

Scenario

A young boy who attends the setting under the Flying Start scheme is arriving most mornings complaining he is hungry. Concerns have been raised by members of staff that snack monies have not been paid for some time, although staff still provide a snack. He often attends without bringing lunch and staff have been making him something onsite. Mum is approachable and willing to communicate, and it seems that due to recent unemployment, economic strain has been placed on the family and they are struggling to make ends meet. Further information has been difficult to obtain due to Mum's broken English so it cannot be determined if the family is getting the help and support that they require. The setting leader has been asked to intervene.

Section 1

What is inclusive leadership?

Inclusive leadership is a style of leadership that places value on its team members by inviting diverse perspectives. It creates an environment where people feel that contributions are recognised and valued and will help improve overall performance (Siraj-Blatchford and Hallet, 2014, p.17). Inclusive workplaces are collaborative and based on equal contribution and mutual respect, appreciating differences, and promoting an ongoing commitment to removing the impediments that cause marginalisation and exclusion (Ferdman, Prime, and Riggio, 2021, p196).

Furthermore, inclusive leaders are aware of bias, do not discriminate, and instead create an environment where everyone feels valued and empowered which fosters an inclusive culture (Randel *et al.*, 2018; Bourke and Titus, 2019).

Inclusive practice is central to providing excellent quality settings, it fosters teamwork and collaboration with external agencies, improves communication, and also supports diverse perspectives, experiences, and ideas (Newstead and Isles-buck, 2010; Siraj-Blatchford and Hallet, 2014, p.18).

In the given scenario inclusive leadership can be used to ensure that the child and family are supported through any issues that they may have and that they can be directed towards further assistance and support in the form of external agencies or advisory boards that could make the situation easier. An inclusive leader will listen,

communicate, and ensure that the family and team members feel that their viewpoints are considered whilst also respecting the views and rights of the child (Bortini *et al.*, 2018; Bourke and Titus, 2019).

The child in question attends as part of the Flying Start scheme which is a government-funded programme of Early Years care targeted towards families with children under the age of four years. Flying Start schemes are run in some of the most disadvantaged areas of the United Kingdom and therefore an inclusive leader will be aware of the core provisions in place within the scheme to influence positive outcomes for children, including access to parenting support (Welsh Government, 2017b).

Links to children

More than 1 in 5 people in the United Kingdom lived in poverty in 2021/22 (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2024) and a third of all school-aged children in Wales currently live in poverty, which equates to almost 200,000 children (Hughes and Davies, 2019). Poverty can have negative effects on the developmental pathway and as such can permanently impact children who are experiencing it (McIntyre, Kwok, and Patten, 2018).

Various adverse situations can be experienced by children and their families that can lead them to poverty, and can therefore influence outcomes for children, and these tend to co-occur. Examples could include lone parenthood, low parental education attainment levels, unemployment, lack of affordable and accessible childcare, abuse, neglect, substandard housing, and homelessness (Hughes and Davies, 2019).

An inclusive leader will ensure that all children within the setting have support. Now that this issue has been flagged the leader would take steps to speak with the family of the child more formally. There are several ways in which settings can take measures to positively impact the lives of poorer children including free school meals and free breakfast clubs. Lack of nutritious food and regular mealtimes are a significant barrier when it comes to positive outcomes for children (Lambie-Mumford and Sims, 2018).

A plan could be put in place to ensure the child has nutritious food provided for him by the setting at breakfast, snack, and lunch times, and that this happens without

drawing undue attention to the situation and affecting friendships. Friendships have an important positive impact on children's well-being and can also function as a protective factor against peer victimisation in such times (Defeyter, Graham, and Russo, 2015). Staff members would be briefed on the situation and arrangements moving forward. The provision of a nutritious breakfast in the company of staff and peers before activities begin will bolster energy levels, provide valuable social interactions with friends, and help avoid the detrimental effects that skipping breakfast can have (Defeyter, Graham, and Russo, 2015).

The key worker would speak to the child 1:1 so that they can gauge how the child is coping at home. Children can provide excellent insights and solutions when they are consulted about situations and their feelings as per Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (cited in Children's Commissioner for Wales, 2020; Welsh Government, 2022), which states that all children should have the right to express their views and have them heard and be taken seriously in all matters affecting them (UNICEF, 2019).

The child in this scenario has an excellent relationship with his parents and this would be nurtured and encouraged by the practitioners within the setting. The family would be feeling isolated due to their current financial status and the inclusive leader must demonstrate how the setting, other professionals, and also the wider community can support, assist, and encourage. Children living in poverty who benefit from sensitive, available, and consistent parenting are more resilient and when there are positive relationships within the wider network of social support this can further influence resilience and the association with positive outcomes (Welsh Government, 2017b; Welsh Government, 2022).

Links to families

Welsh Government Families First initiative (2017) recognises the importance of early intervention and therefore prevention of poverty and other adverse conditions and the need to build family resilience and well-being to facilitate this. This was brought about as a result of many statutory responsibilities enforced by the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 and the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act 2015. The Family First initiative reflects the Welsh Government's commitment to the UNCRC as a basis for all policymaking in Wales and its commitment to ensuring all

young people are provided the opportunities to live up to their potential no matter their upbringing. This being said, not all children can get the support required from their home environments and it is vitally important that parents are directed to support and services that can assist them.

Flying Start guidance (Welsh Government, 2017b) recognises the significant role that parents play concerning outcomes for children and that situations within a parent's life can change, resulting in Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) which can cause problems in childhood and later in life. The child in this scenario has a good relationship with the parents and this is a protective factor that has the potential to promote resilience in the child and therefore minimise the impact of the situation, especially if action is taken immediately (Welsh Government, 2017b).

The quality of parent-child relationships is associated with the development of secure attachment as discussed by Bowlby (1997, cited in NSPCC, 2021). Secure attachments are shown to influence positive outcomes for children. Additionally, it is also important that parents, guardians, and other caregivers are invited into authentic partnerships with early years settings, that settings appreciate parents for being the primary care and education providers for the child, and that parents are not made to feel 'less than' during interactions with the setting and within the community (Welsh Government, 2022).

As discussed previously, the inclusive leader would arrange to speak more formally with the family. A language barrier has been highlighted so it is helpful to arrange for a family member with a better command of the English language to attend with Mum. Failing this an external translator could be arranged. Increased levels of cultural and linguistic diversity within early years settings require the inclusive leader to communicate with families in different ways and to be ready to adapt to changing situations (Egilsson, Einarsdóttir, and Dockett, 2021). An organised meeting with provisions that allow for communication, can afford the family time and space to explain their situation and can provide the setting with opportunities to explore solutions. The inclusive leader will assist families in accessing support services from community agencies, and organisations relating to healthcare, economic development, housing, and social elements (Theoharis and Scanlan, 2021). Plans for the future can be discussed, interventions suggested, and referrals made that can

ensure the family is getting the proper help that they need. It is a fact that how we interact with parents and families can have a great bearing on how well children develop (Welsh Government, 2022).

Inclusive leaders need also to be culturally responsive leaders who ensure that the culture of the child and their family is appreciated and celebrated which in turn empowers parents from diverse racial and ethnic communities (Theoharis and Scanlan, 2021; Welsh Government, 2022).

Links to professionals

Families in challenging situations often do not know where to go to receive help, they may fear official agencies or not realise what financial assistance can be provided or where to go to apply (City and County of Swansea, 2023). This can be made worse when families are isolated due to barriers in culture or language. Meetings with families can help them to understand that help is available. Settings may reach out to other professionals such as social workers, to ensure that families can claim everything they are entitled to (City and County of Swansea, 2023). Social workers also have information on workshops that families can attend on budgeting, healthy food preparation, and language skills in addition to having links to community centres and organisations like Foodbanks, that can further support families in the community (City and County of Swansea, 2024). The Every Child Matters green paper (Department for Education and Skills, 2003) highlighted the importance of bringing together services and responsibilities for children under one coherent national framework, which would aim to equalise and optimise outcomes for children. This involves ensuring that caring and effective leadership and multi-agency working are in practice continuously by placing the welfare, interests, and outcomes for children at the centre of all (Siraj-Blatchford and Hallet, 2014, p21). Other professionals, and how settings relate to them, influence outcomes for children, and successful partnerships are linkages that connect individuals working in different sectors by way of a common goal (Welsh Government, 2022).

The Families First initiative (Welsh Government, 2017) endorses multi-agency working and ensures that families in need, receive interlinked support when it is required. Early intervention prevents problems from escalating and provides a strength-based approach for families to recognise what works within their skillset, to

support empowerment and ownership of growth and development (Ey Alliance, 2019).

There can be barriers to engagement due to many factors, some of which can include time pressures, family circumstances, physical barriers, and lack of confidence, but with good levels of communication and perseverance, these barriers can be overcome, and solutions can be found (Welsh Government, 2016).

Links to the community

An Early Years setting is an integral part of a large network of organisations that exist both in the public and private sectors. This network stands to serve and support the local community (Welsh Government, 2016). Many community projects can help families in all kinds of need when a person knows where to look. Settings can act as hubs that can provide information on a range of support services and how these can be accessed, this creates links within organisations and the community and means that everyone is working together to improve access to healthcare, clinics, and adult education classes and, therefore to reform the quality of life within an area (City and County of Swansea, 2023). Community food banks are an example of an invaluable resource to help tackle child poverty and have become more prevalent in recent times (Lambie-Mumford and Sims, 2018; City and County of Swansea, 2024). It is now possible for local churches and councillors to refer families to food banks for help. This can help to take some financial pressure off the weekly bills in periods of economic downturn.

Successful inclusive settings invest resources in building social capital, creating a welcoming climate, and fostering community engagement. Schools and settings that are dedicated to engaging with the community and that foster excellent parent partnerships are already working inclusively (Welsh Government, 2022).

Furthermore, independent community organisations, for example, community parenting classes, playgroups, and sports teams, which assist in bringing together parents and practitioners across racial and economic backgrounds, play a significant role in creating a more inclusive social environment (The red card, 2023).

Such community-run schemes can be found in many parks, churches, and community centres and can provide families with opportunities to build relationships, provide children with opportunities to develop social skills, and provide a much-

needed respite from sometimes stressful family life (Theoharis and Scanlan, 2021; The red card, 2023).

These important connections that form around and with the child are demonstrative of Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory 1979, where a child's life is viewed as a complex system of individual parts that are affected by various relationships, and instances within their environment ranging from the family and school to broader concepts such as culture and customs (Brodie and Savage, 2015).

Conclusion

Leadership that recognises cultural and other diversities in addition to excellent parental and community engagement, interconnects to create a foundation for inclusive leadership. Inclusive leadership within an Early Years setting requires attending to the multiple, intersecting dimensions of diversity across cultural boundaries and adapting service delivery to meet the needs associated with these dimensions.

Section 2

What is a policy?

A policy is a set of statements that aim to inform and direct individuals to ensure that the organisation's objectives are met fairly and legally (Baldock, Fitzgerald, and Kay, 2013). A policy will state the commitments of an organisation and will specify how they intend to address and solve issues (Baldock, Fitzgerald, and Kay, 2013). The intentions of a policy should clearly demonstrate the organisations values and whom the policy aims to benefit. However, the interpretation of policies can be ambivalent and open to misinterpretation. Policies can have direct intentions but can be written in ambiguous language that can be difficult to challenge (Hallet, 2015).

Critical Evaluation

The policy that will be discussed in this section of the portfolio will be the equality and diversity policy of Cylch Meithrin Pontarddulais (Mudiad Meithrin, 2024) which is a micro-level policy. This policy provides firm intentions and aims, in an exact but not forceful manner. The policy makes statements and chooses between definite

language, for example, the term 'will' and more suggestive language, for example, the term 'aim' (Hallet, 2015).

The policy states that the organisation aims to provide an accessible working and learning environment for disabled adults and children, but does not specify what it means by the term disabled and this is open to interpretation. Such policies serve to label certain groups of people as inferior (Conn and Davis, 2023), and by suggesting that some people need to be 'included' there is a direct contradiction of the aim of inclusion (Brodie and Savage, 2015; Knight and Crick, 2021). The role of the inclusive leader would be to assess the situation and to ensure that the disability could be accommodated within the constructs of health and safety parameters. Although the policy aims to include all, this is sometimes impractical and including terms such as 'as far as reasonably possible' or 'at the leader's discretion' could ensure that the organisation is not held responsible when accommodations cannot be made. The relationship between policy and practice is not straightforward and the term inclusion is a multi-faceted consideration of not only the policy mandates but also the practicalities and legal boundaries of a given situation (Brodie and Savage, 2015; Conn and Davis, 2023).

The inclusion of articles from the UNCRC demonstrates that the setting is a rights-respecting environment. It clearly states the setting's intentions to uphold the rights of the child in its daily practice (Hallet, 2015). It should be mentioned that the UNCRC has no legal basis in the United Kingdom and instead is more aspirational than enforceable (Brodie and Savage, 2015), however Wales as a devolved nation has a commitment to ensuring the UNCRC is the basis for all policymaking relating to children and young people in Wales (Welsh Government, 2019).

The policy document outlines the organisation's intentions toward providing barrier-free opportunities for all children. The organisation makes these statements in line with the National Minimum Standards which are a set of requirements that the setting is bound to uphold legally (Welsh Government, 2023). Statements that are bound by law are written more forcefully, setting out strict intentions and the consequences of failing to comply with them.

The Equality Act 2010, part 6 attempted to bring together and update anti-discrimination legislation in respect of education. The Act (Equality Act 2010) makes

it unlawful to discriminate on grounds of disability, race, age, gender, religion, belief, or sex. However, the Equality Act could not address one of the key issues relating to inclusion, which is that of poverty. A key factor behind social exclusion is material poverty. A person can experience discrimination because of the protected characteristics described in the Equality Act 2010 but experiencing discrimination due to the effects of material poverty is not currently legally recognised (Brodie and Savage, 2015; Entrust, 2020)

Wales is defined by persistent poverty, and inequality goes hand in hand with this. Policy changes within Wales at a national level have aimed to address the principles of equity, social justice, human rights, and community engagement. The current reform of the Welsh education system aims to raise standards and reduce the impact of disadvantage by providing universal access to opportunities (Welsh Government, 2022; Conn and Davis, 2023). These national changes should be reflected in all settings, and inclusion policies should aim to address the wider issues of inclusion instead of focusing on race and culture.

The policy promotes inclusive leadership and demonstrates inclusive practices within the setting, clearly stating the importance of excellent two-way communication and the importance the setting places on the support and opinions of its parent partners and the wider community (Welsh Government, 2022).

The document stresses the organisation's commitment to providing opportunities for all children to benefit from a range of activities that promote cultural understanding and celebrate diversity. This promotes inclusive leadership by providing a framework by which the inclusive leader can ensure that activities and resources demonstrate diversity in the form of activities, games, books, and toys (Care Inspectorate, 2020; Welsh Government, 2022; Sensory Trust, 2024). However, it has been stated that the way that settings traditionally celebrate cultural festivals can be deemed as culturally inappropriate and it is important that settings are aware of stereotyping and bias when they interpret this part of the policy (Newstead and Isles-buck, 2010; Inquiry being, 2018; Ndna, 2021).

The organisation's commitment to ensuring the professional development of its staff is clearly stated and the policy has further indicated that this training and development must include cultural awareness training and training that enables staff

to understand disabilities and accommodations more fully (Care Inspectorate, 2020; Mudiad Meithrin, 2024) However, within the policy, it is clearly stated that inclusion should be applied to gender and sexual orientation also, and given the importance of gender issues in current times there should be a requirement to ensure all staff receives gender training also.

Conclusion

The policy chosen to review appears to be professionally written and with some small modifications could ensure practitioners are better protected in the workplace and also that children are provided with a more comprehensive education within a more diverse environment.

Section 3

The inclusive leader – promoting inclusive practice in a diverse Early Years Setting.

Early childhood is a critical time in any child's life. It is the time when their beliefs, attitudes, and values are formed, and it is a crucial time to introduce and promote equality and diversity (One Education, 2023). Settings can provide children with safe, nurturing, and supportive environments where they can find out who they are and learn how to be accepting of others regardless of their backgrounds (Brodie and Savage, 2015; One Education, 2023).

The first step in promoting diversity and inclusion within a setting would be to create an inclusive environment. An inclusive environment values a child's individuality and celebrates their diversity while also fostering respect for others (Welsh Government, 2022). Furthermore, an inclusive environment should offer varied resources and materials that reflect different ethnicities or personal characteristics, for example, dolls with different skin tones or books that contain characters with disabilities (Entrust, 2020). Inclusive settings would display a wide range of different people from divergent backgrounds ensuring that they are as representative of the world as possible. The opportunities that an inclusive setting provides will aim to teach children about people who have different backgrounds, family structures, abilities, and cultures than themselves (Entrust, 2020; One Education, 2023). And most

importantly practitioners should be using inclusive language, whether in displays or on pictures, or in written and verbal communication. Consideration should also be given to gender-neutral language and avoidance should be given to making assumptions about gender identities or backgrounds (Care Inspectorate, 2020; One Education, 2023).

To achieve a productive, efficient, and effective inclusive environment staff should be offered essential training to help them to understand the many different perspectives, cultures, and individuals in today's world. There are various kinds of training available which could include teaching about language barriers and how to combat these, supporting children with Additional Learning Needs (ALNs), or just generally about cultural differences (Peer and Reid, 2021).

Training should be a continuous process and should ensure staff are always familiar with the latest practices. Policies and procedures should be in place that depict appropriate practice in clear terms ensuring a welcoming and respectful environment is in place for all (Hadfield, Jopling, and Needham, 2015).

Settings should ensure that inclusive teaching practices are adopted and that these practices cater to the diverse nature of children who may attend (Sensory Trust, 2024). Teaching practices should be flexible to accommodate all abilities and should be focused on the play-based curriculum, teaching can be further enhanced with visual and sensory aids (Welsh Government, 2022; Sensory Trust, 2024). Parent partnership is an important aspect for consideration in addition to efficient partnerships with external agencies and other professionals, especially in cases where there are specific needs to be met (Peer and Reid, 2021; Welsh Government, 2022). Children should be allowed to express themselves and encouraged to share their own experiences as they learn, and these effective strategies can help to promote respect for diversity and encourage acceptance for all (Welsh Government, 2022).

An inclusive environment supports children with additional learning needs and ensures that all children with different needs are offered equal support and are allowed to participate in all activities, and this further fosters a sense of equality and diversity (Peer and Reid, 2021; Welsh Government, 2022; Sensory Trust, 2024).

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(Appendix A – Unpublished Equality and Diversity Policy)**CYLCH MEITHRIN PONTARDDULAIS**
EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY POLICY**Aim**

The aim of the Cylch Meithrin is to provide an inclusive environment which promotes the contribution and participation of everyone involved with Cylch Meithrin.

We will positively promote diversity, equality of opportunities and anti-discrimination policies and practices for all children and adults associated with our work. We will regularly monitor our personnel policies and procedures to ensure that they are fair and objective. Our aim is to attract a wide range of competent and able applicants for our posts. We aim to provide an accessible working and learning environment for disabled adults and children. We will ensure that all our staff know their rights and their personal responsibilities contained within policies of the Cylch Meithrin. We acknowledge that everyone has a right to be treated fairly and without discrimination, and to enjoy a harmonious working and learning environment.

The Cylch Meithrin will ensure that all sectors of the community, including those from a deprived background, regardless of their language, know that the Cylch Meithrin activities are available to them.

The Rights of the Child

This policy is part of ensuring that the Cylch Meithrin respects children's rights as included in the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child, particularly:

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| Article 2 | The Convention applies to every child without discrimination, whatever their ethnicity, gender, religion, language, abilities or any other status, whatever they think or say, whatever their family background. |
| Article 3 | All organisations concerned with children should work towards what is best for each child. |
| Article 8 | Governments should respect children's right to a name, a nationality and family ties. |
| Article 12 | Every child has the right to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them, and to have their views considered and taken seriously. |

Article 14 Children have the right to think and believe what they want and to practice their religion, as long as they are not stopping other people from enjoying their rights.

Article 23 Every disabled child has the right to live a full and decent life with dignity and, as far as possible, independence and to play an active part in the community.

Article 30 Children have a right to learn and use the language and customs of their families, whether these are shared by the majority of people in the country or not.

Article 31 Every child has the right to relax, play and take part in a wide range of cultural and artistic activities.

Code of Practice

The Cylch Meithrin environment

The Cylch Meithrin commits to give every child barrier free opportunity to benefit from a range of early years experiences. To this end, the Cylch Meithrin will ensure that the Cylch Meithrin environment promotes understanding of cultural diversity and reflects the society within which we live.

The Cylch Meithrin will:

- promote equality and diversity within each activity and though working with parents/carers/guardians¹.
- recognise that equality and diversity include all aspects of employment and service provision². To this end, the Cylch will ensure that the committee/manager and staff comply with this policy at all times and will review the policy annually.
- recognise and remove any practice which discriminates on the basis of race, disability, gender, age, sexual orientation, pregnancy and motherhood, religion or social status.
- promote and atmosphere which is free of discrimination, harassment and bullying. The Cylch will deal with any behaviour which violates this. Failure by a member of staff or volunteer to adhere to this policy could lead to action under the Disciplinary Procedure.

¹ NMS 2016, 16.1: equality of opportunity and anti-discriminatory practice is promoted in the setting

² NMS 2016, 16.3: all children and adults are treated with equal concern and the registered person complies with relevant anti-discriminatory legislation and good practice in all areas, including employment, training, admission to day care and access to the resources, activities and facilities available.

Working with Families

The Cylch Meithrin is committed to ensuring that families from all sectors of the community are aware that the Cylch Meithrin's activities are available to them.

The Cylch Meithrin will:

- create an impression that welcomes and reflects all sectors of the community by using clear and simple language. Ensure that any letter, newsletter, statement, poster, booklet, leaflet etc. which displays the Cylch name does not use discriminatory language/pictures/images. We will also ensure that all literature will actively and positively demonstrate diversity in all its forms.
- ensure that everyone associated with the Cylch are made aware of all the activities that they have a right to take part through an appropriate accessible medium, in clear language, and free from any terms that could be discriminatory.
- encourage parents/carers/guardians to take part in the setting's life e.g. by ensuring a fair and balanced representation of Cylch staff on the management committee / parents association.
- provide barrier free facilities and/or opportunities, taking into consideration peoples language, nationality, race, gender, sexual orientation, disability, religion, marital status, culture or social status. This will help allow everybody to contribute and celebrate the life of the Cylch.
- arrange meetings which are suitable to the circumstances of all associated with the Cylch, in terms of time, notice, access, interpretation equipment, and any other necessary arrangements. Monitor attendance and consider changes to time, location and any other barriers, in order to give the opportunity to parents or guardians who wouldn't be able to attend otherwise.
- monitor access to the Cylch's activities and make a special effort to include every sector of the community. In order to do this, the Cylch will undertake an annual review of the Cylch's activities.
- work in partnership with parents/carers/guardians to meet the medical, cultural and dietary needs of the children.

Activities of the Cylch Meithrin

The Cylch Meithrin is committed to offering children an opportunity to benefit from a range of early years experiences. To this end, the Cylch Meithrin ensures that the activities and resources in the Cylch Meithrin promote understanding and celebration of cultural diversity.

The Cylch Meithrin will:

- provide support and encouragement to members of staff to develop their careers and increase their contribution to the work of the Cylch Meithrin by enhancing their knowledge and skills. The Cylch Meithrin will provide training to staff and volunteers in order to improve skills and expand their knowledge. This should include cultural awareness training and training that enables staff to have a full and practical understanding of the Social Model of Disability.
- ensure that cultural and disability diversity is reflected in the range of resources that the Cylch Meithrin provides e.g. dolls, toys, books, games.
- encourage children and their families to share experiences from their everyday lives.
- look for opportunities to invite or visit representatives from different communities to share experiences from their everyday lives.
- celebrate a variety of cultural festivals.
- encourage children to learn about different foods, eating practices, and encourage children to develop respect toward the various cultural practices.

Associated Policies

Inclusion and Equal Opportunities Policy

Staffing Policy

Admissions Policy

Healthy Eating and Keep Fit Policy

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