

SECTION 1

What is inclusive leadership and why is it important?

Ferdman (2020) identifies inclusive leadership as the ability to ensure that everyone feels included, appreciated, safe and comfortable enough to have a voice, feel heard and the ability to educate others about their diversity. It is about taking the time to build relationships with people, get to know their background and help them feel supported in being their authentic self. Bowers, Robertson and Parchman (2012) further supports this stating that if people from different hierarchical levels within the workplace feel that they have different levels of worth they may not feel comfortable voicing an opinion, which can have a negative impact on the setting. To overcome this, an inclusive leadership style is needed so that it will promote positive and encouraging safe environments where people not only feel safe to engage but to go a step further and be confident enough to offer new ideas or ask for help when needed. Qi *et al* (2019) states that by providing people with fully inclusive support it can result in employees displaying heightened innovative behaviour as they feel that their ideas are valued and they will strive for the best they can be and wanting the best for the workplace, which will result positively for the workplace. Douglass (2019) agrees stating that the quality of leadership within the setting dictates the impact that process quality has on the staff and the children. By being fully inclusive and developing strong relationships with staff this will then provide the staff with the inclusive relationship tools needed to work with the children. Therefore, strengthening the inclusive approach throughout all aspects of school life.

Bortini *et al.* (2016) highlights the difficulties that leaders face when breaking down the barriers for those who are in minority groups or who feel isolated in society. It takes a leader who is confident to question these individuals to gain a greater understanding of their diversities become more aware for mutual benefit. This involves not just looking at the leader's ideas but collaborating and having joint involvement with everyone included. Booysen (2014) further supports this approach agreeing that there has been a shift in the way that leadership is now not solely focused on what the management want the followers to do but collection of others working together collaboratively and the values coming from everyone. Sharing the same aims through a consistent tailored approach will ensure full inclusivity for all.

Reflective Scenario

The reflective scenario is based around six-year-old Sam who attends year one. Sam is being raised by his father who is a single parent. Sam's Father has regained guardianship of Sam recently after experiencing difficulties with drug and alcohol addiction which led to Sam being placed in temporary foster care. Dad has now fully overcome his addictions and regained full care of Sam. He will still need to be monitored monthly to ensure there has not been any relapses or difficulties arising. It has been noticed at the beginning and end of school, on the yard, the father seems shy and does not mix with any other parents along with avoiding any interaction with staff members. Sam is doing well academically in school however; he does appear to have difficulties making friends and socialising with others.

The practitioner will now use their inclusive leadership skills to help with any socialisation issues Sam and his father are dealing with, whilst combatting any negative stereotyping and giving them both a sense of belonging and validity. This will be done whilst looking at different aspects such as: Sam, the father, the practitioner/professionals and the community.

Sam is displaying a range of difficulties regarding his social and emotional development. He does not appear to have any type of trusting relationship with the children and staff within the setting, resulting in him being isolated and withdrawn. Coyne (1976) as cited in Wilson, Piek and Kane (2012) states that children with limited peer engagement are often linked to being rejected by their peers as they do not have the ability to socialise in a way that society expects, and this can then result in them becoming depressed. Lundy *et al.* (2012) warns that there has been evidence found that children who display depression symptoms are more likely to have poor self-esteem which affects not only their well-being but their academic abilities also. NHS (2020) states that a common reason for a child to experience depression is due to events in their life that have caused difficulty and distress. These are evident in Sam's life due to Dad's addiction issues, his temporary stay in foster care followed by his inability to socialise and make friends.

Welsh Government (2016) states that practitioners have a duty to ensure that every child is provided with positive experiences in a supportive environment which develops

their well-being. Promoting a child's health and well-being is vital in the early years as this will give the child the tools needed to thrive throughout their life. Mentally Healthy Schools (No date) state that leaders within educational settings should have well-being at the forefront of all aspects of school life. It should be a continuous thread that weaves through policies, practice and activities. With having a well-being policy, it is clear what is expected of the practitioners and informs the parents on how the setting aims to promote health and well-being in what should be an easily accessible document. Public Health England (2021) discuss the eight principles that are needed to approach health and wellbeing and there is a strong focus on referrals and interventions to provide children with specific support according to their situation and needs. Gov.uk (2021) state that for this to take place it requires leaders and practitioners being trained on how to promote health and well-being. They need to ensure a healthy whole school approach and how to identify and support individuals like Sam who need further interventions.

Danby and Hamilton (2016) identify in a study how practitioners find it difficult to use the term mental health with children in the early years. The staff in the study reported that they were aware of the term and its meaning but felt that they shied away from using it and called it the 'elephant in the room'. They stated that they felt there is often a stigma attached to phrases such as 'poor mental health' and that when dealing with parents regarding children that have signs of mental health issues they found that using phrases such as difficulties with their 'emotional health' and 'well-being' more acceptable by the parent. Frost (2020) discusses how inclusive leadership has a role in culture building and that everyone within the school community should contribute to it. By being aware of these issues regarding talking about mental health and the stigmas attached to it, practitioners can work together to find the best suited approach to deal with it. Lonsinski *et al.* (2019) discusses the role that schools have in the battle with overcoming bias, stereotyping and discrimination. The staff and the children need to have awareness of diversity and learn about other situations to help them become more knowledgeable which can lead to less negative behaviours surrounding any type of discrimination. Saloviita (2020) identifies potential issues in changing practitioners attitudes and perspectives with them claiming that younger practitioners were found to be more positive about inclusion. Another aspect they discuss is self-efficacy and how confident the practitioner is in their attitude and preferences and how they

influence their students by using these, this relies heavily on the practitioner's skill set and previous training. With practitioners and leaders having appropriate training it will help inform others and give a more cohesive approach.

However, Coughlan (2017) report there being shortages in funding for staff training, therefore causing barriers and preventing teachers to continuing their professional development. It was reported that 0.65% of primary school budgets, on average, were spent on staff training, resulting in teacher's continual professional development suffering unless leaders make cuts in their budgets elsewhere. This is further supported by TES (2016) who report that in a study carried out by the ATL teaching union 49% of practitioners responded saying that there had not been adequate support and funding for them to ensure children with additional learning needs were fully having their needs met. These are potential barriers to Sam receiving the support needed. However, in the setting there is a Thrive trained practitioner who can assess Sam alongside his class teacher using the online Thrive assessment tool.

Thrive (2022) focusses on the use of a social and emotional development model that identifies the child's needs and provides the practitioner with an insight into their emotions followed by an action plan which includes strategies and activities to help the child fill in any developmental gaps. Teachwire (2022) supports the use of Thrive and how it supports children with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. It states that by the school embracing a Thrive approach and having individuals working with staff in small groups or on one-to-one basis they can build relationships and identify a 'safe place, safe person'. This would benefit Sam who has very little interaction with his peers and only engages with staff when asked questions in activities. Through the use of Thrive Sam would build his relationship skills, initially on a one-to-one basis with a practitioner, followed by slowly introducing other carefully selected peers into the sessions. Collins (2014) discusses the importance of building relationships and how theorist Bronfenbrenner believed that engaging in multiple face to face relations with others, whether it is in school, at home or in the community, will influence Sam's relationship skills. Therefore, helping Sam build relationships and giving him a sense of belonging in more places than just his home. Randel *et al.* (2018) states that it is the role of the practitioner and the leader to ensure that they are willing to encourage these opportunities and help Sam achieve a sense of belonging. As Thrive (2022) requires parental permission the setting will require Sam's father to

have an informal meeting with the practitioner regarding the plan for the intervention. Simple steps the practitioner can take to help build Sam's confidence and social skills are daily check ins. This can be done on entry to school by saying Hello and asking how they are feeling, noticing the child throughout the day with simple praises and involving other practitioners to do the same. With this approach Sam can feel more valued and comfortable to interact and give their input and views. This corresponds with the UNCRC (No date) Article 12, the right to express their views and have them respected as well as their feelings.

To help Sam further build these relationships the practitioner needs to build their relationship with Sam's father. As previously mentioned, Sam's father, is often observed isolated on the school yard and has no obvious relations with the other parents, in addition to that he tends to avoid interactions with the school's practitioners. The UKDPC (2012) discusses the stigmas found around people with drug and alcohol addictions stating that people that have previously been linked with these issues can often be ashamed of their past and fear that they are still labelled as a substance user regardless of their progress and rehabilitation. This could be a possible barrier for Sam's father as he may feel judged by the other parents. Kenny and Barrington (2018) state that individuals that are rehabilitated are usually supported by a range of agencies such as social services and the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) to assist them with emotional, instrumental, informational and financial support. London Councils (2012) promote the use of MASH as their aim is to work with the adults and children who have been referred for support after being through various situations. The aim of this is a collaboration of local authority, police, probation, practitioners and health services to work together to share and combine information on a family and work together on what action is needed.

This type of Multi-Agency approach is fully inclusive with all parties involved in decision making to provide Sam and his father with support. They aim to find the best way to help Dad maintain his sobriety, work on his life skills and guide him with his fatherly duties to Sam. However, there can often be barriers when using these services. According to Ferguson *et al.* (2021) Some of the people who require these services are not always as accepting to receive them. Like with Sam's Dad, they are mandatory meetings with plans that must be followed as they are there to ensure the safety of the child and to help maintain the Dad's progress of the rehabilitation. Axford *et al.* (2012)

argues that for these types of services to work well they need the full co-operation and communication of the parent/s and the practitioners. This can often be difficult if they feel they are being forced to do it or on the other hand if it is optional, they may not fully comply by not completing all the actions proposed. This is agreed with by Malouf *et al.* (2017) who reports that parents can often feel discriminated against because of their needs and feel like they must prove themselves to avoid negative attitudes.

As Sam's Dad has very limited contact with the school practitioners this may be an underlying reason why. NSPCC (2022) state that it is the practitioner's duty to work on building a good relationship with the parent, making them feel welcomed, valued and comfortable without feeling pressured about their issues. As Sam's Dad has overcome his addictions and has full care of Sam there are no immediate safety issues around them. The practitioner needs to be supportive and give no unbiased views on Dad's past. Welsh Government (2017) state that the role of the parent in a child's life is vital, and if parents form strong relationships with the practitioners the child will be given the best support whilst having their rights met. Each parent has different levels of parental support needed and this must be taken into consideration when working with them, it is not a 'one size fits all' type of approach. Evangelou *et al.* (2013) discusses the different type of parents, one of the types mentioned is 'hard-to-reach' identifying these as disengaged, resistant and unreachable. Sam's Dad is disengaged with the school and can be described as hard-to-reach as he tends to avoid any interaction with practitioners and with the other parents in the yard. He may feel that he is excluded from the community as he has no relationships with the other parents. The practitioner has discussed this with Sam Dad's social worker. The social worker reported that they had a strong trusted relationship with Dad and they are open to attending the school for sessions to work together with Sam, Dad and the practitioner to help build a home/school relationship. Estyn (2020) supports this stating that practitioners who work in partnership with parents and the community, using informal chats, sharing information what the child has been doing daily and having them invited to play sessions allow opportunities to form strong relationships and enhance their child's learning and development. Rodd (2020) discusses the need for strong leadership which can support and guide others to have a fully inclusive approach, where there is mutual respect, and they work collaboratively to meet the needs of the family. Having a strong relationship with Sam's father will enhance Sam's experiences

of school, give his father a better insight into Sam's education and development and allow the practitioner a greater insight into Sam's home life and needs. Wellham (2015) supports this further stating that with a strong home school relationship it can help the parent feel valued and listened to. Quite often parents feel that they spend majority of the time listening to the practitioner about the child's time at the setting but for the practitioner to have a deeper understanding of the family it is important that they also listen to the parents' input.

With the practitioner taking a similar approach to Sam, they can make more focused effort on greeting Dad in the morning and end of the day and with the support of the social worker, invite Dad in for short informal chats and play sessions one-to-one with Sam. Welsh Government (2016b) supports this state that with the practitioner and setting working closely with Sam and his Dad, Sam's learning is influenced six times more than without this interaction. With this relationship working together it will have a big impact on how Sam develops as a learner.

For Sam's Dad to feel more supported by the community the MASH team could introduce him to some of the supportive clubs run within his local area. NHS (2020b) state that there are local support services for people who are battling or have battled addictions to substances. These support groups provide the attendee with information, support and coping strategies whilst being amongst a community of people who are experiencing the same difficulties. This further supported by FRANK (No date) who discusses the difficulties that recovery can involve. The need for a lifestyle adjustment can be more successful with the use of support from others who have a shared understanding of the difficulties. Education.Gov (No date) discuss how these situations can be barriers to parents being engaged in their child's school life and how the practitioner must be aware of these issues. By the practitioner being educated on the impact of these issues and what the parent has been through it will allow them to be fully inclusive of the parent/ families needs and adjust their approach to help them feel accepted. Lynch (2020) discusses how leaders need to take into consideration their staff's attitudes to certain communities and ensure there are no teachers stereotyping parents. They discuss how everyone has some level of prejudice, with some people being aware of them and others not. However, stereotyping can have negative impacts on the child, parent and teacher's relationships. Gerritsen (2020) states that inclusive leaders must ensure their

decisions and actions are fully inclusive, taking into consideration everyone involved, and they are the correct role model on how to treat others.

SECTION 2

Baldock, Fitzgerald and Kay (2013) states that the use of policies can influence the way that practitioners work within the setting. It is built on intentions and actions that should take place by those within the setting. For a policy to be impactful and work to its full potential it should be created with all the stake holders that will be involved in using it. Harackiewicz, Smith and Priniski (2016) further discusses policies stating that they are only useful if they link with the practice, to the classroom and with the learners. Policies should not just be about performance and standards they should also include the type of approach delivered and how to ignite interests for the learner. However, Hardy and Woodcock (2014) discuss how policies can often not be fully inclusive. Stating that inclusion should be at the forefront of all policies but there is more work needed to see evidence of that in educational policies. Section 2 will be looking at what level of inclusive leadership is evident within the New Curriculum for Wales (2020) which is a macro-level and an Equalities Policy from the practitioner's workplace which is at a micro-level policy from Newton Primary School. The practitioner's setting involves all practitioners and governors in group meetings when creating or adjusting any policies, just as they did with the creation of the Equality Policy Newton Primary (2021). Ferdman (2020) discusses the multi levels of inclusion and how the framework moves between the individual, groups, leaders, organisations and society. This is explained further by Liddicoat (2015) stating that macro level is created by the government and micro level is more locally created by the setting. This is agreed with by Curdt-Christiansen (2018) who goes onto highlight potential issues that can arise in creating micro level policies. If the information given in the macro level policy is not clear or is open to interpretation this can cause micro-level policies to have different focuses and possibly conflict against the original macro-level policy.

Welsh Government (2021) discussed the new Curriculum for Wales and how it aims to help each school become more individual in the way they teach their curriculum, making it more tailored to the needs of the children and the type of community they reside in. Reina *et al.* (2013) supports this style of linking the community with the

school as it ensures that the setting is fully aware of the needs of the community and how they can work together to tailor the right style of education. This benefits all parties involved as they will have strong levels of engagement and inclusivity. Alexander and Weekes-Bernard (2017) discusses the importance of supporting pupils to become more knowledgeable citizens about their and other cultures and their history and the diversity that surrounds everyday life. Welsh Government (2022) support this stating that one of the four purposes of the New Curriculum for Wales is for children to be ethically informed citizens. It breaks the purpose down to describe how they should be able to find evidence, form views, understand the impact of their actions, respect the rights and needs of others in addition to building their knowledge up about their culture, enabling them to become more aware of their individuality and celebrating others. Welsh Government (2021c) discusses how the new Curriculum for Wales aims to provide children with the ability to understand and respect their own and other cultures. This will depend on the teachers and settings creating lessons based on human societies. As this is a new focus of the curriculum it will be a new addition for practitioners to teach, possibly requiring training for them on how to deliver it. Which can pose difficult for leaders if funding is an issue.

However, Newton Primary (2021) state in their Equalities Policy that they are responsible for everyone to be treated fairly regardless of their age, race, gender, ability etc. This is policy for all aspects of school life not just related to the curriculum. It states that it aims to 'provide leadership and vision in respect of equality inclusion and community cohesion' Newton Primary School (2021) This corresponds with Peters *et al.* (2018) who states the importance of leaders making policies with clear aims and not disconnected by using unclear terms such as 'recommend' and 'as far as possible'

Gatley (2020) discusses how the New Curriculum for Wales is based upon the Four Core Purposes and the Areas of Learning and Experience. They state that the aim of the curriculum is for both to work together for it to succeed and no one of them to be seen as less or more important than the other. However, a difficulty that Gatley (2020) identifies is that the pressure and responsibility is put on the schools and staff themselves on how they will implement the New Curriculum for Wales. Wavehill (2019) reported feedback analysis from the Curriculum for Wales 2022. In the section linked to the curriculum's guidance material there were several suggestions made by

practitioners on how the guidance needed to be simplified by adapting the language and concepts used in addition to more detail being needed in areas. Welsh Government (2021b) discusses how it has been important to co-construct the Curriculum for Wales from the beginning with the practitioners as they must use it day in and day out and creating it without them would have not seen it move forward in the way it needed to. With the feedback and the co-construction, it was able to give practitioners the feeling of being valued, not just in the workplace but by the government also. Newton Primary School (2021) support this stating that their policies are reviewed yearly, or before if needed, by a collaboration of staff, governors and co-ordinators. Siraj-Blatchford and Mani (2007) as cited in O'Sullivan (2015) states that inclusive leaders are leaders that have strong communication with their colleagues and when they are involved in the decision-making, like with the new curriculum, they are more successful in embedding the approach in practice as the practitioner has a better understanding of it from being included in the co-construction.

SECTION 3

How to promote inclusive leadership in an Early Years Setting

Before children join the nursery in my setting, they are given a form for the parent to fill in to gather information about the child. This includes basic information about the family, any medical issues, dietary requirements or allergies. I aim to adapt this welcome leaflet to become more inclusive of the child and parent's beliefs, what they wish for their child/themselves to gain from their time at the setting as well as an empty box with no specific directed information to allow the parent and child the freedom to add what else they want the setting to know.

CYPCS (2022) states the UNCRC Article 12 – The right to be listened to and taken seriously states it is important to include the child's voice in this welcome leaflet. By having their input and giving an insight into what they would like to share about themselves it will help them feel more valued and more included. Murray (2019) supports this stating that settings that listen to children's voices on an individual level help the child feel a sense of belonging. Furthermore, it provides the practitioner with the detailed specific information needed to help promote the child's development according to their level of need whilst including their interests to help engage them.

These welcome leaflets could be adapted for children to each year when they transition to a new class. Ensuring that the information is up to date and providing each practitioner that the child works with a bank of information about the child from the child, parent and previous practitioners.

However, creating this style of booklet does have barriers that the practitioner needs to be aware of. Such as if the parent/guardian, or child in the older classes, has limited literacy skills or uses English as an additional language (EAL). To be fully inclusive the practitioner must find suitable support for parents in these types of situations. Regarding EAL, Welsh Government (2015) discusses how the Minority Ethnic Achievement Grant (MEAG) is provided to help support those with EAL. This helps the setting provide the appropriate support by using training, bilingual assistants and suitable resources. Therefore, helping to overcome those barriers. Welsh Government (2022b) further support this stating that this follows the new Curriculum for Wales in respecting people's diversity and how everyone's cultures and beliefs can be appreciated and included in their journey through school.

With the parent and child providing the information for the welcome leaflet and having the addition of the empty box, to allow freedom of speech, it provides them with the opportunity to educate the practitioner on something they may not be aware of or need to take into consideration. As I often find when filling in forms the titles/ questions do not always match what I want to say. Fenton, Ocasio-Stoutenbury and Harry (2017) further supports this type of inclusive practice stating that for children to have educational equity it is important for the parents to be involved in a partnership with them for a cohesive approach for the child's development.

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