

How a school develops one aspect of its SDP: a report that critically reflects on the actions, impact and evidence base – SN: 2200578

Introduction

The utilisation of School Development Plans (SDP) is crucial in directing schools towards meeting their students' needs. These plans establish the school's objectives and goals, along with strategies and actions to achieve them. This report will analyse the process of a school's development and implementation of a specific aspect of its SDP. The study will focus on various aspects such as the actions taken, stakeholders involved, planning, self-evaluation, and overall impact.

The school that will be the primary focus of this report is a comprehensive school situated in South Wales. At the time of its most recent Estyn inspection in March 2016, there were 780 pupils enrolled, all of whom were between the ages of 11 and 16. The percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals (eFSM) was approximately 13%, which was 4.4% below the national average in 2016. It is worth noting that the school's 'Prospects for Improvement' were rated as 'Excellent' (Estyn, 2016), which may have been demonstrated through the implementation of their SDP.

This report will concentrate on a particular aspect of the SDP, which pertains to the 'Student Outcomes' section of the plan. The strategy identified in this section is to "Update mentoring programme to further support eFSM pupils by using non-form teachers to deliver mentoring session during registration period." In essence, the plan aims to provide academic assistance to eFSM pupils by assigning them a mentor who can deliver mentoring sessions during morning registration and thus improve their academic performance.

In adherence to BERA's 'Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research' (2018), this report will maintain the anonymity of the school, its specific location, and its students.

Literature Review (800)

The Welsh Government (2022) has established a framework to assist schools in developing a successful SDP. According to this framework, an SDP should span a period of three years, undergo an annual review, and adhere to the principles of evaluation, accountability, and transparency. In a separate document, the Welsh Government (2014, p.2) specifies that the ultimate goal of the framework and SDPs in Wales is to establish a strong, evidence-based approach to planning that results in favourable outcomes for learners and incorporates the best practices currently employed by schools in Wales.

An essential aspect of an SDP is identifying the stakeholders who will plan, oversee, and evaluate the specific tasks within the plan. According to Estyn (2020), it is advisable to establish smaller teams of staff members within the school who are passionate or have a particular interest in specific priorities. Each team would then develop a plan for their priority area, which would form part of the larger SDP. This approach is consistent with Glover's (1990, p.25) recommendation that staff members work more effectively when they

are divided into dedicated teams, such as departments or groups led by their head of year, to focus on school purpose and curriculum delivery.

Self-evaluation is a crucial component in the development of an SDP, as well as in teaching as a whole. In the context of an SDP, self-evaluation involves reflecting on and evaluating one's own professional practice and identifying areas for improvement that can enhance both professional and student learning (Chapman & Sammons, 2013, p.2). According to Davies and Ellison (2003, pp. 61-62), there is currently a greater emphasis on self-evaluation than ever before, with the practice serving more than just the purpose of reflecting on one's own practice. Self-evaluation can also facilitate comparisons between schools in the same area through sources such as Estyn reports, as well as identify patterns across schools in the same region or nationally. However, the Welsh Government (2014, p.5) notes that schools should not necessarily emulate the approach or practices of other schools. Schools may be at different stages in their development, and what works for one school may not work or be relevant for another. Comparing schools with similar numbers of students, percentages of ALN or eFSM pupils, in similar areas or at the same stage in their SDP cycle may be useful. Whereas comparing the SDP of a school in an affluent area of London to one in a deprived area of Wales may not be appropriate due to a possible lack of similarities.

The final aspect this section will discuss is how schools use data analysis to determine their priorities when developing an SDP. According to Schildkamp (2019, p.259), schools typically collect three types of data when developing an SDP. First is formal data, which consists of exam or assessment results, systematic observations and surveys. Secondly, informal data, this is obtained through pupil voice panels, informal discussions and informal observations. Lastly, data collected through educational research, this can be used to make research informed decisions within the SDP. Schmoker (2003, pp.22-24) suggests that analysing formal data allows educators to quickly identify areas for improvement in their teaching practice. They can assess success levels within certain groups of learners, such as ALN or eFSM pupils, and use this information to make necessary adjustments to their lessons and teaching methods to promote success.

An alternative perspective presented by the Welsh Government (2014, p.9) is to consider two types of data when developing an SDP: qualitative and quantitative. While this approach differs from Schildkamp's (2019, p.259) three categories, the data collected is largely similar. Quantitative data includes assessment results, school attendance and learners' progress, among others. On the other hand, qualitative data, which is less emphasised in Schildkamp's (2019, p.259) categories, includes school reports, such as an Estyn report in Wales, to identify areas for improvement. The Welsh Government also emphasises the importance of considering students' well-being as the SDP evolves.

The focus of this report pertains to the aspect of the SDP that aims to update the mentoring programme to provide additional support for eFSM pupils during morning registration. Sims and Jackson (2022) conducted research and discovered that eFSM children typically perform poorly in school from as early as the age of 5. They analysed GCSE results in English and Maths and found that only 40% of eFSM students exhibited good skills in these subjects, in contrast to 69% of non-eFSM pupils. Additionally, Green (2021) supports these findings and reports that just 14% of eFSM students achieved A-A* grades in 2021 GCSE results,

compared to 31% of non-eFSM students. This suggests that eFSM pupils are 57% less likely to achieve these grades. She also states that the gap has widened by around 33% between 2019 and 2022.

Developing an Action Point

Henceforth, in this report, the school that is the subject of the SDP analysis will be referred to as 'School X'.

In this section of the report, the attention will be directed towards School X's SDP, the selected component of the SDP, and the procedures implemented by School X to create and execute their SDP. The SDP operates on a 3-year cycle, as recommended by the Welsh Government (2022), and is evaluated regularly during each 3-year phase, using a color-coded system (red-amber-green), where red indicates 'incomplete', amber indicates 'in progress', and green signifies 'complete.'

School X determines its priorities for the SDP by taking into account four primary factors. The first factor is 'National Priorities', which involves considering guidance from the Welsh Government, including the new curriculum and the four purposes. The second factor is 'Standards Reviews', where the school assesses the performance of its students to identify areas that need support. The third factor is 'Self-evaluation', which involves reflecting and evaluating one's own professional practice to identify areas for improvement. Lastly, the school considers 'Estyn Reports and Visits', which examine recent investigative reports about the school and highlight areas that require improvement.

The six priorities that they identified were:

1. Pupil Outcomes
2. Professional Learning
3. Curriculum and Assessment
4. Staff and Pupil Wellbeing
5. Care, Support and Guidance
6. Resources and Environment

The focus of this report falls under the category of 'Professional Learning' within School X's SDP. To identify the need for support for eFSM pupils, the school analysed various factors. Firstly, they examined quantitative data, comparing the target and expected GCSE results of eFSM students with their peers. The data revealed a significant discrepancy between the two groups, particularly in Mathematics GCSE. For instance, the target score for A-A* results for eFSM Year 10 students were set at 0%, compared to 39% for non-eFSM pupils, and the progress check results for November and January were also 0%. This demonstrates not only the disparity between eFSM and non-eFSM pupils but also the absence of value added between the start of the academic year and January. In Year 11, the target score for eFSM students was set at 25% A-A*, compared to 43% for non-eFSM students. Although this target was exceeded in both progress checks, with a score of 33%, it remained the same between November and January, indicating a lack of value added and still a lower target than non-eFSM pupils. Secondly, School X collected qualitative data to identify the need to

support eFSM pupils. During their investigation, they observed a lack of consistency in the mentoring program, particularly in the teaching methods used by different mentors. School X preferred that topics be taught in a consistent manner, tailored to each individual student's needs. To gather this information, School X observed mentoring sessions conducted by each mentor and interviewed students to gain insight into how they were being taught.

The school developed a 7-point plan, looking at how they were going to tackle the issue:

1. Identification of eligible students - The school identifies all students who receive free school meals and are at risk of underachievement based on their academic performance data.
2. Mentor recruitment and training - The school trains a team of existing and new mentors who are assigned to work with the identified students. The mentors are chosen based on their experience, skills, and ability to build positive relationships with students.
3. Producing a mentoring booklet – This booklet would contain guidelines and instructions for mentoring sessions in specific subjects, thus ensuring that all mentors teach topics in the same manner.
4. Individualised support planning - The mentors work with the students to identify their specific needs and develop individualised support plans. The support plans are designed to address any barriers to learning and help students to achieve their academic potential.
5. Morning mentoring sessions - The mentors hold regular one-to-one or small group sessions with the students during the morning registration period. These sessions will provide academic support and build positive relationships.
6. Progress monitoring - The school regularly monitors the progress of the students involved in the mentoring program and adjusts the support plans as necessary to ensure that they are effective.
7. Mentor support and development - The school provides ongoing support and development opportunities for the mentors to ensure that they are equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively support the students.

School X selected the Head of Year 9 Progress and the Care, Support and Guidance Coordinator to oversee the target of updating the mentoring program for eFSM pupils. However, it is possible that selecting the Numeracy and Literacy Coordinators to oversee the target might have been a better choice as they have expertise in the specific areas where eFSM pupils need support the most.

The school set out four ways in which they will measure the impact of the new mentoring program:

1. Improved academic performance - The school will track the academic progress of students involved in the mentoring program through regular assessments and progress reports.

2. Increased engagement - The school will use various methods to measure the engagement of students who receive free school meals, including attendance records, surveys, and interviews.
3. Improved attendance - The school will measure the impact of the mentoring program on attendance rates among students who receive free school meals.
4. Improved wellbeing - The school will use surveys and interviews to measure the impact of the mentoring program on the wellbeing of students who receive free school meals.

Reflection and Evaluation

Overall, School X has taken a thorough approach in identifying the need to support eFSM pupils and developing a plan to address the issue through a more consistent and personalised mentoring program. The decision to have the mentoring take place during morning registration, which is already dedicated to literacy and numeracy twice a week, is an intelligent move as it maximises the use of available time and resources. By providing targeted support during this time, eFSM students may benefit from more personalised attention and guidance, which could potentially improve their academic performance.

School X is prioritising the well-being of their students, something that is crucial for their overall development and success. The new AoLE 'Health and Well-being' also reflects the Welsh Government's (2019) focus on promoting the holistic development of students, including their physical, emotional, and social well-being. By prioritising this area, School X is not only addressing a critical need but also aligning with the national education priorities.

School X's approach to identifying the area of concern was carried out in a very appropriate way. They used methods that closely align with Schmoker's (2003, pp.22-24) suggestions of examining formal data and swiftly identifying an area for improvement. Additionally, by considering qualitative data, as recommended by the Welsh Government (2014, p.9), they were again focusing on student well-being and considering their perspectives. By using these methods, they were able to identify the gap in results between eFSM and non-eFSM students, as well as discovering how students would like to receive additional support.

The 7-point plan devised by School X to address the issue of lower performance results for eFSM pupils covered most of the necessary areas, including a comprehensive overhaul of their mentoring system. While utilising morning registration time for mentoring is a commendable idea, the school should also consider providing alternative arrangements for students who may struggle with attendance. Additionally, the plan does not specify the days on which the mentoring sessions will take place. It may be beneficial for the school to provide clarity on this point.

The creation of a mentoring booklet is a positive step, as it provides a standardised approach to mentoring that can be implemented by all mentors, while still allowing for personalised teaching through the use of differentiation.

The two main overseers of the target are something that could perhaps be amended. As stated previously there may already be better choices within the school structure, in the

Numeracy and Literacy Coordinators. However, as this is such a large target and it affects approximately 13% (Estyn, 2016) of the school's pupils, perhaps there should be a role created just to oversee the mentoring program. Similar to how a school has an ALN Coordinator, they could have an eFSM Coordinator, to oversee the development and improvement of eFSM pupils throughout school and within the mentoring program.

It may be worth considering a revision of the selection of overseers for the target. While the Head of Year 9 Progress and Care, Support and Guidance Coordinator were chosen, there may be better candidates within the school structure, such as the Numeracy and Literacy Coordinators. However, given that this target affects a large portion of the student body, approximately 13% (Estyn, 2016), it may be beneficial to create a dedicated role to oversee the mentoring program, similar to the ALN Coordinator role. An eFSM Coordinator could be responsible for the development and improvement of eFSM pupils throughout the school and specifically within the mentoring program.

Finally, School X plans to monitor the target for a full school year, it is crucial to consider that monitoring the progress of eFSM pupils should not be limited to just one year. To fully assess the impact of their interventions, it is important to follow the development of these pupils throughout their entire school life, from Year 7 up until they leave in Year 11. Therefore, it may be necessary to extend the monitoring period beyond the 3-year SDP cycle to ensure that the desired outcomes are achieved.

Conclusion

In conclusion, reviewing a school's SDP can offer valuable knowledge about its focal points, ambitions, and techniques to enhance student academic achievements. Through assessing a development plan, stakeholders can acquire a complete comprehension of the school's trajectory and the means it aims to employ to accomplish its aims. Examining a school's development plan can assist aspiring teachers in aligning their practices with the school's targets, honing their teaching abilities, and gaining a wider outlook on education policies and tendencies.

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