Introduction

For this assignment, I will be looking closely at a School Development Plan (SDP) from a large comprehensive school. I will look at why and how a plan is developed and focus on one specific area of its strategic targets to analyse the steps that have been outlined in order to achieve these goals, such as the timescales, the people involved, how the evidence is collected, and how the impact is measured.

The school I will be focusing on currently has almost 1100 pupils enrolled, and 80 teaching staff employed. Approximately 11% of pupils have Additional Learning Needs (ALN), 7% receive Free School Meals, and there are 8 pupils confirmed as Young Carers ([redacted] School, 2020). The school was rewarded a performance rating of 'Good' across all areas from ESTYN during their last inspection, with the school's focus on pupil wellbeing highlighted as a particular strength (ESTYN, 2013). As a result of this, I will focus on how the school 'Enhances the school provision for Young Carers,' a target within the school's strategic target area of 'Enhancing and Embedding the Wellbeing Curriculum' ([redacted] School, 2019).

In accordance with BERA's Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (2018), I will hereafter be referring to the school as 'School X' to ensure anonymity. The name of a charity organisation referred to in School X's SDP will also be redacted as it refers to the area in which the school is located.

Literature Review

Brighouse and Woods (2013) state that improvement planning is one of the most important components to how schools develop and adapt in order to meet the needs of its learners and ensure a high-quality learning experience is gained by all. A SDP is defined as a strategic plan outlining the school's priorities for improvement and the methods and resources it will use in order to achieve its targets (Welsh Government, 2014). The SDP is not intended to be a fixed plan, given how frequently cultural and environmental shifts impact those involved within the school setting (Caldwell and Spinks, 1992), and is instead looked at as a continuously evolving document that should be regularly referred to and updated to reflect the school's progress (Welsh Government, 2014). This continual strive for improvement ensures that the school is constantly working to push its current levels of performance closer to its levels of potential (Hanover Research, 2014).

The Welsh Government (2014) recommends that schools start with their own 'school vision' when developing a SDP and then reflect on their own strengths and weaknesses, initiating

improvements through developing targets, the steps that will be taken in order to meet them, and the expected results. These SDPs must also involve contributions from both internal (staff, governors, regular visitors, pupils) and external (prospective pupils, parents/carers, the local community, inspection bodies, etc.) stakeholders to ensure everyone's ideals and preferences are acknowledged (Davies and Ellison, 2003). Additionally, action plans must be detailed enough to include specific steps needed to achieve the desired outcomes; details within these steps include ensuring staff are proficient in carrying out these activities, that appropriate resources are available (Davies and Ellison, 2003), and that steps are able to make a noticeable difference to preceding practice (Brighouse & Woods, 1999).

It is vital that these steps align with each other logically to ensure improvement planning is meaningful rather than over-standardised and generic, which could lead to a risk of larger targets being ignored (Dunaway, 2007). Davies and Ellison (2003) reported that while school improvement planning generally has a positive effect in schools, short-term planning can lead to targets and action plans becoming too simplified in order to meet the needs of inspection bodies. Hargreaves (1995) similarly argued that poorly handled development planning has a number of harmful effects on schools if a willingness to please an examining body rather than a larger commitment to bettering the school is not the focal point.

Furthermore, ESTYN have also reported a number of schools basing their SDPs solely on their post-inspection recommendations rather than utilising methods of self-evaluation and using their own initiatives (ESTYN, 2016). They claim that it is the schools that regularly self-evaluate and identify their own areas of development that show the most improvement in learning experiences and outcomes (ESTYN, 2019). Donaldson (2018) also points to self-evaluation as a key element for school improvement planning and recommends a range of methods to accomplish this such as progression assessment, classroom observation, data analysis, and achievement outcomes.

While schools may differ in how they generate a School Development Plan, narrowing the gap between attainment and potential is crucial in ensuring all pupils are able to succeed (Brighouse and Woods, 2013). The wellbeing of pupils and staff is a common focus found on SDPs from schools that excel above average (Buck, 2008) and it is here that the school is able to consider how to acknowledge pupils who are more frequently found to have the largest attainment gap compared to their peers, such as pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds, pupils with Additional Learning Needs (ALN), and Young Carers (Brighouse and Woods, 2013). Inspectors will often look to see how a school will set out to improve the success and security of its disadvantaged pupils (Jones, 2017), particularly those whose experiences are often overlooked (Soothill et al., 2003).

Approximately one in five children across the UK is reported as being a Young Carer (Carers Trust, 2020) though it is believed that, due to many experiences going unknown, the actual number may be higher (Morrow, 2005). Some of the main factors that cause Young Carers to struggle to meet their potential are difficulties with attendance, a lack of understanding within the education system (Moore, McArthur & Morrow, 2009), and a lack of guidance or assistance from others (Morrow, 2005). In addition to this, the inability to enjoy free time or socialise with peers can also impact a Young Carer's emotional and/or physical wellbeing which, in turn, adds to the young person's vulnerability (Department of Health and Social Care, 2020). Young Carers also cite a lack of flexibility from teachers regarding their schoolwork as having a negative impact on their learning experiences (Moore, 2005) and that establishing positive relationships with school staff members is one of the major ways they can feel supported in their caring roles (Moore and Barry, 2014). As The Children Act 1989 calls for local authorities to guarantee the safety and wellbeing of children, it is essential that schools are continuously working at improving and transforming themselves into stable places of comfort and support for young people (Hargreaves, Earl and Ryan, 1996).

Developing an Action Point

The SDP of School X is made from combining the needs of all stakeholders with the school's overall vision and has organised its areas of development in accordance with the needs of ESTYN ([redacted] School, 2019). This can be seen as a logical and convenient way for the school to ensure it is keeping track with the expectations set out by inspection bodies and also ensures it is keeping in accordance with SDP Regulations (Welsh Government, 2014).

The plan includes priorities provided by the Welsh Government, priorities from the Local Authority, and areas of development the school has generated through self-evaluation. This suggests that while School X acknowledges ESTYN's inspection areas, it has also recognised that self-evaluation is vital to making the most improvement across the school (ESTYN, 2019). The school has also included the seven dimensions that make up the 'Schools as Learning Organisations' model for Wales.

School X's self-evaluation for 2018/2019 has highlighted the need to 'Enhance and embed the Wellbeing curriculum' during the next academic year and marked it as a priority under the 'Wellbeing and Attitudes to Learning' section of the SDP. Jones (2017) suggests that a learner's wellbeing is the most important factor to affect their educational outcomes, which may have contributed to School X's prioritisation of this area of development. Within this area, I will be focusing on the target that aims to 'Enhance the school's provision for Young

Carers.' The SDP then lists a number of action steps intended to assist the school in achieving this outcome (Appendix). Two members of staff have been appointed to oversee and monitor this target.

The first action step identified is to 'Monitor all Young Carers' Attendance, Behaviour, and Performance.' Teachers keep track of these for all pupils across the school on the School Information Management System (SIMS) and this data is then analysed and discussed with the Young Carers in weekly meetings with their youth workers. The information is also passed on to Heads of Year and the lead team working on this target, who are able to address concerns if attendance or performance drops, or if there is a noticeable change in behaviour. The school may have developed this action step after looking at research showing how often Young Carers miss school due to their roles at home (Soothill et al., 2003) and noticing a similar pattern with their own pupils. The pressure to juggle education and caring can cause stress and feelings of isolation which, in turn, also has an effect on how they behave and perform at school (Carers Trust, 2020). By monitoring and analysing data daily, the school can immediately observe any changes and provide extra support for those who need it. The impact of this step will be measured by comparing the data to high targets the school has set out for all pupils.

Another action step the school has formed is to 'Provide Staff with Continuing Professional Development (CPD)'. As research suggests that Young Carers often feel unsupported and not understood by teachers (Moore, McArthur & Morrow, 2009), the school may have implemented this action point in an effort to ensure all staff members had sufficient knowledge and training in knowing how to develop sensitivity and flexibility. The Welsh Government (2014) also emphasises the need for CPD to be included on SPDs to ensure that the quality of teaching and support is guaranteed to help pupils achieve. Staff members who work directly with Young Carers are prioritised for CPD related to this area and are expected to share the information within their departments. The impact of this training is measured through another action step: 'Analyse the results of the Health and Wellbeing Questionnaires.'

Wellbeing questionnaires are distributed to pupils across the school on a termly basis. The pupils are asked to assess their relationships with staff members and peers, as well as their attitudes to learning. The school may have created this action step to promote pupil voice, to monitor health and wellbeing across the school, and, as the pre[redacted] point suggests, to assess how pupils felt their relationships towards staff members who have undergone sensitivity CPD were. This suggests that if Young Carers are reporting continuous feelings of being misunderstood, the school is able to change and adapt the training it provides.

The final action step outlined in the SDP is to 'Collaborate with [Redacted] Young Carers Society.' The school may have developed this as a way to ensure its Young Carers were receiving recognition and care from experts and to also ensure objective information and advice was provided to pupils and staff. The Welsh Government (2014) also emphasises the need for SDPs to display how the school works with the wider community which may have influenced the school's decision to collaborate with an outside agency.

To ensure the school has complied with this action step, the SDP indicates that, at the end of the school year, the school must be able to evidence that four school assemblies organised by the Young Carers Society and six meetings between members of the Carers Society and the identified Young Carers in the school have taken place. This step would appear to have a number of advantages as it gives staff at the school the opportunity to be educated by experts in the field and it also allows the Young Carers the chance to meet with people who can provide specialist support. The SDP does not, however, make mention of how the impact of this collaboration will be measured so the effect of this partnership goes unknown. The Welsh Government (2014) warns that this neglect of measuring the effectiveness of actions can be detrimental to the quality of school development.

Reflection and Evaluation

In order for a school to make progress, it is vital that a development plan includes targets, the steps needed in order to achieve them, and how the impact of these steps will be measured to ensure they are effective (Welsh Government, 2014). While School X's action step to collaborate with experts from a Young Carers organisation may seem to hold a number of benefits, the SDP has nothing in place to measure whether this step has been effective in helping the school make progression. As Hargreaves (1995) has argued, developing action steps that are not wholly measured or evaluated can damage a school's ability to progress. The school could consider using a method similar to the Health and Wellbeing questionnaires that are already in place. Feedback forms could be used to uncover whether Young Carers feel more supported by the meetings with the visitors and whether peers and staff feel more educated. Shortcomings with this method, however, may include not gaining enough clear, honest, or detailed feedback to be able to work and adapt from. Furthermore, it is unclear to what extent pupils' feedback would truly be their own, as Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2007) suggest that the presence of peers can unintentionally lead to shared and collective thought.

An alternative method of measuring the impact on collaborating with the Young Carers Society would be to link this action step with another – 'Monitor all Young Carers'

Attendance, Behaviour, and Performance.' While this action step is already underway to look for any drops in attendance, behaviour, or performance, this data could also be analysed following visits from the Young Carers Society. An improvement in attendance, behaviour, and performance might suggest that having regular visits with experts has a positive impact, whereas a consistent drop in these areas could suggest that these visits make little to no difference.

Furthermore, this could also be used to measure how effective CPD is on staff's relationships with the Young Carers in their classes. An improvement in attendance, behaviour, and performance could suggest that teachers are now more effectively able to work with and understand the pupils and their needs. It may also indicate that pupils feel better supported and understood.

While monitoring attendance, behaviour, and performance does not offer detail about how a Young Carer's role is affecting them, this method of data analysis can successfully reveal changes in a pupil's life. This allows the school to respond to pupils on a one-to-one basis and offer individual, tailor-made support in collaboration with the pupil in question, as recommended by Bolas, Van Wersch and Flynn (2007). However, measuring this data against the school's overall targets for success does not take into account the school's ability to develop flexibility surrounding their Young Carers. The school may, instead, find it useful to measure the effectiveness of this data analysis against the data of Young Carers from the previous year. This may provide insight into the efficiency of the actions taken.

Conclusion

With the continual change in culture and environment, it is vital that schools are willing to adapt and progress. The School Development Plan is a reflection of how a school continues to improve and evolve through evaluating its own areas of improvement. In looking closely at School X's SDP and how it develops its targets, I now understand the importance of SDPs in ensuring the school reflects the needs of all its stakeholders and its role in the community as a place of success and enrichment (Donaldson, 2018). As an educator, I must strive to identify what steps I can take that will benefit the learners and help the school to develop. Communicating with SLT and other staff members will ensure I am able to obtain the greatest amount of information needed and also gain perspectives from experienced peers. I must also consider alternative methods of achieving these targets and seek out ways to measure the impact of the steps I am taking to ensure all pupils and areas of the school are reaching their full potential, and that I am enacting positive improvement.

Appendix

Extract from [redacted] School Development Plan (2019)

Target: Enhance and Embed the Wellbeing Curriculum

Development Priority	Action Step	Lead Person (Team)	Resources and Professional Development	Cost	Funding Source	Timescale for Completion	Impact, Evaluation, Evidence
Enhance the school's provision for Young Carers	Monitor All Young Carers' Attendance, Behaviour, and Performance	[Redacted]	Data analysis Reports from SIMS	P/copying parent app	School budget	Summer 2020	Regular data provided and analysed Match with whole school targets
	Provide staff with Continuing Professional Development (CPD)	[Redacted]	WJEC CPD CPD				All relevant CPD must be attended and shared Analyse the results of the Health and Wellbeing Questionnaires
	Analyse the results of the Health and Wellbeing Questionnaires	Redacted]	Meetings Cover Respond to feedback from pupils				Questionnaires to be completed by all pupils in the school
							Questionnaires data to be analysed and used in a wide variety of contexts
	Collaborate with [Redacted] Young Carers Society	[Redacted]	School Assemblies Meetings				Four school assembles to be held by [Redacted] Six meetings between [Redacted] and Young Carers

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