

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

Introduction

In this essay, I will be intending to discuss some of the priorities that School X has set out in its School Development Plan (SDP) by mainly focusing on Priority 4, which is 'To improve the effect of the pupils' voice'. School X has written many points to improve on and how they will be going ahead to develop them. The school has noted what the situation was, what to improve on and what will be their main sources of achieving an improvement. Priority 4 is the priority which has the highest number of steps to implement, which highlights the school's eagerness to improve the pupils' voice.

According to *My Local School*, School X has a green support category which means that the school's most definitely on the right track. School X is a bilingual secondary school in a small town in Carmarthenshire, South Wales. There are 1,120 pupils in School X and one hundred and ninety-two of them are in sixth form.

School X is a Professional Learning Pioneer school, and is working closely with other schools in order to realise the recommendations in Successful Futures to plan and implement a new curriculum for Wales. School X is a close-knit and proud community. Close and productive relationships between staff and pupils make a valuable contribution towards creating a familial and supportive atmosphere. The respectful behaviour of nearly all pupils, and their polished social skills, are notable strengths. During their time at the school, many pupils make sound progress in terms of their knowledge, understanding and skills. (Estyn, 2019)

Literature review

In their reflections and proposals regarding education, young people demonstrate a surprising degree of maturity, they are ambitious as well as realistic. Many students have an overview of the type of education they need to meet their goals and priorities and are able to summarise in a comprehensive way the importance of education for all and the type of education they need to acquire the knowledge, understanding and life skills, so his views are mostly frank and direct, often critical but also constructive.

Student observations can be a very good source of information for future students seeking to pursue a postgraduate or master's degree at a university because they can give the most reliable information on what is happening in the classroom, they express their main concerns, particularly regarding the activities and deficiencies in the classrooms, they value the educational system, courses, exams, contents of the subjects and stage the teacher-student relationship.

It is increasingly clear that the student world is a complex field. In general, the students have been analysed in a fragmentary way and there's no conceptual discussion on how to analytically integrate their needs of different types, their intellectual capacities, their objectives when they are in school, the relationships established between social contexts and their projections towards the present and the future, among other aspects. Thus, there is no comprehensive view of students as diverse subjects and with multiple edges in their living conditions inside and outside of school. (Erickson & Shultz, 1996).

Students can use what they find in the school context in specific ways for their lives or remain in it due to the range of learning and relationships typical of student cultures, not only is there a diversity of students in terms of the socioeconomic conditions they have or the different educational options to which they have access, but within the same school the variability of experiences through which students live and give meaning to their participation in the school environment.

Conceptually speaking, there is not a subject-student but multiple student experiences that are expressed in and through school settings. We should not only ask ourselves whether or not students appropriate what the school offers them, but how, from their experiences as students, they have different and multiple ways of relating to what they find in schools. From this conception, the concept of student role is not adequate for us to capture the diversity of experiences, since this concept assumes homogeneity of practices and does not capture the different meanings that individuals give to the value of the school and the experiences in it. The concept of role also supposes passivity, in the sense that students accept to perform a certain task or are forced to do it, so that the intense work of distancing that they carry out in relation to socially established roles is not identified, which allows them build their identity and give meaning to their activities. (Dubet & Martuccelli, 1996)

Knowing who the students are means learning to give them the word or listen to their voices and try to understand their experiences at school, the ways in which it makes sense and becomes a space for realising everyday life. Research has shown that an invisibility of students prevails in school contexts, because they are not seen by adults as subjects with their own concerns, motivations, abilities, but rather a plurality of lenses are used through which attention is focused or paid to deficits, to the representations of the families to which the students belong, in search of the ideal student, to the desired frameworks of discipline and school performance, social class, gender, but very rarely are their voices heard to understand their perspectives. (Langhout, 2005)

Despite the pupil's voice being labelled as something vital, some experts suggest not to give students as much freedom as others want to give them. Morgan (2009) pinpoints the problem of the fear that some students have of their opinion being told to the wrong people. Pupils have trust issues with teachers and suggest that the information they have given could be used against them and could possibly face consequences. Another fear is the possibility of asking too much of pupils and requiring their opinion too frequently. McAuley & Brattman (2003) say that a pupil's opinion should be meaningful and receiving an opinion too often could be damaging, along with pupils' contributions being biased towards the agendas of some teachers.

Developing an action point

I have chosen to look at the pupil's voice as one of the priorities from School X's SDP as it plays a vital role for the pupil's well-being and it's highly important that a pupil's voice is heard.

Importantly, Estyn (2019) has stated that School X had received praise for how they deal with the well-being of the pupils and how they allow the pupils to voice their opinion. Results from the school's well-being survey shows that almost all pupils feel safe when they're at school and they feel that they can speak to someone in the school if they have any concerns. All staff members have been trained to give emotional support if a pupil comes to them with a problem.

In School X's SDP, they have noted what the situation's like now, how they plan to improve it, who's in charge and what they've chosen to use as their main plan of improving it. The first point on the school's current situation is the school council. The school council is formed of a number of pupils from each year group and they meet with the headmaster and his team to discuss any issues or to suggest something that might improve the school. According to the SDP, the school council has had some positive impact on the pupils, such as changing the teaching programme and the school's sportswear. On the other hand, it's been noted in the SDP that a large number of pupils aren't aware of the work that the school council does or can do, and therefore the pupils aren't feeling influenced enough to voice their opinions.

To improve, School X has noted targets and a success criteria on their SDP. The school will feel that they have succeeded if they can achieve the targets that they have set. Firstly, all pupils need have a clear understanding of what their voice and opinions can do to help the school and their classmates. This can be helped by raising awareness of the school council and what fine work it can do for the pupils, which is another target. Another target for the school council is to report back to pupils in during assembly about what they have been discussing in the meetings. The final target set is for the opinions of pupils to influence schoolwork, especially teaching and learning aspects within subject departments.

School X has set out targets for the next academic year and will be tirelessly working at achieving the targets. Firstly, they will be working on giving feedback on pupils' and parents' voice regarding learning in their school. It's always important to hear what the pupils and their parents have to say about the school. Unhappy parents could cause problems for schools and an easy way to avoid this is by giving the opportunity for the parents to voice their concerns or praises.

Another target set by School X is to hold an audit for extra-curricular activities and the effect they have on pupils. It's noticeable that School X has a strong connection with the community and the possibility of being able to hold extra-curricular activities is one that they can always count on. Their connection with Principality and the BBC creates new opportunities for the pupils and can improve their key skills, such as teamwork and problem solving.

Finally, School X's final target for next year is to evaluate the affect the reward system has on the well-being and attitude at learning. This could be easily done by handing out surveys to the pupils to see if they like the prospect of being rewarded for good behaviour and hard work. Therefore, it's important to hear what the pupils have to say and to give them the opportunity to voice their opinions.

A lot of money needs to be invested for School X to have the facilities to achieve their targets from the SDP. Fortunately, for School X it receives a lot of financial aid, especially from Principality. For the first priority on the school's SDP, a large sum of money is needed to fund the adapting of the curriculum and Principality have happily funded this for them, which highlights the togetherness of the community in the area.

Reflection and evaluation

School X has developed an action plan which includes activities and strategies to improve the pupil's voice. The overall cost of these strategies is nothing, which is great for the school and it shows that there's no need for money to influence the pupils to give their opinion and to improve their well-being. One strategy that I'm fond of is the 'question of the month' where pupils are given the opportunity to ask a question regarding the school. The question could consist of how to improve schoolwork, questions regarding healthy eating and so on. Another strategy that catches my eye is the teachers allowing the pupils to fill out a questionnaire about how the term has gone for them.

After reading School X's action plan, they should consider having the questionnaires more often than at the end of term. If they really want to make sure that the pupils' voices are being heard, they should give out these questionnaires fortnightly, at least. This would give the teachers and

the school a more up to date opinion and view on the pupils' morale which can alter often. On the other hand, suggestions by Morgan (2008) and McAuley & Brattman (2003) must be considered and that a pupil's voice should be meaningful and mustn't be forced too often.

While reviewing School X's SDP, it's quite pleasing to see that the pupils have voiced their opinion about sportswear. Physical education is vital in improving the health and well-being of the pupils and it's also pleasing to see that the school has taken action regarding the sportswear. Brooker & Macdonald (1999) believe that teachers of physical education encourage their pupils to change their lifestyle to being healthier and more physically active. They also believe that physical education is vital for improving effective practice in the classroom. Glasby & Macdonald (2004) also believe that pupils are more likely to voice their opinion if they are being provided with authentic and meaningful learning experiences in the classroom.

School X should consider: "Children and young people should be seen as young citizens, with rights and opinions to be taken into account now. They are not a species apart, to be alternately demonised and sentimentalised...". (Welsh Assembly Government, 2004, p. 4). It must be acknowledged that pupils have as much of a right as anyone when it comes to voicing their opinions. Pupils are the next generation and their word should be considered at all times, even if it's something of low importance for a person, it could mean the world to a pupil.

Conclusion

To conclude, writing and researching for this assignment has opened new paths and has given me a wider range of knowledge, not only for pupils' voice but for how hard the school works to create a SDP and to stick to it.

As Rudduck & McIntyre (2007) have discussed, it's important that we take onboard what the pupils say, rather than just listening to them. It's highly important what the pupils say is really considered, which means if the pupils see that their opinions have been considered, they will then have the confidence to suggest more on how they think the school could change.

Furthermore, this assignment has shown me that a pupil's voice is critical in the development of a school, because without the pupils, there wouldn't be a school. In the future I will consider any form of opinion that the pupils suggest as it's crucial consider their opinions and if we don't consider their opinions, the less likely they will be to suggest more.

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