

Inclusive Leadership: Working together to support families

Definition of inclusive leadership

Inclusive leadership involves addressing and attempting to resolve or improve any situation that may prevent someone from accessing or participating in activities. Examples include disability, additional learning needs, gender discrimination, language barriers, cultural differences and many others. Inclusive leadership also involves recognizing or creating opportunities where diversity can benefit the setting. Successful inclusion helps everyone to feel they belong, and that they are valued, whilst allowing them to maintain their individual identities and values (Ferdman, 2021 p3).

Not knowing what inclusive leadership entails and how it can be achieved, can be a barrier to its effective delivery (Shore and Chung, 2022). To enable successful inclusion, it may be necessary to adapt and improve Early Years practice on several levels. This takes time, which could discourage further exploration. Changes need to take into consideration children, families, staff (including external agencies) and the wider community. A child's learning and development is influenced by all of these parties (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Vygotsky, 1978).

Scenario

For the purposes of this evaluation, the practitioner is reflecting on the case of two Ukrainian refugee children, who had to leave their home, alongside their mother, due to war. Their father remained to fight. The eldest child, a boy, was placed in Year One and the younger, a girl, on whom this evaluation is mostly based was Reception age. The

time of placement meant the children were present for the summer term only. Little was known about the family and staff had two days' notice to prepare for their arrival.

Part 1 – Critical evaluation of the experience of the role of the inclusive leader

The children and their mother were greeted by the Headteacher on their first day - an initial step towards building a positive relationship (EYFS, 2024). The children were shown their coat pegs and drawers, where name labels had been prepared in advance, showing that their arrival was eagerly anticipated and that they had immediate access to the same privileges as other children (Burnham, 2016). To prevent any anxiety, the children were simply asked to join others on the carpet, where their names were shared with the class and their peers asked to take good care of them and help show them around.

Labels for common classroom items had been prepared in Ukrainian, with an English translation. It was hoped this would assist the older child, who may have been able to read a few words. A discussion with his mother, however, later revealed that he did not read or speak Ukrainian and his home language was actually Russian. Failure by the local authority to communicate the family's home language resulted in extra work for the practitioner and could also have confused the child. More rapid and detailed sharing of information would have prevented this.

An online search by the practitioner confirmed similarities between Russian and Polish languages and therefore a Polish child in Year Three was asked to attempt

communication with the new children. This was unsuccessful due to a difference in local dialect. Advice was sought from the school's EAL Lead who advised the use of

English in school, with the support of picture prompts where possible. The children were to attend phonic groups alongside their peers as normal. As neither the practitioner or EAL Lead were able to speak any Russian, they were limited on what immediate help they could give and the EAL Lead agreed to explore further support options. After speaking with the children's mother, it transpired neither child spoke or read any English, and her own English was also limited. Neither could the children read Russian. Any messages sent to the parent from this point on, were clarified using a translation program via the school's ipad. This process had its limitations due to the speed of translation and unreliable translation of some words. It could be difficult to use with children, due to curriculum specific language not always being included in the program's vocabulary. In addition, the use of such programs relies on practitioners having a reasonable understanding of technology and its applications (Davies and Lama, n.d.). The practitioner feels there are many families in school who would benefit from newsletters and messages being provided in their home language. This is not a facility the setting currently offers and therefore it has been suggested to the leadership team.

It quickly became apparent that both children were finding school life challenging, due to the language barrier and also their emotional wellbeing. The boy was becoming very aggressive in his play, incorporating lots of war-like elements and encouraging friends to join in. The younger child was constantly tired and tearful, often falling asleep in the early afternoon. She found it difficult to sit still and often rolled or lay on the floor. Any attempt to speak with her was met with tears, screaming, and angry or frustrated language, with occasional lashing out at staff. These actions led staff to suspect an Autistic Spectrum Disorder, in addition to her language needs. Her frustration was distressing for staff, as they could not understand her protests or work out what she needed. According to the Department for Education and Training Victoria (2020), an EAL child who has only recently arrived, can take two years to learn the language required for social interaction. It can take up to five years for them to acquire curriculum specific language. This time scale increases up to seven to ten years if a child has had

no previous schooling. Due to the Ukrainian school start age, our reception child was unlikely to have experienced a high level of social interaction outside of her own family surroundings and it became clear that both children would need a large amount of support just to navigate everyday life in school. Staff involved with the child were often coming under fire from the child's outbursts, either verbally or physically and this was recognised by the practitioner, who let them know to signal if they were finding the strain too much, whereupon another member of staff would step in and give them some assistance or a break from the child. As reported by Clayback and Williford (2022) a practitioner under stress may implement less effective strategies to deal with challenging behaviour. This results in children displaying even worse behaviour and becomes a vicious circle, which can affect the entire class. Further professional development could also be offered to practitioners, detailing more effective ways to deal with challenging behaviour, thus empowering them to confidently deal with situations that arise. A supportive culture in the workplace and the provision of adequate training are both cited as good ways to retain staff by the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) policy.

As stated by Skinner (1957) obstacles relating to language can depend on the surrounding conditions of the child and how the verbal community interacts with them (Strogonova and Piper, 2018). In this scenario, the practitioner gestured around the room, asking the child to 'Show me'. This worked when she wanted a specific physical item but was not as effective when her frustrations were based around something non-material. The practitioner used emotion cards on her lanyard to see if the child could point to how she was feeling, naming each emotion as she showed the card. This had little effect initially, however the practitioner advised all staff involved with the child, to continue the use of emotion cards and PECS cards (Picture Exchange Communication System), as this approach had worked with previous EAL students (Alfuraih et al, 2024). The practitioner spoke with the child's mother, suggesting a conversation take place at home, in the home language, to see if the source of her upset could be identified. She

mentioned that she herself considered English schools to be 'like punishment' as they expected too much from young children and said the child simply did not like being made to work. Due to decreased staffing, it was difficult to spend time with the child or find out her interests and it was observed by nearby nurture practitioners that the child's time in Reception had not been enjoyable for her and she was very often ignored, due to the teacher having to focus on children who were engaging with activities on offer.

Practitioners in the nurture class had witnessed several of the child's outbursts and felt that the full Reception class was very overwhelming for a child who had never experienced school before. Nurture staff suggested the child be allowed to access the nurture provision during the day, if she felt the need for a quieter space. This was discussed with the school SENCo (Special Educational Needs Co-Ordinator), who had apparently been considering nurture as an option for both children the following school year. Nurture staff and the SENCo worked collaboratively, agreeing that both children be allowed access for the last couple of weeks of the term, to give them a gentle introduction. This would prevent them being nervous or unfamiliar on their return in September and as the siblings were together, it could make them more comfortable. This collaboration between staff is an example of social justice leadership (Theoharis and Scanlan, 2020). Arrangements were agreed between the Head and parent and both children began attending nurture in the mornings, then returning to their respective classrooms in the afternoons, for less formal lessons, such as art and music (Boxall, 2002). The focus was initially on the children's wellbeing, rather than having an expectation that they would work. It was thought their willingness to work would improve once they felt comfortable in the environment and familiar with the staff therein (Bowlby, 1969) and that their development needed to be of a holistic nature.

Whilst in the Nurture room, the younger child's interest was observed to be in small world resources. She became fascinated with a dolls' house and was often seen re-arranging the furniture and quietly talking to herself, seemingly making up her own

narratives to suit her play. She would look nervously at staff as if seeking permission to play and with an encouraging nod or gesture from an adult, she would spend the majority of the session in the same area. On occasion she struggled to share the resources but by rearranging tables, providing additional space, nurture staff demonstrated that she could bring furniture out of the house, onto the table, allowing her more space for creativity, whilst freeing up space for others to use the resources. Using classrooms and furniture flexibly is not something all staff may be familiar or comfortable with and may depend on room size, but it could be beneficial to provide staff training on flexible classrooms, to demonstrate the impact this can have on children's learning (Kariippanon et al, 2020). If the child wanted a piece of unavailable furniture, a creative member of staff would help make a small cardboard junk model of whatever item they were missing, and the child would fetch the materials she envisaged should be used. She expressed delight at being able to create the miniature world she had in mind and became more eager every day, to make more models, becoming quite exacting in her expectations of what adults could make! Through these sessions, the child showed a great deal of creative ability and excellent use of equipment such as scissors, tape, glue and embellishments, to achieve the desired outcome, meaning practitioners were able to identify next steps in her learning journey. After a while she began making her own dolls' houses from cardboard boxes, adding flooring, different level platforms, gardens

and other details. As she worked, staff were able to scaffold her learning by giving her the English names for common household items and tools she used to create her models, building on her current level of understanding (Vygotsky, 1978). She worked mostly independently, showing prolonged periods of intense focus, enabling staff to identify her strengths against the Characteristics of Effective Learning (Birth to Five Matters, 2021). She would always return to the same staff member for something she could not achieve alone, showing that she had built a good relationship with them. Noting that the usual staff member was probably a little tired of making the same model every day, another practitioner stepped in on one occasion, creating a false reason for the other to leave the room, and offered to help her instead. She was not keen, so the practitioner suggested she have a go herself. She did so although became frustrated

when the model did not look exactly as the last one had. Over time, this behaviour became more intense, causing the child to have full meltdowns, sometimes destroying what she had created. Staff had already spotted some indicators that the child may be on the autistic spectrum and began recording such incidents in case referral to outside agencies was required. Collaboration between nurture staff and class teachers enabled sharing and use of regulatory exercises meaning that situations could be resolved quickly or prevented altogether.

Funding was obtained with the support of the school FSW (Family Support Worker), enabling a play therapist to visit school once a week, to work on the children's trauma, from having to leave their home. The family were now housed at the top of a high-rise flat, with no furniture and the children were sharing a bedroom. Having collaborated with nurture staff, discovering the child's habits and interests, the therapist suspected the dolls' house fixation was the child's way of processing what had happened to her family. This gave ideas for further activities to support the child in processing her feelings. The FSW visited the flat and discussed what furniture and appliances would be of most use.

Sofas, cupboards and beds were purchased, and carpets were offered, although the mother did not seem keen on this idea, as it meant she would need a vacuum cleaner. She thought this was a strange British custom, when rugs were much easier to shake out and clean! This part of her culture was therefore respected and rugs purchased, rather than fitted carpets.

The children had access to several clubs and activity groups when in Ukraine, which their mother said they missed. The FSW and Nurture staff arranged to run a club for them and some of their friends, giving staff and the children the chance to share their artistic/craft skills, further strengthening their relationship.

In conclusion, examples of inclusive leadership have been demonstrated by several different people in the above scenario. This shows that the role of leader can no longer be restricted to just one person, who holds power over others, but is now required to be a collaborative exercise, making good use of everyone's unique skills and talents, appreciating the intersectionality that exists between them (Ferdman 2021). Whilst a Headteacher or class teacher may have ultimate responsibility for the children in their care, they are unable to provide a full range of support for those children by themselves and should involve all the other people around the child, to help realise the best outcome for them (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Part 2 – Critical evaluation of a policy or professional guidance

For this exercise, the practitioner will evaluate the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Policy (SEND) from the practitioner's placement setting (Yorkswood Primary School, n.d.).

Evaluation

This policy is structured well, with a professional font and clearly defined paragraphs setting out the roles and responsibilities of practitioners in school and the areas of SEND covered. The author, policy date and review date are clearly stated, however the review date is given as December 2023, when the copy used for this evaluation was taken from the school website in January 2025. This indicates that either the policy has not been reviewed or that the new review date has mistakenly not been inserted. This

reflects poorly on the efficiency of the school and may cause parents/carers to question the school's commitment to SEND children's development.

Details are shown of the guidance and legislation referred to when writing the SEND policy and the school policies which should be read in conjunction, are clearly stated. It is not stated where most of these policies can be accessed, which could mean new members of staff, having to ask around for the whereabouts of these documents, wasting valuable time when ensuring children's needs are met. To prevent this, staff could be given details of where policy materials are stored and time to access them, to ensure they understand the school's systems. Additionally, they may require support from an IT technician, as computer literacy is not in everyone's skill set.

Reference is made to the school's governing body having an identified SEND governor, reflecting compliance with section 29 of the SEND Code of Practice: 0-25 years (2015). Details are given as to how the school meets the requirements of the Children and Families Act (2014) and the Equality Act (2010), although some of these points overlap with the contents of the school's Equality Policy which is a separate document and not being evaluated on this occasion. Section 19 of the Children and Families Act (2014) mentions the importance of listening to the views of children and parents/carers, when dealing with their needs. Similarly, the school policy refers to the voice of the children and the views of their parents/carers being taken into consideration at all times.

As per section 22 of the Children and Families Act (2014), and section 1.14 of the SEND Code of Practice 0 to 25 years (2014), the school policy emphasises the need to identify children with special needs or disability, as soon as possible and ensure that they receive the support they need to further their learning. Whilst the pupils in need may be identified early on, due to the high levels of need in some settings and the workload this entails for a SENDCo, access to the help the children need may not always be immediate. Added to this, the workload experienced by external agencies,

such as Speech and Language Therapists or Educational Psychologists, may mean that they are unable to visit and assess the child for a few months, or in some cases years. This results in the child getting insufficient or even no help. Initial assistance is often provided by school staff who do not have the required expertise to deliver it properly. This in turn can lead to extra stress or feelings of inadequacy for staff, affecting their own well-being. When these situations occur, it can affect the outcomes mentioned in section 25 of the Children and Families Act (2014), concerning the integration of several services who can come together to improve a child's wellbeing or improve the quality of their special educational provision. If one or more of the required agencies are unable to perform their assessments for whatever reason, it is like having a missing link in the child's provision and certain aspects of their need may not be met sufficiently. This will result in them not achieving milestones in their development and eventually falling further behind their peers.

When discussing the inclusive community of the school, it is recognised that if children's needs are met, they will be able to achieve and make a positive contribution to society. However, it is also stated in the SEND policy, that the needs of pupils will be met 'as far as possible'. This phrase shows that the school is aware of its limitations and knows that in some circumstances, it will not be able to meet the needs of pupils, and they may be better served by an alternative setting. This does not always happen immediately due to lack of spaces in specialist provision. Often children are unable to move setting and spend a long time making poor progress due to their current setting being unequipped with the resources they need. Palikara et al (2018) states that when surveyed, most professionals agreed with the principles of the SEND Code of Practice (2014) but felt that budget cuts, collaboration issues and restricted timescales affected how well the principles could be met.

Since writing the policy, the school has had a new telephone and IT system installed. However, the new contact number and email have not been updated in the policy. The

named SENDCo has also recently retired, with the role being temporarily held by a SENDCo from the Academy Trust the school has recently joined. This is not stated in the policy. Neither is it stated that the Attendance Lead retired four months ago and has been replaced. This may result in parents or new staff not knowing who to speak with.

Mention is made of the SEND register and Provision Map being updated termly and reviewed 'regularly'. The regularity of such reviews could vary dependent on the length of each term. In addition, it is said that the SENDCo and SEN Team will meet 'regularly' with external agencies. Again, there is no indication of what timescale is considered 'regular'.

Methods of tracking the children's progress are mentioned as being the SEND register, Provision Map and Insight tracking. A parent reading the SEND Policy may not be aware of these tools and what they offer. A brief explanation of each system would be of use here, to help parents/carers better understand their function.

One of the policy's principles is that the views of the child and their parents/carers should be sought and taken into account. It would be useful here also, to indicate what parents/carers can do or provide, to help support the school in getting further help for their child, easing the worry and uncertainty they may already feel about attending meetings. Similarly, when attending a review, parents/carers know that most of the attendees will be experienced professionals and may feel overwhelmed about talking with them. It would be helpful if the SENDCo could provide a brief explanation of how the review will be conducted, the meeting structure/agenda and what sort of things the parent could discuss or bring to the review, to support them and their child.

The policy states that SEND specific support staff will work towards specified targets with SEND children. Dependent on staffing levels and the amount of SEND need in a setting, it may not always be possible to utilise a SEND specific staff member and instead the task may fall to a general support assistant, who may not have the required expertise to deliver the teaching effectively. This could result in the support assistant feeling inadequate and the child not receiving the correct level of support.

The policy says that parents/carers of SEND children may be given strategies to support their child's learning at home. Intentions here are good but depend on how willing the parents are to assist and/or how well they understand what is required of them. Teachers may provide resources for use at home but often do not have time to explain how to get the best results from them.

In the section on admission arrangements, the policy says all children are admitted according to the local authority admissions policy. This is no longer the case, as the school has joined a multi-academy trust, who are responsible for their own admissions arrangements, provided they abide by the current School Admissions Code.

Reference is made to the school's Accessibility Plan, in relation to children/staff with disabilities. There is no mention of where this can be accessed, so a parent/carers may not know where to look. Also, in the Graduated Approach section, the abbreviations EYFS, KS1 and KS2 are used. An initial full description, followed by the abbreviation in brackets, would assist those unfamiliar with the abbreviations. For example, Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). The same in other sections, where the initials EAL, SSE and SEMH are used, with no explanation of what they stand for.

The policy claims that the provision of higher quality teaching to the whole class can result in less pupils needing additional support. Whilst this is an ideal situation, it may

not always be possible. For instance, a newly qualified teacher may not yet have the confidence or experience needed to deliver higher quality teaching. Alternatively, it may be that a class teacher is absent through long term sickness, meaning a supply teacher may have to be hired. However good their methods, the supply teacher will be at a disadvantage, as they will not be familiar with the class or have formed the close relationships the usual teacher has with the children. Children may be apprehensive about speaking to the supply and not display the true extent of their knowledge. This could make assessment for additional support difficult, as an unrealistic view of the child is observed.

Reference is made of records being stored on CPOMS. Anyone not employed in school, or a new member of staff may not know what CPOMS is, and a brief description would be useful, explaining the system's full name and purpose.

A useful appendix is provided on the final page of the policy, showing a simple flow chart of how the graduated approach to identifying SEND needs works. This is a simple chart to understand and provides parents/carers and staff with an instant idea of what processes will be undertaken. They can then read into each section in more depth, within the policy itself.

On the whole, the practitioner finds the setting's SEND Policy easy to understand, having worked in education for a considerable time. However, it is clear to see how parents/carers or new staff members could be confused by the language and abbreviations used, if they have never come across them before. This highlights the fact that when writing any form of policy, the author needs to carefully consider their audience and what level of knowledge they possess about the chosen topic. In the case of education policies, it would be good practice to invite parents/carers to

contribute to the writing process, asking them what information they would find helpful and how they would like it explained. Policies could also be made available in different languages, ensuring that no EAL families are excluded and for anyone who may suffer from dyslexia, the school office could offer to print out policies on different coloured paper, to make reading easier, or to have a member of staff read out the policy in person, answering any questions the listener may have.

Reference List

Alfuraih, R. K., Almalki, N.S. and AlNemary, F.M. (2024), ' Effectiveness of picture exchange communication system in developing requesting skills for children with multiple disabilities'. *Front. Psychol.* 15:1434478, Available at: doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2024.1434478 (Accessed: 25th January 2025)

Bowlby, J. (1969), *Attachment and loss: Volume I: Attachment*, London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis

Boxall, M. (2002), *Nurture groups in school: Principles & practice*, London: Sage

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979), *The ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design*, Harvard University Press.

Burnham, L. (2016), *How to be an outstanding early years practitioner*, London, England: Bloomsbury.

Children and Families Act (2014), Available at:

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2014/6/contents> (Accessed: 26th January 2025)

Clayback, K.A. and Williford, A.P. (2022), 'Teacher and Classroom Predictors of Preschool Teacher Stress', *Center for Advanced Study of Teaching and Learning, University of Virginia, Early Education and Development*, Vol. 33 (No. 8, 1347-1363), Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10409289.2021.1972902> (Accessed: 26th January 2025)

Davies, N. and Lama, D. (no date), *"It's too slow. It doesn't make sense. I'll ask my friend to help me – it's better!"*: *Using e-translation in the classroom*, Available at: <https://www.naldic.org.uk/Resources/NALDIC/Teaching%20and%20Learning/Documents/NQ4.2.10.pdf>

Department for Education and Department of Health and Social Care (2014), *Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice: 0 to 25 years*, Reference: DFE-00205-2013, Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a7dcb85ed915d2ac884d995/SEND_Code_of_Practice_January_2015.pdf (Accessed: 25th November 2025)

Department for Education (2024), *Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework*, Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/670fa42a30536cb92748328f/EYFS_statutory_framework_for_group_and_school_-_based_providers.pdf (Accessed: 25th January 2025)

Department for Education and Training Victoria (2019), *The EAL Handbook: Advice to schools on programs for supporting students learning English as an Additional*

Language, Available at:

<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/school/teachers/teachingresources/diversity/eal/eslhandbook.pdf>, (Accessed: 26th January 2025)

Early Years Coalition (2021). *Birth to 5 Matters: Non-statutory guidance for the Early Years Foundation Stage*. St Albans: Early Education. Available at:

<https://birthto5matters.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Birthto5Matters-download.pdf> (Accessed: 26th January 2025)

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (no date), *Early Childhood Education and Care*, Available at: <https://www.oecd.org/en/about/programmes/early-childhood-education-and-care-ecec.html> (Accessed: 26th January 2025)

Equality Act (2010), Available at:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a7e3237ed915d74e33f0ac9/Equality_Act_Advice_Final.pdf (Accessed: 26th January 2025)

Ferdman, B.M., Prime, J. and Riggio, R.E. (eds.) (2021), *Inclusive leadership: transforming diverse lives, workplaces and societies*. London. Routledge.

Kariippanon, K.E., Cliff, D.P., Okely, A.D. and Parrish, A., (2020). 'The 'why' and 'how' of flexible learning spaces: A complex adaptive systems analysis', *Journal of Educational Change*, **21**(4), pp. 569-593.

Palikara, O. *et al.* (2018) 'Professionals' views on the new policy for special educational needs in England: ideology versus implementation', *European Journal of Special Needs*

Education, 34(1), pp. 83–97. doi: 10.1080/08856257.2018.1451310 (Accessed: 26th January 2025)

Shore, L. M., & Chung, B. G. (2022), 'Inclusive Leadership: How Leaders Sustain or Discourage Work Group Inclusion. *Group & Organization Management*', 47(4), 723-754, Available at:
<https://journals-sagepubcom.ezproxy.uwtsd.ac.uk/doi/10.1177/1059601121999580>
(Accessed: 25th January 2025)

Skinner, B. F. (1957), *Verbal Behavior*, New York: Appleton-Century Crofts Prentice-Hall, Inc.

Strogonova, I. and Piper, A. (2018), *The use of pictograms in the educational process for children with moderate and severe intellectual disabilities*, Daugavpils University. Available at: <https://shortest.link/4rQH> (Accessed: 25th January 2025)

Theoharis, G. & Scanlan, M (eds) 2020, *Leadership for Increasingly Diverse Schools*, Taylor & Francis Group, Oxford. Available from: ProQuest Ebook Central. [25 January 2025].

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978), *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*, Harvard University Press.

Yorkswood Primary School (no date), 'Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Policy', Available at:
<https://primarysite-prod-sorted.s3.amazonaws.com/yorkswood-primary-school/UploadedDocument/0bb61991-a3cf-439b-8673-3258fdd314d6/yorkswood-send-policy-22-final.pdf> (Accessed: 25th January 2025)

