

ECEY6004 Inclusive Leadership

Part 1

Introduction

According to Hallet (2016), inclusion is a philosophical stance of ethical values and beliefs of social justice and equality where equal opportunities are given to all, irrespective of their background, attainment, disability, ethnicity, age or gender.

According to Booysen (2014), inclusive leadership strives for cohesiveness, whilst still retaining individual uniqueness, and being beneficial for all. Randel et al. (2018) offer a similar definition of inclusive leadership as promoting belongingness, whilst retaining uniqueness.

Inclusive leadership has historically been focused on including individuals with special educational needs or disabilities (SEND), but is increasingly concerned with recognising all diverse needs (Reza, 2021). As modern society is increasingly diverse, inclusive leaders must evolve to recognise, include and take advantage of this diversity.

In addition to recognising a child's unique needs, it is also essential to recognise their own views. Hollander (2008) talks of "doing things with people rather than to them", and Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) states that every child, in accordance with their age and understanding, has the right to a voice on matters that affect them. This is echoed in legislation, in the Children and Families Act (2014) and the SEND code of Practice: 0 to 25 years (2015), which placed children and families at the centre of decision making.

Ferdman et al (2020) discuss how inclusive leaders need the mindset to appreciate the benefits of inclusivity. Von Kippenberg et al (2013) discuss the benefits of highlighting diversity, rather than downplaying differences. Ferdman et al (2020) believes that in addition to valuing the benefits of inclusivity, inclusive leaders also require the skills to notice and develop diversity.

Gerritsen (2020) identifies several barriers to inclusive leadership. A lack of knowledge, or shared vision can be barriers to inclusive leadership. Policies or procedures that are not aligned with inclusive leadership can also hinder effective inclusive leadership. Gerritsen (2020) is clear that inclusion must be demonstrated by those in positions of leadership, to ensure that an organisation is truly inclusive.

I am going to be discussing how the inclusive leader in the scenario works in partnership with children, their families and communities, as well as other professionals, to facilitate a more inclusive approach, which ensures that every child and family is included and supported.

Scenario

Child A is a 54 month old girl, who has recently started in Reception in a two-form entry, mainstream school. Child A has never attended a setting before. Child A has two older siblings already attending the school, and the school already has a good relationship with both parents.

Child A wears a back brace because she has Scoliosis. The back brace can hinder Child A's movement, and make some activities more difficult for Child A.

Prior to Child A starting school, the entire EYFS team received training from a community nurse on how to correctly remove and fit Child A's back brace. At regular hospital appointments, Child A is regularly re-fitted for an appropriate back brace and parents are advised for what period of each day the back brace should be worn. The back brace may be removed after the required period of time, if Child A expresses discomfort, or to enable Child A to use the toilet more easily.

Child A is significantly smaller than her peers, and dresses in 2-3 year old clothing. Child A also has asthma.

Child A's parents were apprehensive about her attending school, and have also expressed concerns about her falling behind her peers academically.

Child A is very quiet and reluctant to speak to familiar school staff or her peers. Child A will communicate her needs through gestures and occasional quiet words.

Child A's speech at home is said to be very good in her home language of Punjabi, and her English is also said to be good, as both parents and siblings also speak English.

On Transition day, it was apparent that the school would need to make some adjustments for Child A, and that Child A would need to start school on a reduced timetable.

The Reception toilets were too big and high for Child A. Child A was also unable to reach the bathroom sinks, or to push down on the taps to turn on the taps. Child A was unable to reach her coat peg to hang up her coat. Child A was unable to sit comfortably on the carpet whilst wearing her back brace. Child A needed some support to sit at a Reception table. At lunchtime, Child A found it difficult to hold the cutlery, and needed support to sit on the dining room furniture. At playtime, Child A found it hard to keep up with her friends as they walked to the playground, and Child A expressed that she was tired.

Despite Child A's apparent difficulties, she always arrives at school with a smile, and her parents report that Child A states that she likes school. Child A joins in with activities and seems content when her peers try to include her in their play.

The role of an inclusive leader

As an inclusive leader, Child A's teacher is mindful of John Bowlby's theory of attachment (1958) and has tried hard to develop a good relationship with Child A. The Early Years Statutory Framework (2024) states that every child must be assigned a key person. The inclusive leader has taken the time to introduce themselves to Child A's parents and get to know Child A. The inclusive leader carried out a home visit prior to transition day and found out about Child A's interests as well as her individual needs. According to the Early Years Statutory Framework (2024) every child is unique, and learns well with support from adults who respond to their individual interests and needs. The inclusive leader planned activities and made

adaptions to the provision, considering their knowledge of Child A. The inclusive leader developed this knowledge through conversations with the parents and Child A and through observation. According to Fawcett and Watson (2016), observation is not just about noticing and recording what a child is doing but respecting and valuing their explorations and opinions.

The inclusive leader is mindful of their obligations as outlined in the Equality Act 2010, to make reasonable adjustments for Child A. The inclusive leader is also considerate of Child A's emotional well-being and mindful of tools such as the Leuven scale, to monitor Child A's emotional well-being and involvement in the setting. The inclusive leader continually reflects on their practice and on the learning environment, considering Child A's unique needs as well as her unique abilities and capabilities, and plans the learning environment and activities to reflect this. Hanson (2012) is clear about the benefits of reflective practitioners. The theory of reflective practice was first conceived by John Dewey, and later developed by Donald Schon. The Statutory Guidance; Keeping Children Safe in Education states that all schools have a statutory duty to promote the welfare of their pupils.

The inclusive leader acknowledges that Child A speaks English as an additional language, and is mindful of the obligations outlined in the Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework (2024) to ensure that Child A reaches 'a good standard in English language during the early years foundation stage'. The inclusive leader ensures that Child A has lots of opportunities to listen to stories, learn new words and interact with adults and her peers.

The inclusive leader recognised through observations that Child A was unable to use the bathroom independently and has sought assistance from the EYFS Lead, SENDCO and Site Manager, to make adjustments. A special set of steps have been fitted to a toilet to enable Child A to sit on the toilet independently and comfortably. Steps were added to the sinks to ensure that Child A can wash her hands at any sink. Child A, however, still needs a friend or adult to help her push the taps on. The bathroom has quite recently been fitted and there is no budget available to change the taps. The bathroom door is now permanently wedged open so Child A can enter. Child A's coat peg has been lowered to enable her to reach.

A small wooden infant chair and table were purchased to enable Child A to sit comfortably and join in with carpet sessions. The inclusive leader sensitively discussed this with the rest of the class to ensure that Child A was not ridiculed or resented for this adaption. The class actually support Child A, and are very keen to include her and help her. This dynamic has been developed and supported by the inclusive leader for the benefit of Child A and all her peers. Birth to Five Matters (2021) discusses creating a culture of 'we' rather than 'us' and 'them'.

The inclusive leader also noticed that Child A was struggling to move the flat magnetic letter tiles during phonics sessions, so the inclusive leader found Child A her own set of chunky plastic letters to use, that she could manipulate more easily. The inclusive leader was careful to sensitively discuss how this assisted Child A, to ensure the other children understood why Child A had different resources.

The inclusive leader planned small group sessions to give Child A the opportunity to work in a smaller group, where she is more confident to join in.

As an inclusive leader, Child A's teacher is constantly reviewing the environment and

considering how best to meet Child A's unique needs. Child A's timetable will gradually increase if she is not too tired, and the inclusive leader will make adaptations as required to meet Child A's changing needs.

Child A walks with a TA at the end of the line, to enable Child A to move around school at her own pace. When children are divided into groups for phonics and maths, Child A's group is always situated in her usual classroom, with her own table and chair, to minimise unnecessary exertion for Child A. Child A's chair is taken to assemblies so that Child A does not need to attempt to sit on the floor, which she finds uncomfortable when she is wearing her back brace.

The inclusive leader requested smaller cutlery and a cushion for Child A at lunch time. Child A goes home after eating her lunch because of safety concerns for her at lunchtime, when the playground is very busy with many children, all much bigger than Child A.

The inclusive leader is an excellent communicator, thus ensuring that effective partnership working is possible. This is particularly important as Child A settles into the setting. Dockett, S. , Perry, B. (2001) state that "effective transition programs rely on reciprocal communication among participants". Birth to Five Matters (2021) agrees that effective communication is particularly important during transition. The inclusive leader took the time to conduct a home visit before transition started, and has continued to communicate with Child A's parents.

The inclusive leader recognises the crucial role of the parents as the child's first and most enduring educators (Birth to Five Matters, 2021).

The inclusive leader was aware that Child A's parents both speak English as an additional language, so a colleague who speaks Punjabi fluently accompanied the inclusive leader on the home visit and is available upon request to translate when the inclusive leader discusses Child A's progress with her parents.

The inclusive leader is sensitive to Child A's parents concerns about her progress and has involved the SENDCO to offer additional support and advice.

The inclusive leader has helped the family to access a local support group for families of children with disabilities. The inclusive leader has helped the family to communicate their struggles with the group, to ensure that the family gets useful support.

The inclusive leader has worked alongside a specialist community nurse, to ensure that Child A's back brace is used safely. The inclusive leader has ensured that they have the required skills and knowledge and requested support when required.

The inclusive leader has also involved the school's speech and language HLTA, to support Child A with talking at school.

The inclusive leader has sought guidance from the SENDCO and consulted with the EYFS Lead and Site Manager to make adaptations to the setting.

Conclusion

The inclusive leader has strived to ensure that Child A is a valued member of the class. The inclusive leader ensures that all students are valued and included, and this example has ensured that the students are inclusive also.

The continuous provision contains books and resources that reflect the diverse ethnicities of the class, but there are no resources that reflect Child B's disability. The inclusive practitioner could try to source such resources. Birth to Five Matters (2021) advises practitioners that children should see themselves and their families in the environment, and Development Matters (2023) suggests that practitioners use story time to think about the perspectives of others.

The inclusive leader has made many adaptations to support Child A, but Child A still requires support to turn on the taps in the bathroom. The inclusive practitioner could consider applying for an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), which may secure additional funding to adapt the bathroom to enable Child A to wash her hands independently. Additional funding could also provide Child A with one to one support at lunchtime, to enable her to remain in school.

The inclusive leader has ensured that Child A's parents are involved and happy about the support that Child A is receiving and the progress that they are making. The inclusive practitioner has ensured that they maintain accurate records and adhere to the Data Protection Act (2018), inline with school policies and procedures. The inclusive practitioner has also worked in partnership with other professionals, as well as the local community, to ensure that Child A is receiving the very best support. The inclusive leader could be attentive to other opportunities to work in partnership with the local community.

By ensuring equity, and removing potential barriers for Child A, the inclusive leader has not only supported Child A, but the entire school community. The example set by the inclusive leader has been followed by the entire class and the setting is an inclusive place where everyone can thrive.

Part 2

The Warnock Report in 1978, which led to the Education Act (1981) first introduced an 'integrative' approach to education for children with special educational needs. There was however no additional funding to enable this approach, so provision for children with special educational needs was inadequate and inconsistent. (UK Parliament, 2006)

In 1994, the UN made a statement on special needs education, which urged governments to adopt the principle of 'inclusive' education. This was adopted in the 1997 Green Paper Excellence For All Children Meeting Special Educational Needs (UK Parliament, 2006).

Now with an inclusive approach, the Children and Families Act (2014) and The *Special educational needs and disability code of practice: 0 to 25 years* (2015) aimed to place children and their families at the centre of decision making.

The Equality Act (2010) defined disability as 'a physical or mental impairment which has a long-term and substantial adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities'. The Act defines 'long-term' as a year or more and 'substantial' is defined as more than minor or trivial. Using this definition, Child A has a disability, and the school has a legal duty to make reasonable adjustments to ensure that Child A is not at a substantial disadvantage compared to her peers. Advance thought is required by inclusive leaders, as the duty is anticipatory, and inclusive leaders should ensure that Child A is not disadvantaged.

The school is required to make reasonable adjustments by making physical alterations if required. This is subjective, as the school have installed steps to the bathroom, but failed to change the taps because of budget restraints. Child A is still not able to fully access the bathroom independently, but the school could state that they have made reasonable adjustments, and providing support to turn on taps is reasonable. Legislation and an inclusive approach have improved access for Child A, but is the provision truly inclusive if Child A can't operate the taps independently, if other children can? A weakness of this legislation is that it is subject to individual interpretation.

The special educational needs and disability code of practice: 0 to 25 years (2015) and the early years statutory framework (2024) state that children with medical conditions must get the support required to meet their needs. Child A is supported to remove her back brace and a chair has been provided for her comfort. The inclusive leader has considered Child A's lethargy and made arrangements to reduce her time at school and to minimise unnecessary exertion. The school have assessed that lunchtime arrangements aren't safe and suitable for Child A, but have failed to provide an alternative.

The school recognises the importance of working in partnership with parents as detailed in the early years statutory framework (2024) and the special educational needs and disability code of practice: 0 to 25 years (2015). The school communicate well with Child A's parents, despite the potential barrier of both parents speaking English as an additional language.

Bradbury (2013) is critical of early years education, as it favours 'good learners' who are self-directed and displaying typical childhood development. Critics of the Special educational needs and disability code of practice: 0 to 25 years (2015) include Hodgkinson (2023) who concluded that it lacks effectiveness as it failed to bring about radical reform as it was driven by performativity and economic austerity. Provision for children with special educational needs or disabilities has been further impacted by the Covid 19 pandemic. According to the UK Government (2021) challenges faced by children with special educational needs or disabilities, their families and professionals were exasperated by the Covid pandemic.

Staff knowledge and training is essential if staff are to foster an inclusive environment. Schools are required to appoint a qualified SENDCO and to have up to date Safeguarding and SEND policies, that outline the policies and procedures adopted by the school to adhere to their legal obligations. The special educational needs and disability code of practice: 0 to 25 years (2015) is 292 pages long, making it quite a complex document for staff to comprehend, which could lead to inconsistencies with application.

The school's Safeguarding policy acknowledges that children with special educational needs and disabilities or certain health conditions can face additional safeguarding challenges and acknowledges that additional barriers can exist when recognising abuse and neglect in this group of children. The policy also acknowledges that children with special educational needs or disabilities are more prone to peer group isolation than other children and the potential for children with special educational needs or disabilities be disproportionately impacted by child-on-child abuse.. The school safeguarding policy details the procedures for dealing with child-on-child abuse and outlines what staff training should be undertaken to create a supportive environment in school and minimise the risk of child-on-child abuse. In the scenario, the inclusive leader has taken care to promote a supportive environment, and provided an excellent role-model for the children.

The school have several policies that impact on Child A's care and education. These policies are: special educational needs and disabilities policy, safeguarding children and child protection policy, intimate care policy, behaviour and discipline policy, anti-bullying policy, and medical conditions policy. The school is considerate of its legal duties and part of the school ethos is that the school is an inclusive place, where everyone can thrive. Inclusive leadership is enabled, despite some obvious flaws in the legislation. If special educational needs provision was given greater prominence and financial support, this would undoubtedly benefit children with special educational needs or disabilities and their families.

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