

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

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Introduction

As a student teacher, I have been given a unique opportunity to participate in a bridging experience that focuses on an action point of my Lead School's School Development Plan (SDP).

The School is a diverse English-medium mixed 11 to 18 school in Cardiff, Wales. With a student body of 1,721 pupils from various ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds, the school strongly emphasises inclusion and ensures that all students feel supported and valued. Despite a significant proportion of pupils being eligible for free school meals (32.7%) and having special educational needs (approximately 35%), the school maintains a positive and welcoming culture that promotes respect, responsibility, and resilience among students. In support of student well-being, the school offers a range of extra-curricular activities and programs that encourage engagement and personal growth.

During the experience, I gained valuable insights into how the school identifies action points for its SDP, implements actions, and measures their impact. Additionally, I learned about the school's approach to developing its SDP and was encouraged to connect to research, theories, and policies.

For this report, I was required to select one action point from my school's SDP that significantly impacts the overall school improvement. Once I have identified the action point, I should describe how the school developed its SDP, the process used to determine the specific action point I chose, and how the school has implemented the action point and the strategies to ensure its success. Additionally, I described the impact of the action point on the school and the outcomes achieved as a result of its implementation.

Overall, my report should provide an overview of the action point I selected, its implementation process, and its impact on the school. It should also include an analysis of how this action point fits within the broader school improvement goals and

how it relates to current research, theories or policies.

Literature review

According to the Welsh Government, the Minister for Education and Skills has launched a programme to improve the quality of education and learner outcomes (SLO, 2017). This programme focuses on sustainable school improvement through effective planning, including setting challenging targets. To achieve this, schools need to undergo a process of honest self-evaluation using qualitative and quantitative data. They then identify priorities for improvement, develop strategies, take action, and review progress and impact.

Schools use a School Development Plan (SDP) to achieve these goals. The SDP outlines a school's strategic plan for improvement by setting out its actions to improve learner outcomes, focusing on short- and long-term priorities and activities (SDP, 2014). The method ensures everyone is working towards the same goals and priorities to raise standards and improve outcomes for all learners, regardless of their background. The SDP also includes the school's plan for addressing national importance, such as increasing literacy and numeracy standards and reducing poverty's impact on educational attainment.

The SDP also outlines the school's staff development plan to meet its priorities and targets. It is a living document that should be regularly updated to reflect the school's progress in meeting its importance, considering the latest performance data. The SDP cycle is a three-year plan that outlines a school's priorities, targets, and strategies for improvement. It is based on a clear vision of what the school aims to achieve, and this vision sets the context for the SDP (SDP, 2014).

During the SDP cycle, the school monitors progress against set targets and milestones. The SDP involves all school partners and stakeholders, including the governing body, school staff, learners, parents,

carers, and others involved in the life and work of the school. The SDP must also contain details of the school's provision for addressing the professional development needs of all staff, the governing body's plans to work with the broader school community, and how the school will evaluate the effectiveness of previously achieved targets (SDP, 2014).

Consequently, the art department has identified three main priorities to raise achievement standards. One of the targets is to monitor pupils' progress through feedback to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Then, this study will discuss how pupils' progress can be monitored through feedback as a crucial factor that can significantly influence students' learning. It is considered a powerful tool for enhancing academic performance.

The primary objective of the feedback is to minimise the gap between the current understanding and what needs to be understood (Sadler, 1989). However, for feedback to be effective in helping students achieve their learning objectives, their current understanding must be adequate. The failure to address past learning experiences can render feedback ineffective, as noted by Kulhavy (1977), who stresses that feedback alone cannot create change. In essence, feedback is only valuable if it enables students to add, overwrite, or restructure previous knowledge (Winne and Butler, 1994).

This evidence highlights that the impact of feedback can vary significantly, benefiting or harming a student's learning outcomes depending on its type and quality.

Consequently, in light of the evidence presented, Hattie's (2009) analysis revealed that certain types of feedback could be more effective than others. Hattie (2009) also found that the most effective feedback was when pupils had a clear and specific idea of completing the activity. Kluger and Denise (1996) concurred with Hattie's findings, asserting that feedback was more effective when the learning objectives were clear and specific, and the level of complexity to achieve them was low. Kluger and Denise (1996) also claimed that a low level of complexity could help to reduce the perception of threat in the pupils' minds, leading to increased effort levels and encouraging pupils to tackle more challenging activities rather than stay in their comfort zone. Sweller (1990) also suggested that

narrowing the range of learning objectives could make goals more manageable. Locke and Latham (1984) further proposed that specific goals are more effective, allowing pupils to obtain relevant information on what steps they need to take to achieve their goals rather than general or non-specific ones.

However, those specific goals can be more effective if they present a suitable level of challenge, elicit students' commitment to achieving them, and provide feedback on their progress, facilitating a more comprehensive understanding of the task (Locke and Latham, 1990). Black and Wiliam (1998) reinforced Locke and Latham's findings (1990) by asserting that pupils' engagement and academic achievement increase when challenging but specific goals accompany comprehensive feedback. On the contrary, praise, rewards and punishment were the least effective feedback forms. Deci, Koestner and Ryan (1999) concurred with Hattie's findings (2009), demonstrating that rewards can have a negative impact on pupils' performance due to the minimal amount of information provided, which can undermine engagement and self-regulation.

Therefore, based on the evidence, specific goals and clear, specific feedback are effective in increasing student engagement and academic achievement. Simplifying goals can also encourage students to take on more challenging tasks. However, praise, rewards, and punishment were ineffective feedback forms. Rewards, in particular, can negatively impact student performance by providing minimal information and undermining engagement and self-regulation.

In conclusion, feedback is crucial in helping students achieve their learning objectives by bridging the gap between their current understanding and what they need to learn. The efficacy of feedback depends on its quality and type, with specific goals and clear feedback effectively enhancing student engagement and academic achievement and simplified goals encouraging students to tackle more challenging tasks. Even praise, rewards, and punishment are ineffective feedback forms, with rewards negatively impacting student performance by providing minimal information and undermining engagement and self-regulation.

Developing an action point

Self-evaluation

The school identified three areas/priorities for development to raise standards of achievement based on recommendations from the Estyn report in 2017. The report suggested improving standards in some subjects and strengthening self-evaluation and improvement planning. The school has identified the need to raise achievement standards in Art and Design by continuing to improve the quality of teaching and learning, well-being, and leadership across the department/school.

Data analysis

The art department used qualitative and quantitative data to identify the area of need, such as pupil tracking and pupil data. The department ensured that pupils achieved and went beyond their minimum expected grades (MEGs), and data tracking was accurate. Additionally, the department moderated pupil work throughout the year, using KS4 criteria accurately. Regarding stakeholders, learners, teachers, and the head of the department need to be involved in the plan. The head of the department will lead the initiative, while the teachers will operate it daily. The head of the department will also consult with other stakeholders, such as teachers from different departments and in charge of other year groups, to ensure that the plan is implemented effectively. By involving learners and relevant stakeholders and using data-driven methods, the department expects to create a more effective and comprehensive plan for improvement.

Strategic planning

One of the central art department's targets is improving teaching and learning quality by monitoring pupil progress. The success criteria for this initiative include successful pupil outcomes, the achievement of class and pupil targets, and staff being confident in marking accurately against WJEC criteria at an earlier stage. The department must implement pupil tracking, provide up-to-date examples, and offer regular good practice feedback to achieve these goals.

The strategy includes ensuring that staff continue to build on the new ethos of sharing ideas and monitoring students' books and resources as part of department routines. Additionally, the art teachers

will respond to feedback and re-visit work to make progress, use weekly tracking, and offer extra after-school support using up-to-date work examples. The time scale for this plan is September 2022 to July 2023, and it is expected to be implemented at no cost to the school. By implementing this strategy, the art department hopes to improve the quality of teaching and learning, ultimately leading to better pupil outcomes and more significant achievement of targets.

Measuring impact

The impact of the department's plan will be reviewed every academic year, with weekly and termly reviews conducted by the person in charge of the department and the art teachers. The plan's effectiveness will be determined by whether or not class and pupil targets are achieved and if pupil achievement is improved to the targets set at the GCSE art level. Through regular monitoring and assessment, the school will be able to identify areas of improvement and make necessary adjustments to the plan to ensure that it remains effective in achieving its goals. By consistently measuring the plan's impact, the school can confirm that it is progressing towards its targets and continually improving its students' teaching and learning quality.

Reflection and evaluation

Overall, the school has taken a comprehensive approach to improve achievement standards in the art department. The self-evaluation process was a critical first step in identifying the areas of need based on the recommendations from the Estyn report (2017). Using qualitative and quantitative data to determine the area of need is also a positive sign that the department is data-driven in its approach to improvement.

The strategic planning process is also well thought out and includes clear success criteria for the initiative. The involvement of learners and relevant stakeholders in the plan's implementation is also a positive sign that the department is committed to collaboration and teamwork.

The plan's impact will be regularly measured and assessed, which is crucial in ensuring that the department remains on track and continually improves. It is also optimistic that the plan is expected to be implemented at no cost to the school,

indicating that the department is focused on achieving its goals efficiently and effectively.

Overall, the school's approach to developing an action plan for improving achievement standards in the art department is a positive sign that it is committed to continuous improvement. However, it would be helpful to see how the plan aligns with the broader goals and priorities of the school to ensure that the art department's goals are fully integrated into the school's strategic vision.

Indeed, here are some practical suggestions based on theory and practice that could be considered to improve the department's approach to developing an action plan for improving achievement standards:

1. *Involve all stakeholders in the self-evaluation process:* While it is optimistic that the school identified three areas/priorities for development based on recommendations from the Estyn report, involving all stakeholders in the self-evaluation process would be helpful. This could include teachers, teaching assistants, learners, parents, and other school community members, such as administrators. By applying everyone in the self-evaluation process, the school can ensure that everyone's perspectives are heard and a shared understanding of the areas of need (Bronfenbrenner, 1976).
2. *Use a range of data sources to inform the action plan:* While the art department used qualitative and quantitative data to identify the area of need, it would be helpful to use a range of data sources to inform the action plan. This could include data from learner surveys (pupil's voice), learner and parents' feedback, attendance, demographics, observations, and external assessments. The school can use various data sources to ensure the action plan is evidence-based and reflects a comprehensive understanding of the issues.
3. *Incorporate various teaching strategies and assessment methods:* The strategic planning process focuses on improving teaching and learning quality by monitoring pupil progress. It would be helpful to incorporate multiple teaching strategies and assessment methods to achieve this goal. This could include formative assessment, peer assessment, and self-

assessment (Black and Wiliam, 2010). By incorporating various teaching strategies and assessment methods, the school can ensure that learners are engaged and motivated to learn and that their progress is regularly monitored (Wiliam, 2009, 2011).

4. *Create a culture of continuous improvement:* The impact of the department's plan will be reviewed every academic year, with weekly and termly reviews conducted by the person in charge of the department and the art teachers. It would be helpful to create a culture of continuous improvement by regularly reviewing and reflecting on the effectiveness of the department's action plan (Brookfield, 1998). This could include regular meetings with all stakeholders to discuss progress and identify areas for improvement. By creating a culture of continuous improvement, the school can ensure that it is continually learning and growing and that the action plan remains relevant and effective over time (Berger, 2003).

These are a few practical suggestions that could be considered to improve the department's approach to developing an action plan for improving achievement standards. By incorporating these suggestions, the department can ensure its approach is evidence-based, collaborative, and focused on continuous improvement.

Conclusion

This report has discussed a school's School Development Plan (SDP) and how it identifies action points, implements actions, and measures their impact. Additionally, one action point from the department's SDP was selected to analyse and describe the development process, implementation, and impact. Therefore, this report also provides an overview of one of the action point's implementation process, its impact on the school/department, and its relation to broader school improvement goals and current research, theories, or policies.

In doing so, some literature reviews have discussed the focus on the art department's priorities, explicitly monitoring pupils' progress through feedback to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Lastly, this report has also reflected and evaluated what the art department has done and

how things could be done differently by making practical suggestions based on theory and practice.

In conclusion, analysing a department's strategic plan has given me a deeper understanding of the importance of using evidence-based methods to inform decision-making and identify areas for improvement. I have also gained valuable insights into practical strategies and processes for achieving better pupil outcomes by examining the actions taken, the impact observed, and the evidence base used. Reflecting on the elements of a school's strategic development plan has given me a solid foundation to identify effective strategies and interventions to improve student outcomes in my future teaching practice. As a student teacher, I will apply similar methods in my future teaching career, such as using data to inform teaching practices, involving learners and other stakeholders in improvement plans, and regularly monitoring and assessing impact to make necessary adjustments to ensure continued progress towards targets. This approach will help me improve my teaching practices and improve pupil outcomes.

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