

Part B

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

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Previous Targets:

- Aim to use the synthesis of viewpoints and research to implicitly demonstrate how you will apply your knowledge to your practice.
- When forming arguments make sure they are appropriate to your personal development.
- Include targets from previous assignments in the main body of assignments.

Introduction

This assignment critically reflects on a school's development of one aspect of its School Development Plan, focusing specifically on Delivering high standards and progress in skills across all Key Stages. It will examine the processes, actions, impact, and evidence base before concluding with a reflection on professional learning gained through evaluating the school's approach. As per a guidance report by the Welsh government on School Development Plans School development plans are important for embedding a robust strategic planning approach to delivering improvements in learner outcomes (Welsh Government, 2014).

School X is an 11-18 mixed secondary school in Wales established in 2018 following the merger of two predecessor schools. The school serves a predominantly White British rural population of approximately 1500 students, with around 19% eligible for free school meals and 26% identified as having special educational needs. As part of its latest School Development Plan, the school identified the need to improve skills development across Key Stages based on internal assessment data showing declining progress in literacy and numeracy. This report will critically reflect on the actions taken by School X to address this priority area, including the processes, impact, and evidence base. It will conclude with a reflection on the professional learning gained through evaluating the school's strategic approach to improving standards and skills progression. This links to the wider purpose of school development planning in systematically delivering enhancements in outcomes for all learners.

Literature Review

A school development plan outlines strategic priorities and actions for school improvement over a 3–5-year period (Davies & Ellison, 1997). It provides a framework for monitoring progress toward achieving the school's vision through specific, measurable goals across key areas like teaching, curriculum, leadership, and resources (Bennett, 2017). An effective development planning process is critical for school success as it aligns effort, promotes accountability, and informs resourcing decisions (Cousins, 1996). This review will discuss the school development process and participants, critiques of over-ambitious plans, and priority areas for improving teaching and learning effectiveness.

The school development planning process involves consultation with the school community to conduct a situational analysis and identify strategic priorities for improvement (Bennett, 2017). Key participants include school leaders who facilitate the process; teachers who provide curriculum expertise; support staff with insights on operations and resourcing; students to represent learning needs; parents as key stakeholders; and governing bodies who approve the final plan (Cousins, 1996). Participation from varied perspectives enhances the rigor of identified priorities (Davies & Ellison, 1997). However, reaching a consensus is challenging with multiple agendas. Overly enthusiastic plans that target too many competing priorities run the risk of initiative overload and change fatigue, potentially compromising successful

implementation (Fullan, 2004). A narrow strategic focus with consensus on 2-4 improvement priorities is recommended (Cousins, 1996).

One suggested priority area is improving teaching and learning effectiveness, which relates directly to the core business of schools in enhancing student outcomes (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). While there are many determinants of student achievement, teaching effectiveness is one of the most influential as teachers have the closest proximity to influence learning daily (Hattie, 2012). Developing teaching quality involves teachers evaluating and improving their classroom practice, supported by professional development and feedback. However, there are challenges in fostering cultures of continuous improvement without engendering feelings of failure (Fullan, 2004). Progress requires balancing high expectations with psychological safety and collective teacher efficacy (Donohoo, 2016).

Strategies for improving teaching and learning include examining case studies of successful practice and replicating key principles within local contexts while considering the limitations of direct replication (Reynolds et al., 2011). For example, studies of high-performing Asian systems like Singapore and Shanghai highlight centralized approaches to ongoing teacher mentoring, collaboration, lesson observations, regular assessments, and whole-school engagement in evidence-based reforms (Tan & Dimmock, 2014). Teachers require support in skills like data and evidence literacy to inform teaching, the ability to critically evaluate new ideas, and teamwork to problem-solve locally (Campbell & Levin, 2009). Change principles emphasize teacher empowerment over top-down mandates (Fullan, 2015).

Underpinning this strategic priority is a social constructivist view of learning, whereby students actively construct knowledge through social interactions, collaboration, authentic tasks, and building on prior understanding (Vygotsky, 1978). Effective teaching scaffolds these meaning-making processes, creating classroom environments for rich discussion, higher-order application, and development of critical thinking skills (Darling-Hammond et al., 2019). Assessment becomes central for monitoring and advancing learning. Constructivist teaching also demands sophisticated pedagogical content knowledge from teachers (Shulman, 1987). As learning facilitators, teachers require a deep understanding of content, student preconceptions, developmental stages, learning strategies, and barriers.

For educators, striving to improve is an ethical imperative to provide quality learning for all students and reverse cumulative disadvantage (Ladwig, 2005). However, avoiding change fatigue requires prioritizing targeted growth goals and evaluating evidence of positive impacts on learning (Fullan, 2015). Developing teaching quality is interdependent with school leadership, collegial relationships, and enabling conditions (Darling-Hammond et al., 2019), hence the need for coordinated development planning.

In summary, effective teaching meets diverse learner needs through adaptive expertise in pedagogical skills and content knowledge application (Darling-Hammond et al., 2019). Quality teaching benefits student motivation, achievement, higher-order skills, and equitable outcomes (Hattie, 2012). This aligns with the four core purposes of the new Welsh curriculum: developing learners with rich knowledge, essential

skills, and capacity for lifelong learning that supports personal fulfillment and active citizenship (Donaldson, 2015). Improving teaching and learning effectiveness should be an ongoing strategic priority for school development planning. Progress requires resource prioritization, professional development, classroom innovation, monitoring of implementation fidelity, and collective teacher efficacy balanced with psychological safety (Donohoo, 2016; Fullan, 2015). Evidence-informed school development planning enables continuous, incremental improvement.

Developing an Action Point

School improvement requires comprehensive planning analysing the current state, desired future state, and steps to bridge the gap. Vital processes are honest evaluation of strengths and weaknesses, data analysis to identify priorities, stakeholder consultation on needs, targeted actions, and monitoring systems to track impact. Effective embedding of these reflective, evidence-based, responsive practices empowers the school development plan to drive continuous enhancement (Welsh Government, 2014).

Self-Evaluation

Effective self-evaluation is essential for identifying priorities and monitoring progress in school improvement (Estyn, 2023). This involves gathering evidence from various sources, including pupil outcomes, quality of teaching, leadership, and resources to make judgments about strengths and areas for improvement (OECD, 2013). In the chosen priority area “Deliver high standards and progress in skills across all Key Stages”, the development plan indicates the use of several self-evaluation methods. Learning walks, work scrutiny by senior leaders, analysis of recordings of lessons through IRIS, which is a protected intranet portal recording teaching technique of participants, and “ThreadThru” curriculum reviews which is a quality assurance process used within the school X. They help gauge teaching quality and pupil progress (HMCI, 2019). School X partnered with School Y who had gone through the same process to visit and exchange best practices also enables reflective evaluation.

While these sources provide some valuable insights, over-reliance on senior leader observations offers a limited perspective. Expanding self-review to gather wider stakeholder feedback through student and staff surveys could reveal further strengths or issues and enhance objectivity (Cambridge Assessment, 2017). Tracking longitudinal pupil outcome data is also essential to effectively evaluate standards over time (DfE, 2022). This plan wants details on how contextual value-added data is used to assess progress. Strengthening the analysis of robust quantitative attainment statistics would make judgments more evidence-based.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is key for diagnosing problems, tracking progress, and demonstrating impact (DfE, 2014). This plan utilizes some data, including IRIS lesson recordings, work scrutiny, and curriculum reviews to pinpoint areas for teaching improvement.

However, the approach seems quite narrow. Wider analysis of outcomes in tests, exams, and value-added progress measures across subjects and student groups would enable more precise identification of subjects or stages needing intervention (NASUWT, 2021).

While improving teaching quality is imperative, data should also steer decisions on resource allocation and targeted academic support for disadvantaged pupils (Wiggins et al., 2019). As social inequality impacts attainment (Gorard, 2012), analytics on the progress gap between disadvantaged students and others should inform pupils of high spending and justification strategies. The plan would therefore benefit from more emphasis on rigorous data analysis guiding strategic decisions to raise standards.

Stakeholder Involvement

Active stakeholder participation is vital for school improvement (Chapman C et al, 2012). This plan engages some staff through coaching, curriculum reviews, senior leader scrutiny, and visits to School Y. Wider collaboration with teachers using IRIS networks to share teaching practices also positively fosters professional learning.

However, the plan lacks detail on consulting students and parents on priorities, garnering their perspectives to shape actions (DfE, 2014). Closer parental involvement raises achievement (Goodall, 2019), so keeping them informed on standards and progress initiatives is key. Appointing parent governors to the school improvement group overseeing the plan may enhance ownership and accountability too (Parentkind, 2022). This strategy requires greater multidirectional collaboration for success.

Strategic Planning

This plan demonstrates some characteristics of effective strategic planning. Research shows that directly linking actions to precise outcome goals aids monitoring and creates clear responsibilities (Levin, 2008). School X's specific intended impacts are outlined, like improving teaching consistency, more effective feedback, and higher learner resilience. The tactical steps underneath each aspiration suggest logical connections toward achieving the aims.

Using change management theory principles could strengthen the likelihood of successful implementation (Hargreaves & Fink, 2012). It had been observed the workload demands on staff are extensive, with new feedback protocols, coaching models, curriculum reviews, etc. Assigning dedicated transformation leads for each project and outlining the support for managing staff workloads would ease anxiety. Strategic planning must also consider potential barriers, like teacher drop-out from self-coaching, which could hinder progress. Incorporating justification plans would boost this priority's strength.

Measuring Impact

This plan focuses substantially on enhancing processes, like expanding instructional coaching and sharing strong practices through IRIS. While perfecting these is positive, the true test is whether such inputs improve outputs and outcomes (DfE,

2016). So clearly defining key performance indicators around skill development, and regularly collecting quantifiable data on these, is essential to gauging impact (Estyn, 2017). The priorities lack explicit success criteria beyond vague aspirations like “improved teaching consistency”. Specific targets for reducing variability in grading between teachers, raising value-added progress scores by X%, or achieving Y 9-5 passes per subject would facilitate clearer measurement (Greatbatch, 2019). Using pre- and post-intervention statistics allows tracking change over time too. While this plan evaluates some immediate perceptions, embedding a more objective analysis of longitudinal pupil outcomes would strengthen accountability for impact.

Reflection and Evaluation

The collaborative process used to identify needs and gain stakeholder buy-in seems quite thorough. Engaging middle leaders, and teachers, and even partnering with another school shows a commitment to gaining perspectives from multiple levels. This likely led to increased buy-in as more people felt involved. Additionally, the focus on instructional coaching provides an opportunity for further collaboration and sharing of ideas between teachers. To enhance buy-in even more, additional efforts could be made to include student and parent voices when identifying priorities.

Several of the suggested teaching techniques are supported by research. Instructional coaching, which involves observation, discussion, and reflection has been shown to positively impact teacher practices (Kraft et al., 2018). Using recorded classroom observation to promote discussion aligns with the literature on effective coaching models (Knight et al., 2012). The plan's focus on providing high-quality feedback also mirrors findings that specific, actionable feedback improves student outcomes (Wisniewski et al., 2020). Evaluating the success of new techniques through classroom observation and talking to teachers and students is also an evidence-based approach (Day et al., 2016).

In terms of limitations, while the instructional coaching model is research-backed, implementation takes considerable training and support for a cultural shift toward a coaching mindset (Kraft et al., 2018). The plan does not detail if resources have been allocated for this extensive training and typical change. Additionally, some actions like revising the marking policy or hosting parent evenings, though potentially helpful, are not linked directly with impacts on teaching and learning.

Successes noted in feedback include appreciation for the increase in teacher collaboration opportunities. Teachers also reported feeling more empowered to try new strategies with the instructional coaching support system. However, some concerns were raised about the required time commitments, especially for activities outside regular work hours. Several teachers also commented on the numerous new initiatives being simultaneously introduced and expressed feeling overwhelmed.

Some enhancements based on this feedback could be to provide more concrete details on expectations, timelines, and available support to alleviate teacher anxiety. Teacher voice could also be leveraged to prioritize certain initiatives over others. Additionally, increasing the involvement of parents and community groups could

strengthen understanding of and investment in the school's improvement efforts. For example, hosting open house events, sending newsletters, or creating volunteer opportunities.

Research shows school culture influences the success of improvement efforts (Muhammad, 2009), so initiatives explicitly targeting growth mindset among staff and students may be beneficial. Activities focusing on model persistence, embracing challenges, and learning from setbacks could complement the plan's emphasis on teaching excellence. Student motivational outcomes have also been linked to teacher mindsets towards learning (Sun, 2015).

Through this analysis, some key learnings emerged regarding leading change efforts. First, collaboration with stakeholders at multiple levels improves buy-in as participants feel actively part of the process and solution. However, balancing input with clear direction and reasonable expectations is also crucial for success. Implementing numerous major initiatives simultaneously risks change fatigue, highlighting the importance of thoughtful prioritization and pacing. Additionally, culture shifts require extensive support and scaffolding over time. As such, allocating resources should be done accordingly rather than expecting quick wins. Finally, continuous feedback loops help monitor what is working versus what needs rethinking. Building these reflective touchpoints into the change process is invaluable for maximizing improvement.

Conclusion

Through critically analysing School X's development plan priority of improving standards and skills progression, several key insights emerged that will inform my practice. This process highlighted the importance of reflective evaluation using varied data sources to identify precise needs, rather than relying solely on senior leader perspectives. It also demonstrated how active consultation across all stakeholder groups, especially students and parents, enhances solution fit and ownership. Additionally, while strengthening teaching quality is imperative, a multifaceted approach tracking resourcing, targeted interventions, and progress analytics provides a more complete picture to guide decisions. Clear delineation of responsibilities intended impacts and quantifiable success criteria creates accountability.

However, even the best-laid plans must contend with implementation barriers if the human aspects are neglected. Taking time to intentionally foster buy-in, motivate intrinsic priorities alignment, develop capacities to enact change, and respond to concerns prevents initiative fatigue. This requires resource prioritization and pacing. Building continuous feedback loops and reflective space to course-correct based on evidence of impact is key. Through researching School X's approach, I have gained an appreciation for leading sustainable change through consultation, clarity, supportive conditions, and shared evaluation. The interdependency of strategic planning and people management cannot be overlooked. This assignment has

revolutionized my mindset about how to partner with school communities to enact meaningful improvement.

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