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**Inspiring leaders;  
improving children's lives**

# Every Child Matters

**Leading schools to promote social  
inclusion: a study of practice**



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## 1. Introduction

The concept of social exclusion has been with us in contemporary social policy for some time (Byrne, 2005). Although a contested term, at the root of the concept are multi-dimensional socio-economic processes that exclude particular groups of individuals, in particular places and in particular ways, from mainstream society. In many respects the concept became embedded in numerous discourses at the same time as the Social Exclusion Unit was set up by New Labour to examine some of the processes and possible causes of social exclusion. The Social Exclusion Task force was then empowered to suggest policy developments that would counter the processes of social exclusion and enhance its corollary – social inclusion. One of the key areas of priority for developing social inclusion centred on improving education attainments for all children, regardless of personal circumstances and family background. Through the removal of barriers to engagement and achievement young people would be able to participate, engage and succeed in various aspects of mainstream life. Over the last ten years there have been numerous attempts to assist this process (for example Education Action Zones, Excellence in Cities, Connexions, Sure Start, Educational Maintenance Allowances to name but a few) but perhaps of late developments such as Every Child Matters and the subsequent launch of a range of extended services such as Full Service Extended Schools (FSES) has now resulted in schools being more outward looking with a focus on working with partners to provide a range of services to support children, families and communities. Although much research has focused on how these various initiatives have impacted on the educational attainment for young people categorised as most ‘at risk’ (see for example Kendal et al, 2005; Hoggart & Smith, 2004; Middleton et al, 2005; Melhuish et al, 2005; Cummings et al, 2005) little research has systematically examined, categorised and synthesised the types of leadership in schools that might assist improving social inclusion for those young people and their families.

What research there is appears to be both disparate and yet fork along two distinct lines of enquiry that either (a) take for granted a somewhat vague and normative understanding of social inclusion linked to instrumental school leadership practice; or (b) develop a social justice approach to schools and school leadership that are generally critical of current educational policy and bureaucratic forms of school leadership implied in that policy.

In this report we develop an appropriate conceptual framework through which to articulate approaches to inclusion, policy and leadership practices. We have found it helpful to draw on an ‘equity and knowledge problematics’ developed by Popkewitz & Linbland (2000) and a typology of school leadership approaches developed by Ribbins and Gunter (2002). These approaches provide a way of understanding not only how social inclusion/exclusion can be defined in terms of access, recognition and meaningful participation issues (‘equity’) but also how particular inclusion/exclusion perspectives are defined, developed, privileged and used (‘knowledge’) with regards to equity issues.

This report has two main sections: the first presents a rationale for a conceptual framework for understanding social inclusion and how governments draw on particular knowledge claims to determine strategy; we finish the paper by making suggestions for how the research team can engage with this paper in the research design and analysis.

## 2. Developing a conceptual framework for social inclusion, education and leadership

In this section we intend to examine the meaning of social inclusion and present a conceptual framework for how government approaches can be grouped and explained.

### An overview of social inclusion and education

At one level social inclusion can be viewed as the extent to which various practices/activities/mechanisms promote or limit cultural and economic integration and the meaningful participatory access of social groups and individuals into mainstream society. At another level it can also mean the way different individuals and groups are given recognition for who and what they are. These various foci of analysis therefore suggest a need to examine what types of knowledge about social inclusion are generated and what perspectives underpin this knowledge.

### The equity problematic, social inclusion and education

A review undertaken by Popkewitz and Lindblad (2000) on social inclusion and education suggested that there is a potential equity problematic. Here we focus on two aspects of social inclusion: (1) economic inclusion, (2) cultural inclusion with regards to gender, race and ethnicity.

**Economic inclusion:** equity problematics from this perspective examine the extent to which education can bring about economic inclusion as a proxy for social inclusion. Policy-orientated literatures from the OECD strongly relate labour markets to education. The argument presented is that schooling should promote access and success in the economic field thereby delivering greater levels of social inclusion more generally. Inclusion is enhanced by enabling more people to achieve credentials that will act as a passport to improved labour market opportunities. The tensions for education in such literatures is that schools at one level act as a sorting function for the delivery of a differentiated credential system (ie not everyone can equally achieve) and yet at the same time need to find

ways of equalising an unequal playing field through eliminating potentially exclusionary practices that create differentiated educational outcomes for particular groups, including particular social groups and groups with particular special educational needs. A different perspective on the link between education and the labour market suggests that new forms of post-industrial economic activity increasingly require new forms of knowledge work that place a greater emphasis on social and cultural capital than on ascription and merit. Class distinctions in such labour markets appear to becoming ever more marked as the middle class with appropriate capitals reap the benefits (Ball, 2003) in these new labour markets. This suggests that those most disadvantaged need to be provided with bridging ties into opportunities for enhanced social and cultural capital development (Raffo, 2006).

**Cultural inclusion:** here the equity problematic relates to both representation and stereotyping, and the institutional rules and processes that may culturally exclude some groups from mainstream social life. Equity issues for education viz-a-viz cultural inclusion focus on questions such as, first, the nature of the representation of gender, class and ethnicity in the curriculum; second, teachers' discourses about cultural plurality in classrooms; third, the gendering of roles in classroom and school practices; fourth, inclusion in mainstream classrooms of young people with special educational needs; and, fifth, the affordances given to the educational values and norms of different families and communities with diverse class and ethnic backgrounds.

From our reading of the research on social inclusion we present a useful way of framing the knowledge problematic through two broad headings – functionalist and socially critical (Raffo et al. 2007). The 'functionalist' position takes it for granted that social inclusion is an important part in the proper functioning of society that brings benefits both to society as a whole and to individuals within that society. The major gains of increased levels of inclusion are exemplified by improved economic development, social cohesion, and enhanced life chances for individuals. The problem is that these benefits often do not materialise in the case of individuals and groups from disadvantaged backgrounds.

This failure results in varying forms of social exclusion and calls for explanation and intervention. Commonly, explanations tend to be offered in terms of dysfunctions at the level of the individual learner, the social contexts within which the learner is placed such as schools, families and neighbourhoods, the underlying social structures such as class, race and gender out of which those contexts arise, or some interaction of these. Crucially, however, the assumption is that, if specific (albeit complex) problems in the way social and economic policy works within society can be overcome, enhanced social inclusion will indeed materialise. Education policy is seen as central to overcoming problems of social exclusion and enhancing social inclusion.

The second position, which we label here 'socially critical', likewise assumes that social inclusion is potentially beneficial. However, it doubts whether its benefits can be realised simply by overcoming certain exclusionary forces implicit in the social arrangements experienced by disadvantaged groups. Those social arrangements are themselves seen as being inherently inequitable, and levels of inclusion/exclusion reflect unequal distributions of power and resource. The failure of society to produce benefits for people living in disadvantage is not simply a glitch in an otherwise benevolent system, but is a result of the inequalities built into society. It follows that, if social inclusion is to be realised, a form of social and economic policy, including education, is needed which is critical of existing arrangements and which can both challenge existing power structures and inequality and enable democratic development.

### 3. Putting a conceptual framework to work in understanding and explaining social inclusion, education and learning.

This section uses the three main questions developed in part one of the paper to present how school leadership can be related to social inclusion.

#### (a) How is knowledge of social inclusion defined and produced through functionalist and socially critical perspectives and what are the implications for education?

As we have seen social inclusion and its links to educational policy can be examined from an economic and cultural perspective.

**Economic Inclusion** – There are a number of approaches of defining economic inclusion and its implications for educational policy. Alexiadou's research (2002) provides a useful way of differentiating between (a) taken for granted, and descriptive perspectives of economic social inclusion that focus on discourses of public sector modernisation, globalisation, economic competitiveness and raising standards of achievement and that emphasise a **functionalist** integration of varying groups, including those with special educational needs, into the labour market and paid work to (b) other **socially critical** perspectives that focus on issues of social justice and suggest that a functionalist and integrating discourse emphasises educational credentials and standards that obscure questions of structural unemployment, income polarisation and differential access to the labour markets, the divisive nature of 'magnet economies' (Betcherman, 1996: 261), the differentiation of educational achievement on the basis of class, ethnicity, special educational needs and race (Gewirtz et al. 1995, Lauder et al, 1999) and the 'positional conflict' in the competition for educational credentials (Brown, 2000).

The **functionalist** perspective suggests that the education service must be modernised in order to contribute more effectively to economic recovery and increased competitiveness. For example, the changing global economy and mobility of multinational capital requires people to have transferable skills that can be set against standards of educational achievement that compare favourably against standards in other leading economies. In addition, and linked to this discourse, is the view that poverty is no excuse for educational failure. Hence the separation of academic performance from conditions of social deprivation, and the direct link of such performance to economic prosperity result in a discourse whereby education bears the burden of national economic success (cf to studies emanating from school improvement and effectiveness perspective). Given the importance of education in such a discourse, schooling and other public sector services that may aid the delivery of educational credentials need to be appropriately harnessed to overcome any barriers that particular young people may have to achieving such outcomes.

The **socially critical** perspective suggests that social exclusion is just a contemporary form of capitalist exploitation, and inherent in the system rather than a mere by-product (Lipman, 2004: Anyon, 1997). New forms of economic and business re-structuring have created polarised communities that have few resources and opportunities of engaging with evolving forms of mainstream post-industrial business activity. The lack of ensuing economic well-being for such groups is not the fault of individuals because of their lack of human capital but a natural by-product of an exploitative economic and political system run by the powerful for the powerful. Underpinned by such a perspective, education is hence viewed as barely able to compensate for such arrangements. Educational policy and practice, per se, therefore needs to appreciate its inherent limits and must work alongside redistributive, democratising and socially just economic and social policy in order to bring about social inclusion.

**Cultural inclusion** – again there are two broad ways of exploring cultural inclusion and what that might mean for education. At a **functionalist** level cultural inclusion is suggestive of appropriate cultural integration strategies that value the assets of difference and cultural diversity for the benefits of the mainstream and that, taken together, will enhance social cohesion. A lack of social cohesion might therefore be viewed as lack of aspiration for diversity reflective of a cultural disaggregation and separation. Educational policy may be developed to encourage social cohesion by encouraging culturally integrated schools whose intake and curriculum reflect and respect diversity. This may include, for example, supporting the use of the first language in school and appropriate strategies for English as an additional language or mainstreaming young people with educational disabilities. Headteacher and teacher standards will reflect the need for understanding, respecting and valuing diversity in order to encourage school cohesion, appropriate integration and educational success for all. This may also include working with minority parents and community leaders to enable them to support and encourage their children in school.

A **socially critical** analysis of cultural inclusion may suggest that this can only come about if minority groups are provided with opportunities for reflecting on and acting against discrimination that are reflected in aspects of a divided society and which education through schools reflects. It assumes that those at local level are policymakers (Ozga 2000) and that alternative improvement strategies can be developed (Hollins et al. 2006), not least with the inclusion of children as policymakers (Smyth 2006, Thomson and Gunter 2006, 2007). Educationally this may mean providing space within the curriculum to develop critical pedagogies (Thomson, 2002) where minority young people and their communities are provided with an opportunity to develop an empowering critical capacity for engagement and change (Smyth & McInerney, 2006). It may also be about the extent to which schools engage with democratic forms of governance that reflect and represent varying cultural values of the community in the mission and strategy of the school (Dean et al 2007). In other cases it might be to critically examine the way the disabled are included in mainstream schools but within

an educational climate of standards and performativity that might differentiate and exclude those individuals even further (Armstrong, 2005)

### **(b) What agenda might be developed for new theorising and research with regards to social inclusion, education and school leadership?**

The analysis so far has shown that social inclusion (with its economic and cultural dimensions) has two main knowledge dimensions within research: functionalist and socially critical. The question then is how these relate to leadership. Based on the research by Dean et al (2007) on school governance in areas of disadvantage, we intend in this section to provide three types of leadership in play within policy, but also within practice and research findings.

#### **These three types are identified as:**

**Focussed.** School leaders are seen as ensuring the efficient and effective management of the school, and of the public resources which support the school. They are known as transformational leaders who can build the commitment of others to the school vision, and engage in successful school improvement. They concern themselves with setting broad strategic directions and enduring the delivery of this strategy. These strategic directions are in many respects underpinned by educational policy that reflect government perspectives and rationales for education e.g. the reduction of social exclusion through a focus on credentials.

**Localising.** School leaders have the role of ‘making things work here’. Whitehall is beginning to abandon its attempt to control public service provision directly and is instead fostering a ‘new localism’ which makes services more responsive to local conditions. School leaders bring to bear, therefore, their detailed knowledge of the school and its communities in ensuring that national frameworks are customised and elaborated in ways that meet local needs and priorities. Social inclusion is about school leaders understanding some of the cultural and economic factors impacting on the local community and how these might be ameliorated through particular educational practice.

**Democratising.** People have become alienated from traditional democratic institutions which seem remote from their lives. A democratising rationale is, therefore, a means whereby people can once again engage with decisions which affect them directly. In this case, the role of school leaders is to stimulate local democratic participation and to ensure that the school is run in a way which meets the wishes of local people. Social inclusion is about giving recognition to, and empowering, local people to take charge of the educational project for their own needs. It may also be about actively allowing socially critical voices to be recognised and represented.

New Labour has attempted in various ways to intervene in promoting functionalist and economic versions of social inclusion through its educational policies. Its main focus has been on standards, the reform of educational structures and practices, the continuing marketisation of the education system and the creation of a culture of performativity. Put simply, if the education system can be made more effective through outcome measures, if in particular 'standards' can be driven up in those parts of the system serving variously disadvantaged groups and if this educational improvement can be accompanied by other policies to address the range of barriers experienced by these groups, then there is no reason why social exclusion should not be overcome. The focus has been on the functioning of schools generally, with extra attention paid to those serving disadvantaged areas and disadvantaged communities of learners. These schools have been targeted with extra resources and support, they have been subject to incentives and penalties and their leaders have been given autonomy, encouragement and training on the assumption that, at some point, they will be able to make the breakthrough with their students. These previously disengaged, underachieving children and young people will, under the right circumstances, begin to switch on to learning, re-discover their 'will to win' and go forward to a brighter future.

In many respects this policy approach to improving schools in disadvantaged areas is suggestive of our first ideal type of school leadership that has as its core rationale notions of efficiency and effectiveness. We have termed this **focussed leadership** and it reflects in many ways what is currently the status quo with regards to the roles and responsibilities of school leaders. Leadership in these terms is functionalist and is about ensuring effectiveness of the organisation regardless of local conditions and for ensuring effective and efficient local practice. The styles of leadership adopted however may vary from heroic and transformational approaches (the school leader as hero in times of difficulty) to forms of distributed leadership where leadership is shared between role incumbents at all levels of the school.

There is no doubt that this view of the role of education in relation to social inclusion/exclusion has proved immensely energising, not least to education professionals working in what were previously seen as hopeless situations. There are also, without doubt, success stories to tell – the initial hike in primary attainment scores, for instance, some indications of the lowest-performing schools doing better at GCSE level and multiple accounts of such schools being 'turned round' by energetic and charismatic headteachers. However the evidence that the historical links between social exclusion, low educational achievement and limited life chances have been definitively broken is hard to come by.

As we have already highlighted other aspects of government policy are suggestive of a more holistic approach to education which acknowledges questions of learner identity, cultural expectations, the nature of teacher-learner relationships and the nature of the school's context. The Every Child Matters agenda, operationalised in the Children Act 2004 and supported by a range of guidance documents (DfES, 2003a, 2004a, 2004b, 2004c), promises to take a holistic view of the needs of children and families and to create integrated structures and services aimed at meeting those needs in a coherent and co-ordinated way.



At the same time, the development of Extended and Full-Service Extended Schools (DfES, 2002, 2003a, 2003b), offering a range of services to children, families and communities and acting as the base for other community agencies seems to offer a new model of schooling which will be much less narrowly focused than its immediate predecessors and which may require different forms of school leadership.

In the early stages of the evaluation of the latter set of initiatives (Cummings et al., 2005, 2004, Dyson et al., 2002) there are indeed signs of things beginning to be done differently. Some school leaders have set up an impressive array of activities and services for children, their families and communities. They have developed, in some cases, a sense of how their work with these three constituencies interacts. Typically, they claim that they are aiming to change attitudes towards learning and wider cultures of aspiration and achievement in families and communities as a means of changing attitudes and levels of achievement amongst their students. They recognise that a uni-dimensional focus on 'standards' is not in itself able to impact sufficiently. Unlike them, however, they have systems and strategies for addressing wider issues. Indeed, in some cases, the work of these schools and its leaders is set within the context of local strategies for the regeneration of neighbourhoods or even whole towns which align their work with policies in housing, economic development, crime reduction and community development. Where this is the case, schools commonly work not as isolated educational institutions, but as part of a network of other schools and community agencies supporting each other and pooling their resources in a sustained effort to address disadvantage in the areas they serve.

In many respects this type of schooling points to leadership approaches that attempt to contextualise the work of schools in order to meet the needs of the community. We have termed this localising leadership in that school leaders are seen as a means of ensuring that the service is fitted to the local context. Here the argument is that the delivery of education through schools can't be left to central government because they have to be shaped to local conditions and the role of school leaders in such contexts is to make this happen which implies that school leaders need to know about the local context.

This doesn't necessarily imply local democratic leadership but it does suggest that the way schools should be run reflect realities of the context within which the school is located. Leadership strategies may therefore include consulting with the communities serving the school to ensure that the education delivered meets the needs of local people. In many respects leadership styles linked to a localising agenda might be reflective of both instrumental approaches (eg the need to collaborate to improve school performance) and/or reflect the biographical realities of school leadership in such situations that are suggestive of tensions, challenges and nuances of working with a variety of educational agendas and stakeholder communities. The perspective underpinning this rationale and style of leadership is also most likely to be generally functionalist with hints of a socially critical perspective depending on how localising the school leader and school agenda becomes.

Other aspects of government policy, particularly with regards to citizenship, neighbourhood renewal and community empowerment are suggestive of the need for local people to be consulted and have a direct say over the approaches and type of public service provided at the local level. And in a sense this brings us to the new localism agenda suggested by the Office of Deputy Prime Minister. In their report for the ODPM (Aspden and Birch, 2005) focus on the way local government can work with service users to look at ways of improving the design and delivery of services so that they can take into account decentralised and better local decision making, revitalised democracy and enhanced civil and community renewal. In essence their report was fundamentally interested in the extent to which local people participated in and had, or felt they had, control over the services and environments which had direct impact on their lives. The authors examined evidence that focused on ways of effectively working with local people, ways to improve partnership working, the different models of participation and perhaps most radically an examination of the impact of more direct partnership initiatives that linked to notions of capacity building, mainstreaming and maintaining representativeness.

Although improved forms of consultation and sounding out of communities by local authorities were explored, perhaps the examination of direct participation provided some of the strongest evidence of levels of user engagement, delivery and decision making. What Aspden and Birch found was that:

*“overall satisfaction and performance levels in situations where users are delivering a service tend to be at least as high, and often higher than local authority provision.... There are broader community benefits from more direct user involvement, for example, Tenant Management Associations acting as a local focus for social and community development activities and successfully promoting improved security ... There is evidence that closer working between local authorities and users, and the latter being more actively involved in both consultation and delivery, can be positive in delivering better quality and value for money services”*  
(Aspden & Birch, 2005, 8)

They also recognised that in order to engage local people with service design and delivery there was a need to for service users and other partners to develop key skills and competencies in a variety of areas including managing performance etc. In addition there was a requirement to enhance capacity not just at the level of the individual but also at an area and authority-wide level to ensure continuity, coverage and representation.

Aspden and Birch also suggested the need for initiatives to be mainstreamed to avoid the possibilities of sidelining opportunities. In order to achieve this there was a suggestion that users get involved at the early stages of planning and decision making in relation to the service delivery. There was an additional task of enhancing representativeness so that forums and boards were appropriate and not recruited from too narrow a band of people. All of this suggests an active engagement by local people in forms of school leadership that not only deal with efficiency and effectiveness issues and the need to take into account local needs but have at their core the notion of co-construction through user engagement in service delivery and decision-making.

This policy direction is therefore suggestive of our third ideal type as a public service that has the central notion of co-production via user engagement in service delivery and decision-making. We have termed this democratising leadership.

Democratising suggests the participation of local people in decisions about things in their lives and with regards to schools. This suggest the need for democratic forms of leadership and governance where local people are resourced and decide on all aspects of rationale, strategy and definition of what the school should offer (Ranson, 2000). A manifestation of this might be that giving democratic control to local communities may result in the delivery of different types of educational outcomes. This leads us to a possible paradox in terms of social inclusion, in that local communities themselves may desire outcomes that are contrary to social inclusion, such as ethnic segregation (Lindsay & Muijs, 2006). Whatever the style adopted the rationale for this democratic approach is about issues to do with the power gap and the desire to ensure more local control over public services. This suggests a relational and communal form of leadership (Foster, 1989), which is much more likely to be biographical and critical in relation to social justice.

These three approaches to school leadership act as a heuristic device for conceptualising the types of skills and knowledge that link to those rationales. We can begin to understand this by examining how cutting across these leadership rationales are varying leadership narratives. Often these approaches are conceptualised by particular forms of school leadership research (Gunter, 2001). One way of categorising these leadership narratives is to use the terms instrumental, biographical and critical (Gunter, 2001). Instrumental narratives generally focus on prescribed educational outcomes and in particular examine and detail the effective ethos, values and organisational systems and change approaches the school and its leaders require to bring about those outcomes. Here the person who is leader has learned the lexicon and the strategies of transformational leadership. This type of narrative is communicated in work by Leithwood et al. (2006) and with Levin (2005).

We associate this narrative with focussed leadership, and it is essential to delivering functional strategies for dealing with social exclusion.

**Biographical leadership** narratives suggest that leadership is more about the characters rather characteristics of leadership and hence details the ambiguities, tensions and challenges reflective of the multi-dimensional reality of school life. Improvement is about a 'messy' synthesis of various stakeholder viewpoints and perspectives. Here the person learns from doing the job (and traditionally did master's work to develop their understanding) and how they want to practice it. This type of narrative is communicated by those who aim to describe the actuality of the job such as Hall (1996), and Ribbins (1997) and with associates Pascal and Ribbins (1998), and Rayner and Ribbins (1999). Practitioners themselves talk about their work in various accounts e.g. Tomlinson et al. (1999).

**Critical educational leadership** is about the questioning of educational policy and its impact on school life. It is also about being critical of taken for granted approaches to hierarchical school organisational structures and leadership approaches that are focused on delivering particular types of educational outcomes. Here the person begins with their political values. This type of narrative is communicated by those who make a case for critical approaches, and who report on evidence of how this works in practice in ways that make a difference. For example, Apple and Beane (1999), and Smyth (2001) begin with learners and learning within context, and build approaches to organisational arrangements that are owned and enable active participation in learning.

## 4. The Project Research Agenda

We have summarised some of the academic and policy texts on education and social inclusion. From these readings it is possible to categorise research studies on social inclusion under two broad explanatory perspectives – functionalist and socially critical (knowledge problematics) – that are based around two levels of analysis – economic inclusion and cultural inclusion.

**Question 3:** what school leadership narratives seem to best sum up the schools and their leaders? How do these differ at times? What are the links between leadership narratives and rationales adopted by school leaders and the visions of social inclusion promoted by the school? Which approaches appear most effective in terms of fostering social inclusion as defined by the school.

### What does this mean for the project?

The analytical framework provides a tool for explaining which conceptualisation of social inclusion a school and its leaders tend to favour in terms of equity and knowledge problematics. We can then ask questions about which leadership rationale and narratives are being adopted to bring this about and why. However categorising this variety will not provide us with a generic leadership strategy for improved social inclusion per se. What it will do is provide examples of where particular approaches and narratives of leadership might be more enabling for particular forms of social inclusion.

### We suggest the following questions can shape the enquiry:

**Question 1:** what forms of social inclusion are given primacy by school leaders through school policy and practice? What secondary forms of social inclusion are supported by the school if any? To what extent are these forms of social inclusion expressed in functionalist and/or socially critical ways?

**Question 2:** what leadership rationales appear to be given primacy by the school and head with regards to their conceptualisation of social inclusion? In what circumstances does there appear to be an overlap between rationales?

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