

	Target	What I have done in this assignment...
Targed/Target 1	* Consider further the sample for the work and how this could have impacted on the findings.	I have attempted to be more critical of studies whilst making a connection between theory and practice
Targed/Target 2	* Elaborate on the context eg time of day, usual routine, groupings etc	I have attempted to be more specific in this assignment whilst adhering to the word count
Targed/Target 3	* Make use of curriculum documentation relating to current practice	I have ensured to read multiple Welsh Government documents along with documents surrounding the new curriculum

How a school develops one aspect of its SDP: a report that critically reflects on the actions, impact and evidence base.

Introduction

This report aims to critically explore how the school in question develops one aspect of its School Development Plan (SDP) with a particular focus on its actions and impact which will be further supported by relevant evidence. The school in question is situated at the heart of a small town which has pockets of substantial social deprivation. It has approximately 400 pupils, 72% of which originate from English speaking backgrounds, with 28% from Welsh speaking homes (Estyn, 2016). A minority of pupils originate from ethnic backgrounds with 11% of pupils receiving free school meals. The aspect of the SDP discussed within this assignment is that of the implementation of nurture groups. This action lies within the SDP as one of the school's main priorities, that of pupil voice and wellbeing. Due to the confidential nature of the school's SDP, limited detailed information was provided to assist with this report. Thus, findings are largely based upon observation and oral communication.

A school's development plan (SDP) is a school's strategic plan for improvement (MacBeath and Mortimore, 2001). It has previously been defined as a "road map that sets out the changes a school needs to make to improve the level of student achievement and shows how and when these changes will be made." (North Carolina, 2013). All schools in Wales are required, by government regulation, to have in place an SDP by the beginning of the new academic year (Welsh Government, 2014). Its principal aims are to identify and establish the

measures and possible strategies a school could take in order to improve learner outcomes given the resources available (Morrison, M. 1991). This essentially aims to narrow the gap between a school's current performance and its true potential. The plan is constructed as a result of frequent self-evaluation together with contextual data (Schildkamp, 2019). Overall, the SDP incorporates the school's improvement priorities as well as setting short and long-term targets (MacBeath and Mortimore, 2001). These priorities should contain sufficient detail to enable actions for the forthcoming year, as well as longer term targets for years two and three.

The SDP will detail how the school aims to achieve its targets, in relation to its priorities, whilst considering aspects such as effective use of existing resources, such as funding (MacBeath and Mortimore, 2001). It will address staffing provision and their development. The SDP is a working document to be frequently revisited and refreshed in pursuit of mirroring the school's progress in achieving its priorities. It is essential that it is readily accessible for both staff and governors and should be used as a common reference point. Likewise, it can be referred to by local authorities and regional consortia as part of the national model for regional working (Brighthouse, T and Woods, D. 1999). Thus, the quality of planning should be evaluated in terms of its impact on improvement as opposed to the volume of detail it contains (Welsh Government, 2014).

However, a recent critique of the SDP is that schools often lack active improvement processes when designing and implementing their SDP. An example of this would be that many schools present plans that heavily focus on measuring outcomes, yet ignore actual processes for improvement, the means for measuring system outcomes and how all of these processes may function in a practical environment (Schildkamp, 2019).

In order to transcend such drawbacks, experts recommend that schools draft clear plans, focusing on the tasks to be accomplished and who will undertake them (Brighthouse, 2013). Schools should attempt to integrate improvement on a daily basis, mirroring their SDP. That is, schools should resist the temptation to speak in vague terms and state more defined actions (MacBeath and Mortimore, 2001).

Another potential drawback to the SDP process is lack of communication. It is essential throughout the process that headteachers communicate objectives, progress, and results to relevant stakeholders (Brighthouse and Woods, 1999). In turn, this can build momentum by announcing "quick wins" when data supports early success. However, this should not be overestimated, and caution should be taken before adjusting original objectives and strategies (Brighthouse and Woods, 1999).

As previously stated, the aspect to be focused upon is that of developing a well-established nurture group within the school. Nurture groups are teacher-led interventions formed in pursuit of addressing obstacles experienced by pupils by developing more sound relationships with adults and peers (Colley, 2009). The Nurture Group Network (2013) describes a nurture group as an independent group of approximately six to ten pupils based in a mainstream educational setting, staffed by two supportive adults. They propose a short-term, focused, intervention strategy, addressing barriers to learning arising as a result of social, emotional and/or behavioural difficulties, in an inclusive, supportive approach. Pupils generally return to their classrooms, full time, within four terms (Colley, 2009). This notion is supported by Bennathan and Boxall (2000) who theorise that establishing new pupil-teacher relationships within the nurture group environment assists development in emotionally

deprived pupils whose difficulties are frequently linked to impoverished early years experiences and potentially insecure attachments (Bennathan and Boxall, 2000). It has been highlighted that pupils presenting such issues are at risk of incremental mental health and behavioural issues (Binnie and Allen, 2008). The pupils belonging to such groups are also known to underachieve academically, often leading to classroom disruption and functioning, in turn effecting not only their own learning but that of their fellow pupils (Sanders, 2007). Likewise, there is growing recognition that early intervention in a pupil's mental health issues is optimal in ensuring health and wellbeing in adult life (Seth-Smith et al., 2010).

Self-Evaluation and Data Analysis

Since the appointment of the new headteacher, the focus and ethos of the school has shifted from a more traditional approach to one of nurture, health and well being. This need was identified through a process of self evaluation. Self-evaluation is the means by which schools analyse their performance and utilise it as a foundation for improvement planning incorporated into the SDP. It is central to supporting advances in school improvement, professional development and learner outcomes (Marsh, 2012). This is carried out annually and is a vital tool in supporting a school to assess its performance. Overall it aims to identify areas of strength and weakness along with what needs to be improved and the actions necessary to achieve such improvements.

However, it must be stated that school development planning should not merely be a process of identifying and addressing a school's development needs. It should also build on and celebrate strengths as well as sharing best practice, both within the school and within the wider community as part of a system-wide improvement (West-Burnham et al., 2007).

Upon evaluation of performance, it was evident that some behavioural issues of a select number of pupils had worsened within the classroom. Many previous trialled strategies were unsuccessful for long terms gains. In turn, this was having a detrimental effect not only on their learning but also that of their peers. Ultimately, this affected a proportion of their academic results. When attempting to get to the root cause of such disruptions, it became apparent that the pupils in question found it extremely difficult to control and express their emotions.

Robust self-evaluation will be informed by the effective use of qualitative and quantitative data (Schildkamp, 2019). Qualitative data includes features such as inspection reports relating to the school and information relating to pupils' well-being. Research suggests that data-based decision-making can contribute to improved pupil learning and achievement (Lai et al. 2014; Van Geel et al. 2016). Such information is housed on the school's internal SIMS system. It also includes information acquired from consultation with pupils, parents/carers, staff, and outside organisations and agencies that the school may be working with as part of the wider community engagement (Brighthouse and Woods, 1999). Quantitative data will include school comparative information. This could be in the form of results of pupils at the school, school banding information, pupil progress, PISA results, as well as wider contextual factors, e.g. socio-economic and enrolment trends (Brighthouse and Woods, 1999). Schools also have access to benchmarking data, enabling them to compare themselves against the best performing schools as well as those within their family of schools (Welsh Government,

2016). However, it is essential that schools make use of existing data systems in order to avoid duplication and additional bureaucracy (Schildkamp, 2019).

To progress with this particular action of establishing a well-developed nurture group, the school focused on socio-economic data such as its catchment area as well as data analysed and presented by local government statistics (Street Check, 2020). This data highlighted a high percentage of crime and unemployment within the local community. Through further analysis it identified a high percentage of vulnerable pupils experiencing the effects of social deprivation within the community first hand. This action also coincides with the requirements of the new curriculum to develop healthy, confident individuals.

Involving Stakeholders and Strategic Planning

For an SDP to be effective, it must involve all relevant school partners and stakeholders. This fosters a sense of ownership and collaborative working. In preparing a SDP, the headteacher must consult with the governing body, staff, pupils, parents/guardians along with other key figures in the work of the school, e.g. local authority, other schools and members of the community (Welsh Government, 2016). In ensuring stakeholders are actively involved, schools may produce a number of plans as part of the SDP which may include a staff development plan and spending plans for grant funding (Welsh Government, 2016).

Within the nurture group there is a high staff-to-pupil ratio (Shaver and McClatchey, 2013). Pupils are supported by key staff members with whom they develop trusting and caring relationships. Staff provide support for pupils' social, emotional and cognitive development (Shaver and McClatchey, 2013). However, co-operation and involvement of all staff within the school are vital in ensuring the success of the nurture group to provide a holistic wellbeing approach (Mogren, 2019). To assist with embedding this aspect of the SDP, frequent training is delivered to staff by Nurture UK as well as being an agenda item at every school staff meeting. However, it must be stated that not all staff find this holistic approach easy to adhere to due to such a drastic culture change within the school.

Another essential stakeholder involved within this action of implementing an effective nurture group is that of parents. According to Harris and Goodall (2007, p.70) "parental engagement in pupils' learning makes a difference – it is the most powerful school improvement lever we have". This is an element that is frequently absent within the lives of the pupils attending the nurture groups, essentially reinforcing the need and purpose of such a group. However, it must be stated that overall, the school promotes spiritual, moral, social and cultural development successfully by inviting parents regularly to join in morning assemblies (Estyn, 2016). Nevertheless, again, it is often parents for whom these sessions are targeted, are the ones who fail to attend such events.

Further key stakeholders involved with the day to day operations of the school and thus the SDP are that of external agencies, such as educational psychologists and welfare officers (Estyn, 2016). Such stakeholders are vital in achieving the school's action of developing a well-established nurture group. The welfare officer attends parents' evenings, speaking to parents and underlying the importance of attendance, further supporting the work of the nurture group (Estyn, 2016).

The nurture room differs from the traditional classroom. It is designed to have a nurturing atmosphere which includes sofas and a kitchen area (Sanders, 2007). Cooking and snacks are fundamental aspects of the classic nurture group model as these produce opportunities for social learning (Shaver and Mcclatechey, 2013). To support this element the school makes good use of the resources of the community and local businesses (Estyn, 2016). An example of this is that of the nurture group visiting the local market to purchase ingredients to bake at the school. This enriches the pupils' experiences by developing a good understanding of the functions of the surrounding community whilst enhancing their social skills. Similarly, there are good links between the school and other schools in the local cluster, which include valuable opportunities to share good practice (Brighthouse and Woods, 1999).

Measuring Impact

The next phase of the SDP is to implement the actions and strategies outlined (Welsh Government, 2014). The school staff will have been consulted during the preparation and revision of the SDP. They will be made aware of their responsibilities in implementing the actions necessary. Commitment of staff throughout the development process is crucial in order for the SDP to be implemented efficiently and effectively. Clear details of responsibilities, accountability, actions and timescales are also essential in avoiding confusion, duplication and effective use of resources.

In order to assess the impact of such implementations within the school in question, senior management analyse a wide range of evidence drawn from data regarding pupils' achievement, scrutiny reports, lesson observations, and sharing best practice. Teachers of the pupils attending the nurture group held fortnightly meetings with the coordinators of the group in order to feedback relevant information such as signs of progression and any concerns they may have.

Reflection and Evaluation

An SDP should be considered as a live document that is regularly monitored by senior management during the development cycle and formally reviewed and revised at least annually. This could also be undertaken following an Estyn inspection. This will ensure that the school's improvement planning and strategies reflect the up-to-date context of the school.

Relating to the action in question, the initiatives in place have proven valuable as well as successful as pupils attending the nurture groups are slowly but surely increasing the amount of time spent in the mainstream class with fewer episodes of disruptive behaviour. Feedback from nurture group leaders to teachers regarding the pupils' development has progressively improved throughout the academic year. This suggests that the school is meeting the aims and objectives of the action set out.

However, there is an evident lack of understanding amongst fellow pupils surrounding the purpose and importance of the nurture group. Pupils in mainstream classes often felt it was unjust that selected pupils were allowed to go to the group. They viewed it as a 'free pass' to 'avoid' work. This lack of education could potentially run the risk of the group becoming counterproductive. This was due to the fact that fellow peers' lack of understanding and knowledge could lead to alienation of those attending. As highlighted by Hughes et al

(2001) fellow classmates' interactions are likely to be influenced by the teacher's attitudes towards the pupil attending the nurture group. Evidence suggests that peers make use of their observations of teacher-pupil interactions to inform their own interactions with a particular child (Zionts et al., 2004). In turn, this has the potential to negatively affect the pupil upon return to the mainstream classroom. Thus, education surrounding the purpose of the nurture group should be clearly communicated to all pupils.

Another crucial aspect in need of addressing is that of the location of the nurture group. Due to limited space and a lack of funding, the group is currently held in the school staff room. This is largely down to the fact that it is the only space available with a kitchen and comfortable chairs, features recommended when forming a nurture group environment (Reynolds, et al., 2009). Thus, there needs to be a clear distinction for both nurture group pupils and staff of their designated space in order to avoid a merge of purposes.

Conclusion

To conclude, this report aimed to critically explore how the school in question develops one aspect of its SDP with a particular focus on its actions and impact. This report has highlighted the importance of understanding pupils' social, emotional and behavioural needs as well as adopting appropriate strategies to address such needs. Likewise, it has demonstrated the importance of all relevant stakeholders effectively collaborating to achieve a common goal. It is crucial that a robust SDP is in place and that it is used as a frequent reference point by both staff and governing bodies to create an optimum learning experience for pupils. Equally, the celebration of wins should not be underestimated and should be used to further motivate staff and pupils. In my teaching career moving forward, I will take all of the above into consideration and do my utmost to adhere and contribute to such a plan.

References

- Bennathan, M. and Boxall, M. (1997). The Boxall Profile. Sutton: SEBDA.
- Binnie, L. M. and Allen, K. (2008) Whole school support for vulnerable children: the evaluation of a part-time nurture group. *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*, Vol. 13, pp. 201–216.
- Brighthouse, T and Woods, D. (1999). How to Improve your school. Routledge; 1 edition.
- Brighthouse, T. 2013. The A-Z of school improvement: principles and practice. London: Bloomsbury
- Colley, D. (2009). Nurture groups in secondary schools. *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*, Vol. 14, pp. 291–300.
- Estyn. (2016). A report on [REDACTED]. Cardiff: Estyn
- Harris, A., and Goodall, J. (2007). Engaging Parents in Raising Achievement Do Parents Know They Matter? *Educational Research*, Vol. 50, pp. 277-289.
- Hughes, J.N., Cavell, T.A. and Willson, V. (2001). Further support for the developmental significance of the quality of the teacher-student relationship. *Journal of School Psychology*, Vol. 39, pp. 289–301
- Lai, M. K., A. Wilson, S. McNaughton, and S. Hsiao. (2014). “Improving Achievement in Secondary Schools: Impact of a Literacy Project on Reading Comprehension and Secondary School Qualifications.” *Reading Research Quarterly* Vol. 49, pp. 305–334.
- MacBeath, J, and Mortimore, P. 2001. *Improving School Effectiveness*. Buckingham: Open UP.
- Marsh, J. A. (2012). “Interventions Promoting Educators’ Use of Data: Research Insights and Gaps.” *Teachers College Record*, Vol. 11, pp. 1–48.
- Mogren, A., Gericke, N., Scherp, H. (2019). Whole school approaches to education for sustainable development: a model that links to school improvement. *Environmental Education Research*, Vol. 25, pp. 508-531
- Morrison, M. 1991. Finding the right dominoes: Introducing school development. *School Organisation*, Vol. 11, pp. 171
- Reynolds, S., Mackay, T., and Kearney, M. (2009). Nurture groups: a large-scale, controlled study of effects on development and academic attainment. *British Journal of Special Education*, Vol. 36, pp. 204– 212.
- Sanders, T. (2007) Helping children thrive at school: the effectiveness of nurture groups. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, Vol. 1, pp. 45– 61.

Schildkamp, K. (2019). Data-based decision-making for school improvement: Research insights and gaps. *Educational Research*, Vol. 61:3, pp. 257-273.

Seth-Smith, F., Levi, N., Pratt, R., Fongay, P., and Jaffey, D. (2010). Do nurture groups improve the social, emotional and behavioural functioning of at-risk children? *Educational & Child Psychology*, Vol. 27, 1, pp. 21–34.

Shaver, I., McClatchey, K. (2013). Assessing the effectiveness of nurture groups in Northern Scotland. *Support for learning*, 28 (3), pp. 97-102.

Street Check. 2020. Area Information for [REDACTED]. Online. Available at: <https://www.streetcheck.co.uk/postcode/sa113a1> [Accessed: 30 March 2020]

The Nurture Group Network. (2013). What are Nurture Groups? [Online]. Available at: <http://www.nurturegroups.org/pages/what-are-nurturegroups.html> [Accessed 27/03/20].

Van Geel, M., T. Keuning, A. J. Visscher, and J. P. Fox. (2016). “Assessing the Effects of a School-Wide Data-Based Decision-Making Intervention on Student Achievement Growth in Primary Schools.” *American Educational Research Journal*, Vol. 53, pp. 360–394.

Welsh Government. (2014). School Development Plans. [Online]. Available at: <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-03/school-development-plans.pdf> [Accessed: 23/03/20]

Welsh Government. (2016). Theme 5: Developing community partnerships and multi-agency working Resources 1–2. [Online]. Available at: https://padlet-uploads.storage.googleapis.com/82566160/d32f7db0ffe1e203d02b26352f49ea70/theme_1_leadership_for_a_self_improving_system_resources_1_7.pdf [Accessed: 23/03/20]

West-burnham, J., Farra, M., Otero, G. (2007). *Schools and Communities: Working together to transform children's lives*. Stafford: Network Continuum Education.

Zionts, L., Anhalt, K., Hinrichs Devore, H. and Davidson, S. (2004). Children's school adjustment: The impact of teacher and parent relationships. Paper presented at the 2004 Convention of the National Association for School Psychologists, Dallas, Texas.