to leave her and she feels anxious when she is not with mum. Mum explained that the girl is finding it difficult being separated from her and usually has an angry or upset outburst in the house if she knows she has to leave mum. The practitioner believed that maybe the child was experiencing separation anxiety which the ICD-11 (2022) describes separation anxiety disorders as “excessive fear or anxiety about separation from specific attachment figures.” Similarly, Dabkowska (2010) defines separation anxiety as excessive, persistent worry about separation from attachment figures. Also as suggested by Dabkowska (2010) children with separation anxiety display distress before separation or during attempts at separation. Mum had also explained that she is finding it difficult to deal with her own emotions as well and then finds it hard to support her daughter whilst she is feeling like this.

Once the practitioner was aware of the situation, they had explained to mum that we would arrange a Team Around the Child meeting and explained that the class teacher, the parent and a member from CAMHS would also be involved in the meeting. Scanlan and Johnson (2020) believe that an essential aspect of inclusive leadership is working in a partnership to allow the children and families to feel valued by the practitioner. A Team Around the Child is where professionals offer support to children and their families in order to achieve expected standards of health, education, development, or welfare (ISCP, 2016). This meeting will be attended by the parent, the class teacher, the teaching assistant and also the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS). CAMHS is used as a term for all services that work with children and young people who have difficulties with their emotional or behavioural wellbeing (NHS, 2020).

This meeting was not attended by the pupil which had meant that there was no inclusivity from the practitioner to the child. On reflection, the child should have had an opportunity to join the meeting to express their feelings and opinions. Mackenzie, Cologon and Fenech (2016) believe that it is important to be inclusive towards children as it allows them to feel valued and equal to the adults and practitioners involved.

When reflecting as a team one of the teaching assistants realised that training was needed for themselves as this member of staff will also need to support the pupil with anxiety. Therefore, the class teacher then suggested that we all attend a course on supporting learners with anxiety. As

the Welsh Government (2016) states, self-evaluation is to make teachers aware of any additional training that may be required for them or their team to support inclusion. Having this training could ensure continuity and inclusion within the classroom as it would allow us to access the same information that we could then use to support pupils. This training was set to be attended later on in the year therefore the teaching assistant had to use their current knowledge to support this child. This teaching assistant found it challenging to support this pupil as they were lacking training and support and due to this this practitioner very rarely was able to support the learner when she was stressed, angry or upset. This was not inclusive for the pupil or the teaching assistant and if the inclusive leadership is not working within the team, then this can result in negative experiences (Randal et al, 2017).

On reflection the class teacher should have realised that training and support was needed for the teaching assistant and should have arranged for the training to be sooner. This would allow the teaching assistant to develop her CPD and would also be able to support the pupil with her anxiety. A reason for the teacher not being inclusive in this situation may be due to lack of Inclusive Leadership Training. The Inclusion and Pupil Support (Welsh Government, 2016) includes that teachers should self-evaluate every year and their planning should set out aims to arrange and attend training that is needed. Therefore, the class teacher may need to access additional training to develop their inclusive leadership skills.

Within this meeting it also focused on supporting the parent recognise their own mental health and emotional struggles as it is important for parent to focus on their own emotions and take care of themselves to then be able to take care of their children's emotional needs (DiMaggio, 2022). When reflecting on the TAC meeting the teacher and CAMHS had realised that the way mum was dealing with her emotions was also having a negative effect on the child. As suggested by Frost (2020) the emotional effects of anxious parenting impact both the child and the parent-child relationship for life and can even lead to depression and anxiety symptoms in the children. From discussions within the meeting it was decided that to support the parent at home, if the parent had any worries or needed to have a conversation about what has gone on at home with the child, then the teacher will be available to speak with the parent and offer

additional support. As an inclusive leader the teacher should have an open mindset, empathise with the adult and understand and listen with no judgment.

Section 2

This section of the portfolio will include a critical evaluation on whether policies in Wales enable inclusive leadership. The chosen policy of focus within this section is the new Curriculum for Wales (Welsh Government, 2020).

Pollock Porter. et al (2018) refers to policy as a “set of principles that guide a course of action.” Baldock, Fitzgerald and Kay (2013) define a policy as an attempt for inside organisations to think in a coherent way about what needs to be achieved and what needs to be put in place to achieve it. Also as mentioned by Dodd and Devo (2000) a policy is an action plan agreed by a group of people who have the power to carry it out and enforce it. According to Levin (1999) common elements of a policy should include specific ways of dealing with specific issues and will show commitment or a course of action. Similarly, Isaac (no date) believes that policies must include strategies to achieve each objective, specific actions that need to be taken and the desired outcomes of the specific actions. However, as suggested by Colebatch (2009) the policy process can be characterised by conflict and uncertainty and that many policy statements can be hard to interpret and often contradicted by other policy statements.

However, Bradbury (2013) views that many education policies only favour ‘ideal learners’ who are self-directed and are ‘good learners’; alike Dallymore (2019) believes that “Early Childhood Education and Care may be used as a vehicle for achieving aims that are not always necessarily in the best interest of the child.”

Researchers including Weatherley and Lipsky (1977) and Tyak and Cuban (1995) suggest that it is more likely that teachers shape the policy rather than the policy influencing the teachers' practise. Also suggested by Vinnet and Pont (2017) teachers view reform implementation as another government initiative that they must study and embed within their school and everyday teaching schedule. Public policies are ratified by governments and which public and

private institutes must comply with these set policies, this can be known as a macro level policy. Whereas private policies are set up by organisations and do not hold the force of law but staff within the organisation may need to comply with these policies (Pollock Porter et al, 2018). Policies created by the organisations such as early years settings are also known as micro level policies. Fullan (2015) defines education policy implementation as “the process of putting into practice an idea, program, or set of activities and structures new to the people attempting or expected to change. The change may be externally imposed or voluntarily sought”.

Within the United Kingdom enabling an inclusive education is high on the government's educational agenda (Kugelmass, 2003), to enable this effective and successful leadership is required with a strong understanding of skills for creating opportunities to benefit and enhance themselves and others (Ferdman et al, 2020). In line with the changing of Wales's curriculum, the New Curriculum for Wales aims to be more inclusive.

The adopted curriculum in all schools and funded non maintained nurseries in Wales must meet several general requirements including which the curriculum should be suitable for learners of differing ages, abilities and aptitudes and that appropriate progression for learners is provided including a range of provision to ensure this (Welsh Government, 2020). Opertti and Brandy (2011) believe that an inclusive curriculum must include strong key concepts, flexibility and must consider each learner within the school and learning environments. Therefore, the new Curriculum for Wales has come away from standardised approach. Instead of standardised age levels the new curriculum has introduced progression steps.

Along with the development of the new Curriculum for Wales a new Additional Learning Needs system was developed. It is a statutory system to support children and young people from birth to 25 years with a learning difficulty or disability (Welsh Government, 2020). However, Knight and Crick (2020) believe that the new ALN system does not focus on the needs of inclusive education for every child but does focus on supporting individuals with an identified additional learning need. Therefore, the new Curriculum for Wales ensures that it can be developed by practitioners to allow an inclusive education for all children.

Section 3

Inclusive leadership focuses on valuing diversity and effective management of diversity and inclusion of all (Booyesen, 2014) and as Ferdam states “inclusion involves both being fully ourselves and allowing others to be fully themselves; individuals experiencing inclusion in a group involves being fully part of the whole while retaining a sense of authenticity and uniqueness.” Being an inclusive leader does not mean you must support every child in the same way but supporting each child’s individual needs and paying attention to their individual backgrounds, beliefs and interests. Ryan (2014) feels that a practitioner that has a good understanding and knowledge of individuals needs and cultures then this will support inclusive leadership.

Children continuously develop and learn through the experiences and opportunities they receive from family, teachers and other people around them. The combination of values, beliefs and attitudes are the moral principles that affect your behaviour and leads you in life, however a person's views can differ to others and when in different institutions such as schools (Reading University, no date). During their time in school children are exploring different aspects of their personality, beliefs and interests, an inclusive setting should allow and encourage children to explore these. Richards (2007) believes as more students in the 21st century are coming from more diverse backgrounds and early years settings need to take an inclusive approach to identify effective methods to support diversity. As suggested by Gocłowska et al (2018) an inclusive leader could promote diversity within the setting by using a range of resources, books, toys and games that incorporate different cultures, beliefs and nationalities.

Ryan (2014) feels that a practitioner that has a good understanding and knowledge of individuals needs and cultures then this will support inclusive leadership. By interacting with the children and conversing with parents the practitioner can gain an understanding of the family's cultural

view and beliefs. By doing this the practitioner can enhance their knowledge and can use this information to promote different beliefs and cultures within the class (Allen et al, 2021).

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