

A Critical Evaluation of the Development of a Strategic Target in a School Development Plan: Actions, Impact, and Evidence-Based Reflections

The purpose of this assignment is to critically assess a key item from [REDACTED] School Development Plan (SDP), a Welsh-medium primary school in Aberystwyth, Ceredigion. For the purpose of this assignment, the school will be referred to as School X in accordance with BERA (2024) ethical guidelines and to ensure confidentiality. The improvement of Welsh oracy abilities across the entire school has been selected as the strategic aim for this assessment. This goal is particularly important in the context of School X, because the school's culture and everyday operations focus around the development and preservation of the Welsh language. Serving a diverse pupil population, School X plays a vital role to the linguistic development of both first-language Welsh speakers and those learning Welsh as a second language. The school, which is part of a bilingual community, is dedicated to developing proficient, self-assured Welsh speakers who can utilise the language in a variety of significant situations. By emphasising oracy, the school hopes to improve students' capacity for successful communication in Welsh both within and outside of the classroom, enhancing their academic performance and sense of cultural identity.

A purposeful and cyclical process, school development planning aims to improve teaching and learning, raise standards, and ensure the progress and well-being of all students. The School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act of 2013 mandates that all maintained schools in Wales create regularly evaluate a School Development Plan (Welsh Government, 2013). Over a three-year period, the SDP aims to create an organised, evidence-based framework that directs school progress. It is modified yearly in response to continuous self-evaluation.

According to the Welsh Government (2014), the process generally consists of a number of interrelated steps, including a thorough self-evaluation, the identification of important goals, action planning, execution, and review. Self-evaluation is essential since it serves as the foundation for establishing quantifiable and achievable growth goals. Following that, these are converted into precise activities with assigned roles, deadlines, and success criteria. Constant observation and reflection guarantee that the strategy stays adaptable and successful.

The process of development planning needs to be in line with broader educational goals. In Wales, these include national initiatives like the Curriculum for Wales, which places a high priority on equity, progress, and learner well-being (Welsh Government, 2020), and Cymraeg 2050 (Welsh Government, 2017), which seeks to increase the number of Welsh speakers. In order to maintain consistency and coherence throughout the educational

system, regional consortia also assist schools in coordinating their programs with these goals. School X guarantees that its development planning is not only contextually relevant but also supports wider educational reform throughout Wales by incorporating these national and regional priorities.

The enhancement of oracy skills in Welsh schools is an essential part of the Welsh Government's broader aim to rejuvenate the Welsh language, as detailed in *Cymraeg 2050: A million Welsh speakers* (Welsh Government, 2017). Oracy, which refers to the capacity to communicate clearly and fluently in spoken language, is crucial for students' cognitive, social, and linguistic growth (Mercer et al., 2019). In a Welsh-medium or bilingual setting, fostering oracy skills holds not only educational value but also cultural and political significance.

Differentiating oracy development for students at different stages of Welsh language acquisition presents additional difficulties for teachers. Hodges (2019) asserts that some teachers are undertrained in the development of oracy in a second language, which can result in an excessive dependence on scripted or extremely formal tasks that don't represent communication in everyday situations.

A variety of evidence-based approaches to addressing these problems are highlighted in recent work. The Welsh Government and regional consortia created the *Siarter Iaith* (Language Charter), which encourages whole-school strategies to boost students' interest in and usage of Welsh (Estyn, 2019). According to research, it can enhance motivation and informal Welsh usage by promoting student voice, leadership possibilities, and peer-to-peer activities like language ambassadors.

Additionally, dialogic education has drawn interest as a successful oracy development technique. According to Mercer et al. (2019), controlled classroom debate promotes both linguistic development and higher order thinking by valuing student contributions and encouraging lengthy verbal responses. This strategy can be especially effective in encouraging genuine and significant language use in Welsh-medium contexts.

The lack of exposure to Welsh outside of the classroom, particularly in areas where English is the primary language, is a major obstacle to developing Welsh oracy abilities in pupils. According to Estyn's 2022 Annual Report, almost all Welsh-medium schools saw a drop in students' spoken and vocabulary usage of Welsh during the pandemic, especially among students from non-Welsh-speaking homes. When they returned to school, they were less confident and reluctant to use Welsh as a result of this exposure reduction (Nation Cymru, 2021).

In result, current research supports whole-school cultural efforts, dialogic pedagogy, and digital integration as successful, evidence-based practices, even though difficulties in

developing Welsh oracy abilities still exist, especially with regard to home language use and teacher preparation. These strategies are crucial to achieving Cymraeg 2050's objectives and guaranteeing that Welsh is a living, vibrant language among the next generation.

In its School Development Plan (SDP), school X, has made the improvement of Welsh oracy abilities a top priority for the entire school. This goal, which aims to improve students' fluency and confidence in using Welsh, is in response to both national initiatives and particular school needs. It also ensures alignment with the Welsh Government's Cymraeg 2050 strategy, which aims to increase the number of Welsh speakers to one million by 2050 (Welsh Government, 2017).

A number of factors, including community needs and inspection input, impacted the decision to concentrate on Welsh oracy. The school determined that students' spoken Welsh skills needed to be improved at the most recent Estyn inspection, especially in casual and impromptu settings (Estyn, 2020). There were little possibilities for many students, particularly those from English-speaking households, to have real Welsh interactions outside of the classroom. Additionally, the community's dedication to Welsh and the growing value of bilingualism in the workplace underlined the need to give oracy top priority in order to improve students' prospects for the future.

School X has put in place a number of efforts to meet this goal. Among these are the implementation of daily Welsh language classes that concentrate especially on enhancing oracy abilities via organised discussion and engaging exercises. Additionally, the school has integrated Welsh oracy objectives into each subject area, guaranteeing that students consistently work on their speaking abilities throughout the curriculum.

The development of a "Welsh Language Charter" (Siarter Iaith), which promotes the use of both formal and informal language throughout the school day, is a key milestone (Welsh Government, 2020).

The provision of resources has included investments in digital tools to facilitate interactive learning and professional development for staff members to improve their abilities to teach Welsh oracy. This includes digital storytelling tools and language apps that enable students to document and share their Welsh language proficiency (Jones & Hughes, 2021).

Several methods are used to evaluate this goal's achievement. Staff can evaluate how well Welsh is being incorporated into classroom activities through routine lesson observations. To measure progress in students' oracy abilities, periodic surveys of Welsh language competency and formative assessments are also carried out. To evaluate the effect of the activities on linguistic confidence outside of school, feedback is also obtained from parents and students (Estyn, 2019). Another measure of success is

student participation in language-rich events like the Eisteddfod and attendance at extracurricular Welsh-language events.

To enhance Welsh language training, the school has integrated digital storytelling tools and language software. With the help of these materials, students can record and communicate their Welsh language skills, encouraging participation and useful language use. For example, the Welsh Government has backed initiatives such as Darllen Co, which enables kids to read and listen to Welsh books at the same time, improving their language and literacy abilities (Welsh Government, 2024).

Following reflection on my work, I helped the school's efforts by incorporating oracy activities into my lessons, which promote the use of Welsh for communication and instructions. In order to give students more authentic language experiences, I suggest future cooperation with nearby Welsh-speaking communities. Furthermore, increasing the use of digital platforms to enable more interesting online discussions may help close the gap for students who have little access to Welsh outside of the classroom.

This assignment's main goal was to evaluate the School Development Plan (SDP) of School X critically, with a particular focus on the goal of enhancing the school's overall Welsh oracy proficiency. The main conclusions demonstrated that the school gave Welsh oracy top priority in order to meet the demands found in recent inspections and to be in line with national objectives like Cymraeg 2050. Using the Siarter Iaith (Language Charter), incorporating Welsh oracy into everyday classes, and utilising digital resources to enhance staff and student development are some of the school's initiatives.

I discovered the value of evidence-based decision-making in school development during this process. Utilising information from assessments, student comments, and observer evaluations is crucial since it guarantees that the tactics used are efficient and sensitive to the needs of the students as well as the larger educational environment.

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