

Targets	How you have worked on this	An example can be found on
Target 1 Ensure that you are writing in complete sentences and that they are grammatically correct and expressed with clarity.	I have ensured to write in completed sentence which are expressed with clarity and grammatically correct as I have used the grammar checker.	Throughout this assignment
Target 2 Continue to ensure that your findings are consistently and explicitly linked with theory.	I have continued to support my findings consistently and explicitly through a range of academic and professional literature.	Throughout this assignment

ECAD6009

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

Name: Alice Samuel

Student Number: 2102920

Word Count: 2,716

Introduction:

This report will critically reflect and explore one priority of the School Development Plan (SDP), also known as a School Improvement Plan (SIP) (Greenwood, 2019) from a Welsh primary school. Throughout this report, the school will be referred as School X to ensure the confidentiality, anonymity and privacy rights of the learners, the school, and the community (BERA, 2018; UNICEF, 1989)

School X is in a rural village primary school, situated in Bridged with approximately 582 pupils on roll which are taught across 18 classes (Estyn, 2018). The majority of the learners come from a White British household and live in an English-speaking household, with only few learning English as an additional language (Estyn, 2018). Within their most recent Estyn report, School X identified a rolling three-year average of 6% of their learners being eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) (Estyn, 2018), which is a significantly lower percentage than national average of 22.2% (Welsh Government (WG), 2023). This could lead us to believe that School X is situated in a relatively affluent area. Additionally, 11% of learners were considered to have an Additional Learning Need (ALN) (Estyn, 2018), which again is notably lower percentage than the national average of 21% (WG, 2023)

Literature Review:

There has been a significant national mission to raise standards and improve aspirations for every learner within the educational system in Wales (OCED, 2017; 2014), as a result of PISA standards through indicating that Wales were significantly lower in regards to their performance compared to other British countries (OCED, 2017; Ingram et al., 2023). The Curriculum for Wales (CfW) has played a pivotal contribution to the national objectives and the educational reform through nurturing every learner to become ambitious, creative, healthy, and ethical informed citizens (WG, 2020). Additionally, it has been argued that one of the most effective ways to foster and drive sustainable educational improvement, is through school improvement plan which provides a clear framework of evaluation, improvement, and accountability (WG, 2014; 2022; Estyn 2012). School improvement plans are a strategic planning document for improvement (WG, 2014) that are drawn up to determine set priorities in regards to where the school wants to go, what is needed to get there and how to know if it is got there, over a three-year period (McNamara, 2003). As a result, this is aimed to benefit and support the school to enhance the learning experiences and outcomes for all learners, regardless of their backgrounds, in order to achieve high standards and aspiration for all (Estyn, 2023), under the CfW principles (WG, 2022b; 2020).

Whilst SIP priorities may be tailored to specific school contexts, they often address priorities such as improving and maintaining literacy and numeracy standards, reducing the gap of attainment believed to be linked to poverty or disadvantaged learners (Estyn, 2013; Egan, 2013; Sharp et al., 2015) as well as targets that may be influenced by national policies and objectives (WG, 2020; WG, 2015; WG, 2017; WG, 2021). SIPs often cover a three-year rolling period (WG, 2014) which is considered to be a more typical length of time for a strategic plan (Davies and Ellison, 2003). However, it is worth noting that School X SIP has been drawn up to cover a single academic year. Therefore, School X SIP that is under review could be considered a short-term planning document rather than a long-term plan. Moreover, despite the importance of an SIP there are also some criticisms in the literature that reject the idea that formal improvement planning can positively influence the school; thereby improve learner outcomes (Bell, 2002; Mintzberg, 1994) Additionally, some studies even suggest that formal planning can lead to rigidity and myopic practices (Bryson & Roering, 1987; Halachmi, 1986). That said, SIPs should be considered as a 'live' document, which are subjected to regular monitoring and formal evaluation (WG, 2014). Therefore, this could imply that while SIP serve as a formal planning tool, they do entail a degree of flexibility to adapt and modify their school priorities at given times and meet the needs of their learners.

The focus under consideration within School X SIP relates to aim 1 which is to strengthen provision and ensure progression across the school for all areas of Health & Well-being (School X, 2023). School X has illustrated varying actions that they intend to undertake to make progress against this aim, however this report will look specifically into the action of the implementation of Jigsaw which advocates a personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) scheme of work across the whole school (School X, 2023). The significance of promoting and supporting children and young people's health and well-being in education is widely recognised and increasingly emphasised in the educational agenda (Rose, Gilbert, and Richards, 2016; Estyn 2019; 2016). Under the CfW, the promotion and enhancement of learners' health and well-being has become paramount, not only through being an designated AoLE but also integrating into one of the overarching four purposes, namely "healthy, confident individuals" (WG, 2020, p.1). It is recognised that fostering positive health and well-being is fundamental in order for all learners to thrive and engage successfully with their education, society and the opportunities presented outcomes the school environment (WG, 2021a). As a result, this will support some of objectives within the Well-being Future Generation (Wales) Act (2015), particularly focusing on aims such as "A healthier Wales" and "A resilient Wales" (WG, 2015, p.3).

As mentioned, School X is trialing the Jigsaw PSHE scheme to strengthen their health and well-being provision. Jigsaw is designed as a comprehensive whole-school programme, containing lessons and resources which are intended to provide educators confidence to deliver high-quality lessons on a wide range of health and well-being topics, alongside is said to elevate educational outcomes, mental health, and safeguarding (Jigsaw Educational Group, 2020). Moreover, this programme aims to nurture learners' confidence and success by enhancing their capacity to learn and develop life skills as well as foster their emotional intelligence through recognising their thoughts and feelings and helping them to make appropriate choices as to how to respond and support them in managing those feelings (Jigsaw Educational Group, 2020), something that closely aligns with Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences, primarily the intrapersonal intelligence (Lindon, 2012). However, some recommendations have been made to improve the scheme, particularly regarding making simplifications to the resources, outcomes and assessment measures due to sometimes being too time consuming and difficult to fit into a single lesson (Wolestenholme, Willis and Culliney, 2016). Thus, while the scheme offers notable benefits, there may be a need for adjustments to simplify the facilities to make them manageable and feasible to implement practically within the constraints of school life.

Developing Action Point:

The inclusion of this chosen target on the SIP will have been naturally influenced to a certain degree of national policy of the CfW. However, there is a recognised need in their SIP for further improvement of their provision and progression across the school within the health and well-being AoLE, which would have been determined through the school's own self-evaluation process. Self-evaluation plays a central role in effective strategic planning for driving school improvement, learner outcomes, and professional learning (WG, 2014; Estyn, 2017). Schools are expected to conduct regular self-evaluation to inform and refine their everyday school practices as well as strategic plans such as SIPs, possibly using the Welsh Government's school development planning cycle as a base structure (WG, 2014). However, it is imperative that self-evaluation maintains a focus on improvement rather than solely satisfying external accountability measures or motivated by external competitions, as this can potentially lead to schools and staff viewing self-evaluation processes as a perfunctory audit rather than a meaningful endeavour for school improvement (WG, 2021b).

The SIP highlights that this specific school's aim was determined as a school priority due to challenges continuing to grow within the community with increasing concerns around mental health and family stability impacting upon learners; thereby as a school they identified it is as crucial to ensure their provision and approaches were proactive rather than reactive to

minimise their effectiveness (School X, 2023). Additionally, their SIP from the previous academic year entailed a priority linked to reviewing approaches to pupils' well-being (School X, 2023). Therefore, this provided clear indication of how the school's own self-evaluation has influenced the inclusion of this priority within this academic year through detailing that feedback from stakeholders played a valuable role in supporting informed discussions about further improving this area through embedding a whole-school approach to well-being.

Also, it is clear from School X's SIP there is a strong commitment to engage a range of stakeholders, namely staff, learners, and the governing body, which is something considered as good practice, if not a necessity, in effectively formulating and implementing an SIP (Wood and Brighouse, 2013; WG, 2014). School X has also delegated staff to specific responsibilities in the SIP, which is the health and well-being team for the aim being explored in this report. Subsequently, this can foster ownership, commitment among team members, and professional accountability of effectively implementation of that specific action and the impact on the learners (Gilbert, 2012). The resources and cost column of the SIP makes direct considerations to staff cover and staff training, thereby provided opportunities for School X to consider and identify any resources that are required, alongside costing implications to ensure whether their intended actions are financially viable (WG, 2021b), which is particularly fundamental in light of heightened budgets constraints in schools (NAHT, 2024). Additionally, it is widely recognised the importance of continuous professional development opportunities for educators to upskills their skills and knowledge to enhance the quality of their provision and the outcomes of their learners (Estyn, 2020). This has been evidently recognised in School X's SIP through the identification of the need for staff training, however it is less explicit about the specific types of training required.

An effective SIP, is explicit about how it will be monitored, reviewed, and evaluated (CSCJES, 2017) and School X details a clear success criteria and a list of actions to be implemented which will be monitored and reviewed at regular intervals throughout the year using a 'RAG' (Red, Amber, Green) rating systems (Law, 2016) to inform part of the self-evaluation process whether successful improvement has been made against this aim by the likely timescale of the end of the academic year. Whilst utilising a 'RAG rating can prove to be effective in monitoring progress and identifying areas for development (Earl and Katz, 2006), it could be argued that it may oversimplify complex issues and fail to capture the nuances of school improvement (Gaertner and Wurster, 2013). Consequently, this could imply a need for caution against relying solely on such a system, and perhaps the use of other means of data alongside this RAG rating systems is supplemented during self-

evaluation process to provide a more holistic and reliable view on school improvement (Gaertner and Wurster, 2013). This has been explicitly acknowledged in School X's SIP in order to make strong assertion on progression and improvement of school targets. Furthermore, the review and evaluation column makes reference to various stakeholders that will be involved in this process such as staff and learners and what form of that involvement will they take for example gathering their feedback. The use of gathering staff and learner feedback as a means of evidence to measure and evaluate the impact can be effective in providing a reflective and responsive approach to school improvement through identifying areas of strength and areas for improvement, which can support continuous growth in teaching practice and overall school improvement (Sadler, 2010). Furthermore, integrating the use of learner participation in the evaluation process is paramount, in order to foster their right to have a voice in alignment with article 12 of the United Nation Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (UNICEF, 1989), as well as the expectations under the CfW (WG, 2020).

Reflection and Evaluation:

As explored within this report, School X has detailed varying aspects that make up the creation of an effective SIP (WG, 2014; 2022). However, as previously mentioned the SIP produced by School X covers a period of one academic year. The guidance provided by Welsh Government (2014) suggests that SIPs or SDPs are ideally to cover a period of three years, with detailed targets and actions outlines for the initial year and broader targets and priorities outlined for the subsequent years. Therefore, it could be recommended that School X moves towards, detailing a three-year strategic plan. Nonetheless, the guidance also emphasises the importance of SIPs being a rolling document, and such revisions will occur regularly as the school leadership team carries out ongoing self-evaluation activities leading to strategic planning, implementation of improvements and review of the impact these have had on their school practices (WG, 2014). In the case of School X, whilst it may be argued that the SIP is dated to cover a one-year period, the attitudes and approaches of the leadership team indicated that they have a clear defined overview plan of planning, evaluation, implementation and review to ensure that the targets are relevant to the needs of the learners and school at given years (School X, 2023). As a result, there is an element of a longer term strategic view. Also, School X's leadership has previously been categorised as good under Estyn inspections (Estyn, 2018), something that again which is significant in ensuring effective development and progression of the SIP activity (Estyn, 2016a; Marzano, Waters and McNulty, 2005).

Additionally, whilst School X regularly RAG rates their priorities in order to monitor and evaluate their progress throughout the year, as part of their self-evaluation process, they do not however provide detail of the RAG rating judgements. Therefore, this could make it unclear to the school community how these judgements are reached. As a result, it could be recommended that School X include the RAG rating judgements on their SIP, in order to provide all key stakeholders a clear indication of the judgements which could be beneficial to further improve the delivery of the plan, and for the whole school community to understand and provide valuable evidence in monitoring and reviewing the progress against the priorities (WG, 2014; Hale and Page, 2013).

In relation to the school's progress against the implementation of the Jigsaw scheme, it appeared in discussions with school staff it has supported their confidence to deliver a range of health and well-being topics (Jigsaw Educational Group, 2020). However, the views of school staff in School X, did suggested that this scheme can be time-consuming to deliver every week, with other curriculum demands, something which Wolestenholme, Willis and Culliney (2016) similarly explored. These views from staff could be considered as valuable evidence during the self-evaluation progress against this action to see whether adjustments can be made to this target and the use of the Jigsaw scheme to make it more manageable to implement practically in the classroom, alongside other curriculum demands.

Conclusion:

The information shared by School X provided a comprehensive understanding of the processes that are required and followed to create an SIP and monitor it. From this report, the practitioner has been able to acquire a strong insight into the role of staff stakeholders in collecting and analysing data as part of the ongoing self-evaluation process that the school engages in. Appreciation has been gained on how there is a need to be responsive to a range of influences and data when creating a SIP, In certain instances, such as the priority area explored in this report will have been naturally shaped by national policy agenda, whereas on other occasions it may be in response to observed trends in school reporting data generated by assessment or the specific needs of the school and learners at given times (School X, 2023). It has become clear however that effective delivery of a SIP requires support of all stakeholders, and the practitioner recognises that in their future practice they will play a significant role in driving the school improvement of the school they work for through the school's strategic targets. This is something that is advocated in the professional standards that all teachers' must evidence (WG, 2019), especially those relating to collaboration and leadership, and this is something that the practitioner will continue to fulfil in their future teaching career.

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