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

Word count: 2629

	Targed/target	Yr hyn yr wyf wedi'i wneud yn yr aseiniad hwn What I have done in this assignment...
Targed/Target 1	Continue to engage with contemporary texts that may provide different viewpoints through <u>empirical research</u> .	I have included relevant, current sources of information and literature in this assignment to ensure the concepts and perspectives are up-to-date. I have included different perspectives on a variety of literature.
Targed/Target 2		
Targed/Target 3		

Introduction:

This assignment aims to critically assess a specific area of a School Development Plan (SDP). I have chosen to examine the SDP from the school where I completed my placement. The school will be anonymised as 'School X', ensuring compliance with guidelines (BERA, 2018).

School X is a multicultural, primary school located in South Wales. At the time of their last report, School X had 470 students enlisted, ranging in ages from three to eleven. (ESTYN, 2017). The school's percentage of students who are eligible for free school meals (FSM) is 26%, this was higher than the national average (19%) in 2017. Reports have stated that many of School X's catchment areas are some of the most deprived in Wales (Cardiff Government, 2019).

The school has a small number of students of white British ethnicity, with the vast majority coming from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. Many students speak English as an additional language (EAL) (ESTYN, 2017).

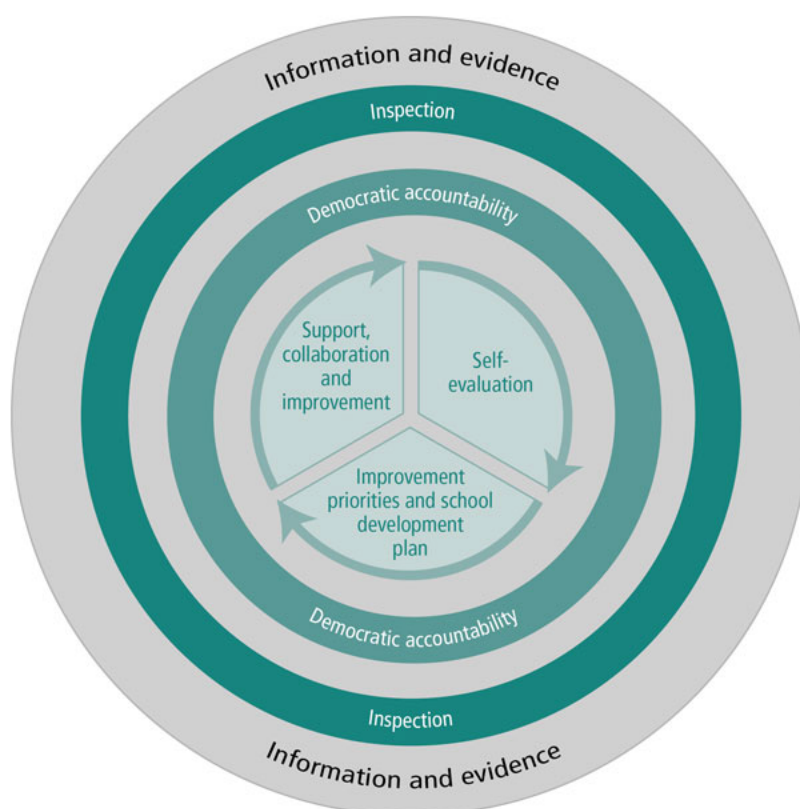
I will analyse the actions taken by School X, the impact of the developed area and supporting evidence. The aspect of the SDP focused on is one of the school's main priorities, "to ensure all pupils are challenged and make progress". This was an aspect of the SDP I saw implemented at this school and due to the vast amount of EAL learners, it is a relevant aspect to focus on as schools must provide an equitable learning environment for all students, including learners who may have barriers to learning regarding language and communication (Veliz and Bonar, 2023).

Literature Review:

An SDP is a plan that schools are required to develop and maintain, outlining actions to improve and enhance their school and the outcomes of the students within it, regardless of "their background or circumstance" (Welsh Government, 2022). These plans typically cover a three year period, but they are regularly self-evaluated by staff and governors based on progress and continually collated data (Welsh Government, 2014). The SDP's goals should focus on the progress of the learner and their well-being ensuring the school is adhering to the Welsh Government's outlook for schools and that students are striving to meet the Curriculum's core purposes (Welsh Government, 2021).

The Welsh Government have provided their framework for how an SDP should be implemented, promoting a cycle of self-evaluation, leading to the construction of the SDP, which is led by support, collaborative efforts and implementation of the improvement, eventually returning to self-evaluation (Welsh Government, 2022). This cyclical process is reinforced through democratic accountability, held by the governing body, and external

inspectors such as ESTYN, who will gather their pre-inspection understanding of a schools' approach and progress based on their SDP (ESTYN, 2021).



The rationale behind the self-evaluative approach indicates that there are several factors to the process' success. The Welsh Government (2022) states that self-evaluation enables schools to identify their strengths through an honest critical analysis founded on evidence. Schools can then implement improvements and policies through a whole-school and communal approach. Maintaining a consistent, coherent and focused goal will require staff to implement these improvements collaboratively to achieve the desired outcome (Lindvall and Ryve, 2019).

Regarding School X's SDP target of "ensuring all pupils are challenged and make progress", there are several relevant areas to explore.

There have been advocations for the disaggregation of graded assessments in education as doing so provides an in-depth perspective of a learners' abilities, highlighting their strengths and areas for improvement, also allowing teachers to provide appropriate challenge and support (Wormeli, 2023). Concerns have been discussed regarding assessment in education and how it can rely on a student's memory, providing challenge for their recall abilities as opposed to their comprehension and skills (Ishaq et al., 2020). This has been an issue for some time, with calls for a holistic approach to assessment being echoed by Knight (2002). Others agree that formative assessment has its place as a challenge for learners, however

there are elements that the success of this approach relies upon, such as continuous professional development of educators (Lee et al., 2020). Regarding EAL students, there has been a call for educators to seek alternative methods of assessment other than summative assessment (such as exams, tests). It has been indicated that EAL learners show increased autonomy and a desire to play a more proactive role in their learning when presented with an e-portfolio instead of an exam (Al-Hawamdeh et al., 2023). These findings show that a creative, informed approach to assessment can provide learners with challenge, leading to progressive outcomes.

Enhancing the previous statement of professional development playing a role within assessment, teachers feeling supported in providing an inclusive education is vital. When teachers are effectively equipped and supported, they are able to provide a more inclusive classroom experience (Chow et al., 2023). Providing an inclusive experience affords students opportunities to succeed. This concept suggests that if the learning environment is more equitable, providing learners with the support they require and removing barriers to learning for those who are disadvantaged, this enables students to achieve more (Almalky & Alwahbi, 2023). Irrespective of the positive research into classroom inclusivity, some teachers are hesitant, with concerns being raised around the practicality of meeting the needs of students with additional learning needs (ALN) (Lindner et al., 2023). Others have suggested their issues regarding the challenge of additional workload, availability of resources and maintaining the school's success and reputation (Jury et al., 2023). In contrast, continuous professional development will prove beneficial for teachers when implementing inclusivity in the classroom (Lee et al., 2020). The Welsh Government (2023) states that inclusivity is key to learner development and engagement in a positive and productive manner.

Research suggests that educators taking an equitable approach rather than one based on equality, will raise standards for those in need of additional support (Cochran-Smith and Keefe, 2022). Some students may need certain resources or alternate approaches to learning due to barriers (e.g. coming from an EAL background) to provide fair opportunities for progression. Further discussion from this source states a need for more than just surface-level equity (such as resource distribution), a call for a deeper implementation of equity is required in schools. Contrastingly, there are claims that equity must be introduced as early as possible in an academic journey for it to succeed (Worrell and Dixon, 2022).

Developing An Action Point:

School X's priority target of ensuring all pupils are challenged and make progress requires an ongoing cyclical process of evaluation.

School X's approach to their SDP targets begins with a collaborative discussion between teaching staff, management and governors, identifying areas for improvement and reviewing the school's ESTYN reports for guidance (Conversation with School X's Headteacher, 2024). Consulting varying hierarchical levels of the school system could result in difficulties in including everyone's perspectives. Different roles could have conflicting opinions on prioritisation and the approach, so this would need to be collaborative and inclusive (Wormeli, 2023).

This tactic has altered slightly since COVID and challenges have been highlighted regarding communication, support for EAL learners, developing assessment approaches to ensure challenge and supporting learner progression. These aspects are in-line with the Welsh Government's desired outcome for our education system (specifically the goal that learners should become healthy, confident individuals, ambitious capable learners and ethical, informed citizens), considering the support and guidance required for students to achieve each of these purposes (Welsh Government, 2020). This is a national mission that the school is adhering to, with schools across Wales adopting the Welsh Government's (2017) aim for the four purposes to encourage leaders who inspire, strong foundations in equity and well-being, learners who can assess, evaluate and take accountability who benefit from a high-quality education. Once the targets are identified, they are presented for approval to an external moderation body (CSC), an improvement partner with the school (CSC, 2020). Strategies are then implemented throughout the school, requiring commitment from all teaching staff to ensure a cohesive, collaborative and consistent approach (Conversation with School X's Headteacher, 2024). These strategies could be specific forms of assessment (relying on knowledge and comprehension rather than memory to provide authentic academic results) (Ishaq et al., 2020) or engaging students with inclusive learning material which represents their culture and background. By tailoring the curriculum to accurately reflect the diversity of its students, School X is working to reduce the racial awarding gap, addressing the disparities in the academic world experienced by students from an EAL, racial or ethnic backgrounds and providing a more equitable experience (Takhar, 2023) (Almalky & Alwahbi, 2023). This supports Worrell and Dixson (2022) and Cochran-Smith and Keefe (2022) as the equitable approach is embedded in the primary curriculum, ensuring early-year implementation for success. Professional development is vital at these stages, ensuring that educators and management have the skills, knowledge and understanding to apply the strategies effectively (Chow et al., 2023).

School X's evaluation stage sees management and Areas of Learning and Experience leads take part in learning walks and observations to assess and evaluate how effective the

strategies are, these walks are used to gauge learner comprehension of the learning intention, success criteria and their knowledge/skills being developed (Conversation with School X's Headteacher, 2024). The evaluation stage consists of book reviews, involving teaching staff, where student books are measured against success criteria to gauge the comprehension of students in relation to the quality of teaching (School X SDP, 2023). It also includes consistent pupil progress meetings (PPMs), where an individual students' progress is reviewed throughout the year, areas for improvement are identified and strategies are put in place to support or challenge them. Lindvall and Ryve (2019) stressed the importance of a focused and coherent improvement effort to avoid the risk of stagnation, confusion or regression. To echo the pleas of Knight (2002) for a more holistic approach, School X additionally integrates teacher-teacher feedback which is provided after observations are exchanged and practises are discussed between teaching staff (School X SDP, 2023). Once the process has passed the evaluation stage, areas are identified that require improvement, resulting in an on-going cycle of evaluation, strategic planning and implementation (Welsh Government, 2022).

Reflection And Evaluation:

School X adopts a collaborative approach when constructing their SDP and developing and identifying their targets. They are providing effective support for their diverse students. This is in-line with the Welsh Government's (2022) desired cyclical approach for schools, with an emphasis on stakeholder involvement. School X shows that collaborative decision-making is a priority in their process for improvement. This integral approach is exhibited through engagement and consideration from all staff, not just management and governors, providing an inclusive environment where contributors give their perspective on school improvements (Lindvall and Ryve, 2019).

Through evaluating strategies and the results of their impact, School X implements a variety of approaches, such as learning walks, observations, PPMs, book reviews, exchanged teacher observations and assessment strategies (School X SDP, 2023). These practices incorporate a holistic approach to evaluation, aligning with the importance of a comprehensive assessment approach (Lee et al., 2020) (Knight, 2002). This holistic approach disregards summative assessments (SATs, for example) as advocated for by Wormeli (2023). Perhaps with the diverse nature of School X's student roster, they could look at adapting their assessment practises to include e-portfolios, a strategy that could prove beneficial for their EAL learners (Al-Hawamdeh et al., 2023).

After evaluation, issues could arise when measuring the impact of specific initiatives. Pupil voice groups are utilised within School X's foundation, allowing students to contribute to the development of the school and their learning. Nonetheless, elements such as these require refinement as at times, "children can have unreasonable expectations" and the impact of these outcomes can be challenging to measure (Conversation with School X's Headteacher, 2024).

Considering that one of the priority targets from School X's SDP is to ensure all students are sufficiently challenged and make progress, School X has taken steps towards this goal to engage their diverse student body to construct the curriculum and learning to be culturally and ethnically relevant and reflective. School X wants their students to feel a sense of belonging to the school and to Wales (Conversation with School X's Headteacher, 2024). This also synchronizes with the Welsh Government's (2021) desire for students to be healthy and confident individuals as they engage with a relevant curriculum. They found that the previous curriculum wasn't reflective of the students who were not engaging, leading to them becoming disinterested, with undesirable behaviour being exhibited. The efforts that School X have made to alter that change and ensure the students can see a reflection of themselves and their culture in their learning are commendable and demonstrates staff are consistently embracing this approach despite challenges regarding work-load and resourcing (Lindner et al., 2023) (Jury et al., 2023).

School X's other priority target from their SDP was based around anti-racism. The efforts to achieve this target are in conjunction with the goal for students to be challenged and make progress as they engage with a more appropriate and reflective curriculum. This aligns with the Welsh Government's (2021) desire for schools to focus their targets on areas that will have the greatest positive effect on learner outcomes. The Headteacher additionally stated (2024) that the aim of anti-racism will remain a priority for another year before being transitioned to a maintenance level. This will indicate that the work has been done by School X and was effective in its implementation.

Conclusion:

This assignment portrayed a critical examination of a focus area of School X's SDP. The focus area was one of their priority targets, as identified by the Headteacher, "to ensure all pupils are challenged and make progress". An analysis and evaluation was undertaken on the school's identification process, their development strategies and how they were implemented and evaluated.

Through this analysis, I have gained a deeper comprehension of collaborative school improvement processes. Research suggests that for effective and consistent change to be implemented, those who are involved in the delivery of the strategy should be given an opportunity to state their perspective (Lindvall and Ryve, 2019). These perspectives may not always be considered and utilised, but working collaboratively fosters an inclusive environment. From this, I have learnt the importance of voicing my opinion (when appropriate). If an opportunity arises for me as a practitioner to state an area for concern or ideas for improvement, I should take that opportunity to contribute to the improvement of the school I am in. This approach explores the teaching standard of collaboration through working with colleagues and supporting and developing others to enable improvement (Welsh Government, 2019).

I have also realised the importance of comprehensive assessment strategies. When implementing a policy or an improvement strategy, there must be methods to measure the impact and effect of these outcomes. There may be complications with measuring aspects like the effectiveness of student voice, however, measuring the impact of appropriate challenge can be achieved through methods stated earlier such as book reviews, PPMs, observations, learning walks and questioning. As a practitioner, I will need to ensure I understand these policies and strategies and their intended method, providing relevant and measurable outcomes as a result. As a consequence of this approach, I will be reinforcing my pedagogy through implementing a range of assessment approaches (Welsh Government, 2019).

By analysing School X's SDP and engaging in the theory and literature that surrounds it, I have gained a broader understanding of the aspects that contribute to effective school improvement. In my future practice, I will apply this understanding to ensure inclusive educational learning environments, with the goal of supporting all students progression and achievement. I will undertake continuous opportunities for professional development to support my students, reinforcing the teaching standard of pedagogy through the refinement of my teaching practise and enriching my professional learning through wider reading and research findings (Welsh Government, 2019).

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