

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

	Target	What I have done in this assignment.
Target 1	-Sustain use of literature throughout your writing, and consider a wider range when discussing chosen focus.	A wider focus has been chosen.
Target 2	-Make links with underlying learning theory and curriculum developments to fully demonstrate knowledge and understanding.	Included more links to curriculum developments.
Target 3	--Avoid informal language, using correct spelling and punctuation throughout.	Continual proof reading.

Introduction

The aspect of the school's development plan (SDP) that will be focused on is the 'Teaching and learning experiences' Priority Area. The school discussed in this report is a comprehensive Pioneer School located in the South Wales area. The school is host to 1700 pupils ages 11-18 and has a budget of around £4100 per student. The school averages a 95% attendance record, with 6.5% of their students qualifying for FSM (free school meals), well below the national average of 16% (My Local School, 2018). Within the SDP, the chosen priority area encapsulated a number of points of improvement within the time frame of 2018-2021, many of which will be the subject of reflection and analysis within the confines of this publication. Due to the nature of the work of Pioneer Schools, the SDP of this school heavily revolves around the implementation of Donaldson's *'Successful Futures'* (2015).

Literature review

School development plans often conform to a 'cascade model' as outlined by Preskar (2014). Typically, a vision for the school is determined by the Headteacher and implemented by the school developments team (SDT). They work with the school project team (SPT) to deliver a specific and achievable set of objectives, processes and success criteria for the school, often in the form of a school development plan (SDP). The specifics of this plan are implemented over the course of the designated timeframe and assessed against the success criteria for the determination of the school's next steps. Dissemination of these successful practices are essential in providing continuous progress for the school and its evolution. Preskar generalised this process as complex and arduous to implement but fails to discuss the process of more analogue objectives and criteria.

Guidance of school development published by Welsh Government (2014) states the purpose of a school's development plan is to outline how the school will address the national priorities that are raising the standards of education in relation to both literacy and numeracy, as well as reducing the impact of poverty on educational attainment. SDPs should set out the overall plan for improvement of the next three years and contain enough detail in order to address the priorities for the current school year, as well as the targets for the second and third years. It should be a working document that is updated to reflect the school's progress in meeting its set objectives through study of performance data.

The government identifies some hallmarks of an effective SDP, one of which is that the impact on learner outcomes is seen as the measure of its effectiveness rather than the production of the plan itself. It is also outlined that successful SDPs involve school partners and stakeholders when determining strengths and areas of improvement. Key to executing

the plan is focusing on both short-term and long-term goals that improve outcomes for all learners. Successfully and accurately self-evaluating regarding school performance against the self-imposed success criteria is required to ensure consistent and continual improvement.

The school development planning cycle revolves around raising standards and improving learner outcomes. Starting with a clear vision for the school; a continual cycle of self-evaluation, strategic planning, taking action, and reviewing impact commences. The vision for the school grounds the SDP within the context of the school. A successful vision will be understood and shared by all, so needs to be motivational and achievable, the foundation for which should be based on solid practical strategies. As part of a school's self-evaluation, four key points should be identified: how well they are performing; any areas of strength; what requires improvement; and what actions are required to make said improvements. As a part of regular monitoring arrangements, a school must assess their progress against set targets. Qualitative data is restrictive and should either relate to inspection reports of the school, or information regarding learners' well-being, as well as information obtained through working with part of the wider school community. Quantitative data could consist of any attainment-based assessments as well as PISA results, school banding information, contextual factors and NEET data. In order to ensure the commitment of school partners and stakeholders, the wider school community should be heavily involved in the process of putting together the school's improvement agenda.

The first section of an SDP should consist of improvement priorities; targets, expected outcomes and strategy; and a professional development strategy. Document should further consist of any community links, school resources (including staff), and any previous targets. The action taken as a result of an SDP would depend on the specifics of the plan in question, but all plans will most likely rely on high-quality leadership at all stages to bring the plan into fruition efficiently and effectively. Reviewing the impact of an SDP must be either conducted annually by the governing body, or following an Estyn inspection, this is to ensure the SDP reflects the school in an up-to-date context. It may be important to note that the Government's guidance on SDP was published in 2014; before 'Successful Futures' (Donaldson, 2015) was published. More guidance could be likely to be published following the deployment of the new curriculum nation-wide.

As mentioned, a large portion of the SDP for the school in question is based around Donaldson's four purposes (2015). Striving to create ambitious capable learners includes such aspects as building a body of subject knowledge, enjoying problem solving and challenges, communicating ideas and concepts through various means. This purpose is what many would consider as the traditional approach to education with a focus on knowledge and skill. Supporting learners to become enterprising creative contributors

focuses on responsibility, problem solving, working as a team and innovativeness. Essentially it is the branch that prepares students to flourish within the working world. Creating ethically informed citizens encourages students to use evidence to form views, as well as help them understand both the human and ecological aspect of the world. This purpose is focused on imparting values on our young people. The last purpose is to create healthy confident individuals, which focuses on students' emotional wellbeing as well as developing and practising empathy. It also encourages and promoted physical health and forming positive relationships. This purpose allows for the broadening the social aspect of students' education. Together the four purposes attempt to encompass a holistic education that results in well-rounded individuals, and this approach is truly at the heart of the new curriculum.

Developing an action point

The first focus within the 'Teaching and learning experiences' priority area within the SDP is to evaluate the school's pioneer curriculum to ensure that it delivers Donaldson's 'four purposes' and is suitable for all learners (School Evaluation and Development Plan, 2018). Heads of departments have been responsible for designing schemes of work that focus on the development of the four purposes according the 'Successful Futures' documentation (Donaldson, 2015). Staff have been engaged with collaboratively planning aspects of the school's curriculum since 2016, so moving forward, the school has planned to assess the extent to which their curriculum functions as a whole in terms of the four purposes. Within their SDP, the school has self-evaluated and determined that as a result of successful monitoring, evaluation and review, that the school will continue to expand its current curriculum reform program, meaning all key stage 3 pupils shall experience the full integrated curriculum through the delivery of six collaborative learning areas. The current year 10 students are the first cohort to receive this education for the entirety of key stage 3, so the upcoming formal exam results would have provided essential and valued quantitative data assuming they would go ahead given current circumstances. To conduct the in-depth analysis required for the assessment of this ambitious curriculum reform, the school has constructed a research team composed of five teacher-researchers. These staff members have been reduced to half-timetables to allow for time to undertake the research required to inform the school in its future teaching practices. This step of allowing staff members extensive time to research and assess could allow for much more scope for change within a smaller time scale, and still allow for effective self-evaluation. Although candid with the fact that the schemes and programmes of delivery for this new curriculum have been changed and revised over the years, the school omits the large regressive steps taken due to

disagreements amongst teachers within, and between learning areas. One example is the complete dissolution of the creative arts learning area, in favour of regressing back to separate disciplines (i.e. Art, Music, and Drama). From speaking to students in the process of choosing their options for GCSE, it was apparent that students were frustrated by not having a clear grasp on what particular disciplines would entail due to having been taught thus far within only six diluted learning areas. Although not proclaimed an issue by the school, steps have been taken to try and combat this issue, but do not appear as part of the school's development plan, which would make for a clear limitation and future target of the school.

The second focus within the SDP is to develop an assessment model which supports the delivery of the new curriculum, including the four purposes. The school has self-evaluated and determined that progress in this area has been excellent; within key stage 3 data has been refined in line with Welsh Government guidance, delivered via whole school inset and through learning area meeting, enabling staff to understand the ethos underpinning the area of assessment. The school asserts that this has provided clarity to both attitude towards learning, and to pupil progress. This allows for accurate reporting, and successful parents' evenings, which have been amended to deliver better support assessment at key stage 3. The increased focus on formative assessment is supported by a two-year project conducted by the school's research team, based around building coherence between progress within an area of learning, and the next steps to be taken. This step is essential for both projections of individual pupils within the school, and for the school's progress to be tracked as a whole, particularly for key stage 3.

The third focus within development priority area of teaching and learning experiences is to embed and extend the digital competency framework. Under the direction of the school's Digital Literacy Coordinator, the DCF has been mapped at both school level and individual learning area level. In the school's current structure, digital leads within each learning area are responsible for producing resources that support the DCF sub element for each learning area. The school mentions that progress within this strand has been significantly hampered by significant network issues as well as the departure of the DLC. In response the school has appointed a DLC for each learning area in an attempt to accelerate progress during the academic year of 2019-2020. From observations made of both teaching methods and the school's curriculum, it is clear that digital competency skills are imbedded wherever possible. 'Research tasks' using Chromebooks are deployed regularly in every lesson.

The fourth focus within the priority area is to extend the use of Welsh activities across the school community and aim to achieve the 'Bronze Siarter Iaith Award'. The school's evaluation of this focus highlights the importance of regarding the SDP as a working document, as any progress towards this goal has yet to be made. The last focus also has no

progress as of writing; identifying how the collaborative learning culture within the school has improved learning experiences for pupils. This focus will most likely receive the most development pending the results of the current GCSE cohort whom have experienced this new curriculum.

Reflection and evaluation

In parts, the SDP is incredibly detailed and thorough, but include inconsistencies and omissions, possibly the product of inevitably being written by multiple authors, as well as being a living and changing document. One obvious avenue for improvement is addressing the lack of success criteria within the 'Teaching and learning experiences' priority area. Within the other priority areas, including 'Standards', 'Wellbeing and attitudes to learning', 'Care, support and guidance', and 'Leadership and management' there are clear, specific and achievable success criteria that the school can self-evaluate and track in regard to. In some areas, leaving no success criteria suggests the need for continual development with no clear objective, which arguably could be appropriate within some strands. But for the objective of embedding and extending the DCF, clear success criteria would allow for a much more focused and gaugeable process.

Any lack of evidence of the cyclical nature of this SDP can be accounted for by regarding the scale and ambition of vision. Specifically, the lack of success criteria, and the limited reviewing of impact evidenced within the SDP can be attributed to the fact that the school is continually assessing and re-establishing a solid understanding of itself after such dramatic change in complete reform of its curriculum. After which it is expected that future SDPs from this school will focus on refining and tuning the changes already made, falling in-line with the new Donaldson curriculum, soon to be established within all schools in Wales. These circumstances are unlikely to be in isolation, as many schools in Wales may experience a similar series of circumstances within the following years.

The advances made within this school are not kept in isolation. The school is host to numerous visits from other schools, participates in many national conferences, as well as presenting to Welsh Government and higher education providers. Schools across the country will rely on the findings of pioneer schools like this one to highlight good practise going forwards within this education reform.

Conclusion

One aspect of a school's development plan was investigated, and critically reflected upon. The Welsh Government regulations were explored, which form the basis for all SDPs. Also Donaldson's four purposes were explored, as they form the basis for this particular school's

development plan. Some recommendations for the school's development plan were made from the perspective of an outsider to the school, with limited experience from within the school itself.

Through this process I have learned the importance and need for schools to produce a development plan. I have examined how the wider school community collaborates to produce a living document that charts the future course of a school. Exploring the specifics of how certain aspects of the SDP are put together has allowed me deeper insight into some of the difficulties regarding the self-evaluation of an entire school.

In terms of further developing my personal professional practise, the production of this report has informed my understanding of the contribution of research, including both small-scale and large-scale research. It has also help me understand the nature of responsibilities within and across teams, as well as the contributions individuals can make towards the school's ethos, resulting in progress towards fulfilling a school's vision.

References

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