

1351371 - Lucy Littler

ECAD7003 – Part B

Learners, Schools & Communities: where am I teaching?

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

INTRODUCTION

This assignment aims to discuss how a school develops one aspect of its School Development Plan (SDP), focussing on the development of well-being in particular, including equity and inclusion. The report will analyse how the target was identified using processes such as self-evaluation, involving stakeholders, strategic planning, and measuring impact using evidence-based approaches.

The School Development Plan used in this report is from an English medium secondary school (School 'X'), in a semi-rural area maintained by Carmarthenshire Local Authority. The school has approximately 920 pupils in attendance aged between 11-19 (Estyn, 2019). Just over 8% of pupils are eligible for free school meals, which is lower than the national average of 16.4%. The percentage of pupils with additional learning needs is approximately 30%, which is significantly higher than the national average of 23%, with almost 2% of pupils having a statement of additional learning needs (Estyn, 2019).

LITERATURE REVIEW

The School Development Plan (SDP) is a critical tool for improving educational outcomes in Wales, and the Welsh Government's guidance on the SDP provides detailed information on its development, implementation, and evaluation. The guidance emphasises the importance of collaboration, evidence-based practices, and data-driven decision-making in the development and implementation of the SDP. According to Welsh Government guidance, the SDP should be a dynamic and responsive document that is regularly reviewed and updated to reflect the changing needs of the school community (Welsh Government, 2014). Welsh Government's guidance on the SDP is informed by a range of national policies and strategies, including the Curriculum for Wales (Welsh Government, 2023) and the Well-being of Future Generations Act (Welsh Government, 2014). The guidance emphasises the importance of aligning the SDP with these policies and strategies to ensure coherence and effectiveness.

McNamara (2002) advocates for the implementation of a school development plan, as it enables schools to address their current needs and priorities. According to McNamara, in order for the development of a school development plan to be effective, schools must ensure a robust planning cycle that aligns with their vision, goals, and values. As a result, McNamara suggests that a school development plan should be subject to continuous change to remain relevant and effective. This is supported in a study by Hill and Crevola (2014) that found that the use of a school development plan was positively associated with improved student achievement. The authors noted that a well-designed plan should incorporate input from all stakeholders, including teachers, students, parents, and community members, and should focus on setting clear goals and objectives that align with the school's vision and mission. Additionally, the authors stressed the importance of monitoring progress and adjusting the plan as needed to ensure that it remains relevant and effective over time.

School self-evaluation is an essential component of the SDP process in Wales. The Welsh Government (2014) recommends that schools use self-evaluation to assess their own performance and progress towards the targets set out in the SDP. According to the Welsh Government (2014), self-evaluation should involve using a range of data sources to inform the evaluation process. These may include performance data, observation, and feedback from stakeholders. Schools should use this information to identify their strengths and areas for improvement. Once the areas for improvement have been identified, the next step is to develop strategies for achieving the targets set out in the SDP. The Welsh Government (2014) recommends that schools set clear and measurable targets, identify the actions needed to achieve these targets, and regularly monitor progress towards them.

According to research conducted by the Department for Education (2017), one out of every ten children has been diagnosed with a form of mental health condition. As the number of mental health diagnoses continues to increase, it is crucial for schools to enhance their efforts in providing adequate support for the well-being of their students over time. The Department for Education (2017) emphasises the importance of supporting children's well-being and mental health to improve educational outcomes. In

their publication 'Supporting Mental Health in Schools and Colleges,' (2017) they highlight that children who are emotionally healthy are better able to learn and achieve their full potential. The Department for Education (2017) advocates for a whole-school approach to promoting mental health and well-being, which includes staff training, creating a safe and supportive environment, and providing access to mental health support. The report draws on a range of research and evidence to demonstrate that children's mental health and well-being are crucial for their academic success and overall development. It highlights that children who are emotionally healthy are better able to learn and achieve their full potential. Conversely, children who experience mental health difficulties are more likely to struggle with their academic work and are at greater risk of dropping out of education altogether. The Department for Education (2017) emphasises the importance of early intervention and prevention in promoting good mental health and well-being in schools. It recommends that schools take a proactive approach to identifying and addressing mental health difficulties, rather than waiting for problems to escalate. This includes providing access to mental health support services, such as counselling, as well as promoting positive mental health practices throughout the school.

Health and well-being education is crucial in schools, according to Welsh Government (2022), because it helps learners develop the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to make informed decisions about their physical, mental, emotional, and social well-being. A focus on health and well-being can also contribute to learners' academic success, as well as their overall life satisfaction (Welsh Government, 2022). In developing an SDP, it is important to prioritise health and well-being education as a key component. Schools should consider the unique needs of their learners, their local community, and the wider context in which they operate. This includes engaging with stakeholders, such as parents, carers, external agencies, and the wider community, to identify the key health and well-being priorities for their learners (Welsh Government, 2022). Schools should also consider how they can promote a safe and inclusive learning environment that supports learners' well-being. This includes developing policies and practices that address issues such as bullying, harassment, and discrimination, as well as promoting positive relationships and respectful behaviour among learners (Welsh Government,

2022). Furthermore, schools should consider how they can promote physical activity, healthy eating, and other healthy lifestyle choices, as well as address mental health and emotional well-being. This can be achieved through a variety of approaches, such as curriculum-based learning, extra-curricular activities, and partnerships with external organisations (Welsh Government, 2022).

DEVELOPING AN ACTION POINT

The Welsh Government (2014) asserts that there are four essential stages that schools are required to go through during their planning cycle: self-evaluation, strategic planning, implementation and reviewing impact.

The first stage, preparation, involves gathering and analysing data about the school and its context, as well as consulting with stakeholders such as staff, parents, and learners. This data is used to identify key priorities for improvement in the school (Welsh Government, 2014). School 'X' conducted the self-evaluation stage by examining previous Estyn inspection reports from 2019, which highlighted a good judgement in the inspection area in the school's well-being provisions (Estyn, 2019). Although the inspection area was given the judgement of 'good', the school still identified areas of improvement. This approach aligns with the recommendations provided by the Welsh Government, which emphasizes the importance of reviewing previous inspection reports as part of the self-evaluation process (Welsh Government, 2014). To further assess the school's well-being provisions, School 'X' also administered a questionnaire to staff and parents to gather their perspectives on the adequacy of these provisions. This method aligns with the importance of gathering stakeholder feedback in self-evaluation, as noted by researchers such as Harris and Chapman (2002) and educational organizations such as the National College for School Leadership (2008). By utilising these methods, School 'X' was able to gain a comprehensive understanding of its current well-being provisions and identify areas for improvement. This aligns with the importance of self-evaluation in supporting school improvement, as emphasized by

the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2013). Although School 'X' undertook several processes to evaluate their well-being provisions, it could be beneficial for them to conduct research on the strategies and practices employed by schools that received an 'excellent standard' rating from Estyn. This aligns with the recommendation made by the Welsh Government (2014) to utilise school comparative information to identify best practices for promoting student well-being.

The second stage of creating a school development plan involves strategic planning, where all stakeholders are expected to contribute to meeting the goals of the plan. (OECD, 2017) emphasizes the importance of involving stakeholders, such as teachers, parents, school councils, and the wider school community, in the planning process to ensure that the plan meets the needs and interests of everyone involved. School 'X' implemented this stage by involving all class teachers in completing pre-intervention profiles for pupils who would have access to well-being provisions throughout the school year. However, it is worth noting that there was little parental involvement in improving well-being provisions at School 'X'. The National Centre for Children and Families (2019) highlights the importance of parental engagement in promoting student well-being and academic success, Estyn (2018) supports this statement in their report called 'Involving parents: Communication between schools and parents of school-aged children'. In addition to involving teachers and setting targets and strategies, School 'X' also invested in staff training to improve their ability to identify students who may need well-being support. This training was provided by an external company during an inset day.

The third stage of creating a school development plan is implementing improvements and actions. The Welsh Government emphasizes the importance of assigning clear responsibilities and duties to ensure the successful execution of the plan (Welsh Government, 2014). In this regard, School 'X' assigned a specific time for teachers and other educational practitioners to monitor the utilisation and impact of the well-being centre on pupils' progress. Additionally, School 'X' established timelines for the implementation of key life-learning skills for pupils. However, the school's development plan fails to account for the possibility that some pupils may not respond to the well-

being provisions, which highlights the need to identify alternative courses of action. Nonetheless, the plan specifies the responsible parties for each task and outlines the resources required for the effective implementation of each provision. One possible approach to improve the third stage of a school development plan is to establish a monitoring and evaluation system to track the impact of the implemented provisions. This could involve utilising tools such as feedback surveys and data analysis to identify areas of success and areas in need of further improvement (Morgan et al., 2014). Additionally, engaging with pupils, parents, and the wider school community can provide valuable insight into the effectiveness of the implemented provisions and identify potential areas for improvement (National Centre for Children and Families, 2019). By incorporating such approaches, schools can continually refine their development plans and ensure that they are meeting the needs of their pupils and stakeholders.

The final stage of the development of the action plan is reviewing the impact of the provisions that have been put in place. According to research by Black and William (1998), this is crucial. This stage involves assessing the effectiveness of the plan in achieving its intended outcomes. School 'X' follows this approach by scheduling regular reviews of the well-being provisions it provides, as outlined in its school development plan. In relation to this, School 'X' should allocate more time for teachers to monitor and assess the use and effectiveness of the well-being provisions. This would align with the recommendations of the Welsh Government (2014) for schools to have a clear outline of responsibilities and duties for implementing and reviewing a development plan. Additionally, the Education and Training Inspectorate (2007) highlights the need for ongoing evaluation and reflection on the effectiveness of a school development plan in order to make any necessary adjustments and improvements.

REFLECTION AND EVALUATION

One of the ways in which School 'X' has implemented its well-being provisions is by incorporating mindfulness practices into its curriculum. According to Weare (2012) mindfulness is a form of meditation that aims to cultivate a state of present-moment awareness and non-judgmental attention to one's thoughts and feelings. School 'X' has introduced a compulsory half-hour teaching lesson per week in during form time during which class teachers conduct mindfulness sessions. These sessions include activities such as reading, colouring, and more. Research has shown that mindfulness practices can have positive impacts on students' well-being. Weare (2012) argues that mindfulness can help to reduce negative behaviours, stress, and anxiety in students. Furthermore, a study by Schonert-Reichl et al. (2015) found that mindfulness practices can enhance students' social-emotional learning, including self-awareness, self-regulation, and relationship skills.

In addition to this, School 'X' could improve their provisions in implementing a whole-school approach. The approach would involve engaging parents and carers, as well as the wider school community, in order to create a supportive environment for pupils. This is in line with the Department for Education (2021), which highlights the importance of parent/carers engagement in improving pupil well-being. One way for school 'X' to involve parents and carers is through surveys and parental meetings. Surveys can be conducted to gather feedback from parents and carers about the impact of the well-being provisions on their children. This can help school 'X' identify any areas for improvement and make necessary adjustments. Parental meetings can also be held to discuss the impact of the well-being provisions on pupils and gather feedback from parents and carers. It is recommended that schools not only involve parents in questionnaires and meetings but also actively engage and support their well-being (Department for Education, 2019; Public Health England, 2018). This could involve identifying and supporting parents who may benefit from well-being support, as well as providing training for staff members to facilitate such support (Department for Education, 2019). By directly supporting parents in this way, schools can contribute to better educational outcomes for children and young people (Department for Education,

2019; Public Health England, 2018). This can help school 'X' understand the needs of the external community and make informed decisions about future provisions. During the pre-implementation stages of well-being provisions, identifying pupils in need based on prior knowledge and parental questionnaires can potentially exclude pupils who may require support but have not been identified. Thus, providing pupils with the autonomy to voice their needs can ensure that every pupil has an equal opportunity to improve their well-being (Welsh Government, 2023). This approach can enable schools to create a more inclusive and supportive environment that meets the diverse needs of all pupils. By involving pupils in decision-making processes, schools can empower them to take ownership of their well-being and contribute to the development of school policies and practices that support their mental health and well-being (Estyn, 2018).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, school 'X' has demonstrated a commitment to following the guidelines set forth by The Welsh Government (2014) in creating a comprehensive and effective school development plan. The school's efforts to improve its well-being provisions have been impressive, with a clear focus on planning and ensuring that roles and responsibilities are clearly defined. However, it is worth noting that school 'X' did not provide any recommendations or directions for what should be done if the well-being provisions were not successful in achieving their intended goals. This is an important oversight that could have significant consequences if not addressed. In my future teaching practice, I will ensure that I take responsibility for planning and preparing for potential setbacks or failures, rather than assuming that everything will go according to plan.

Through my work on this report, I have gained a deeper understanding of the importance of a school development plan, Welsh Government policies, as well as the specific stages and processes involved in its creation. I have also learned that the success of the plan is highly dependent on the school's commitment to the process, as

well as the effort and dedication of those involved in its implementation. Moving forward, I believe that it is crucial for schools to continue to prioritise the well-being of their students, as it has a significant impact on their academic success and overall quality of life. I am grateful for the opportunity to learn more about this important topic, and I look forward to using this knowledge to support the well-being of my future students.

APPENDICES

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