

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

The purpose of this report is to critically analyse and reflect on how the allocated placement school has develop one aspect within its school development plan, the impact of the actions and evaluate its evidence. In accordance with Bera (2018) guidelines, all information pertaining to the placement school must be anonamised, and therefore, the placement school will be referred to as school X throughout this report.

To provide context, school X is an English medium high school, providing education to pupils aged 11-18. There are currently 1721 pupils enrolled at the school, of which, 32.7% receive free school meals, 15.3% higher than the national average. It is estimated that 35% of the pupils have a special educational need, which is 9.9% higher than the national average, Estyn (2017).

Over 70% of the pupils come from a minority background with over 60 languages being spoken at the school, all speak English as an additional language and no pupils speak Welsh as a first language. In addition to this, 60% of pupils live within some of the most deprived areas of Wales, Estyn (2017).

After reading the school development plan the student-teacher has chosen to focus on school X's broad priority of *"Improve the quality of teaching, feedback and assessment so that our pupils reach their full potential, including those with barriers to learning, who make the accelerated progress they need to ensure they reach their full potential"*, specifically exploring the SDP's aim to improve literacy and numeracy within the school. This is in-line with Donaldson's (2015) successful futures report under the new curriculum for Wales, where we are enabling the pupils to become ambitious capable learners.

A school development plan is a schools strategies and systematic plan for school-wide improvement, Welsh Government (2014). SDP's provide the prescriptive actions schools will take to improve the provision of service as laid out in the education (schools development plans) Wales regulations act (2014). In the book "achieving equity and excellence" Reeves (2019) stresses the importance of schools consistently and routinely assessing their own strengths and weaknesses to inform development plans effectively. This is further validated by Hattie (2009) in his comprehensive meta-analysis study where self-evaluating through evidence-based practice is the key to pinpointing areas of improvement and this can also relate to SDP's.

School development plans assist educators in analysing the priorities of their school, how to improve these priorities, what resources will be allocated to them and the key desirables the SDP seeks to meet with deadlines, Department of education (2010). When looking at the planning requirements of SDP's, the department of education (2021) states that under normal circumstances, all schools should plan for at least 3 years ahead, providing an effective roadmap for the future provision of the school. The school development planning cycle helps schools align their plans against a systematic framework of service improvement.

There are 4 stages, which include, self-evaluation, strategic planning, making improvement and action and finally reviewing impact, Welsh Government (2014). During stage one of the SDPC, schools self-evaluate their performance and use this information to form the foundations of their improvement planning, Welsh Government (2014). In stage 2, schools include all school partners and stakeholders in the strategic planning process, with the headteacher being a crucial stakeholder in the process, this ensures that the SDP has been developed collaboratively at every level of the school system, The Educational Institute (2001), Schildkamp, (2019). During stage 3, the school outlines the proposed improvements and actions as stated by Welsh Government (2014). Finally, the last stage is reviewing impact, this is where the SDP is considered a live document and should be regularly reviewed by all stakeholders including the governing body, Welsh Government (2014). The school development planning cycle shares strong a strong relationship with the results-orientated cycle of inquiry or ROCI, which includes setting goals, planning, actions, assessing and reflecting and adjusting, Hannover Research Group, (2014).

There are many benefits for schools to develop and follow an SDP which include increased community participation, a sense of shared responsibility with all stakeholders, increased accountability as a responsible organisation and most importantly increases in pupil achievement, TES (2014). However, Xaba (2006) discusses in his study that when monitoring the effectiveness of schools implementing SDPs it was recorded that schools were inadequate in their planning process, the training in developing effective SDP actions was limited and not all stakeholders were included in the process, highlighting the importance of a fully comprehensive approach to SDPs.

It is common for schools to have a focus of literacy and numeracy within their SDP's as this is a national focus within Wales, triggered by the national literacy and numeracy framework (2013). This prescriptive legislation aims to improve the standards of literacy and numeracy within Wales from a local to national level. The non-statutory skills framework, introduced in 2008, which precedes the LNF (2013), received large scrutiny from Estyn as teachers were not effectively embedding the desired skills, Welsh Government (2013). This was evidenced in the PISA 2009 results, published in 2010, whereby Wales was showing a deterioration in literacy and numeracy skills across the board, scoring 476 on average for reading, much below the OECD average of 493, and likewise in mathematics scoring 472 with the OECD average sitting at 496, Welsh Government (2010). As a result of this, the LNF has now become a statutory curriculum requirement by all schools to develop over the following years.

In recent years, because of the Covid-19 pandemic, schools have seen significant drops in the levels of numeracy and literacy across Wales. The national reading level results for KS3 in 2022 was recorded at 84.7%, whereas prior to covid those same statistics were recorded at 88.9%, highlighting a national drop of 4.2% in pupil literacy skills, Welsh Government (2023). Comparatively to this, the average PISA mathematics score in 2018 was recorded at 487, and in 2022, was recorded at 466, highlighting a 4.3% overall decrease since the covid-19 pandemic. This reinforces the drive from Welsh government to raise the attainment levels of pupils engaging with literacy and numeracy skills. In addition to this, the new curriculum for Wales provides

a new focus on cross-curricular skills, reinforcing both literacy and numeracy as key skills pupils should develop in all areas of learning, Donaldson (2015).

School X has identified within its SDP a focus on developing the reading and numeracy skills of its pupils throughout all levels of the school system, this will be explored further in the next section. School X is looking to improve the levels of their pupils reading and numeracy throughout the school. School X is a data-driven organization and therefore, to understand the reading and numeracy levels, school X must first analyse the data that is available to them and self-evaluate where they are currently at, the first stage within the SDPC.

Firstly, looking at reading, school X analysed year 7 national reading test data, in-line with the national literacy and numeracy framework (2013). School X identified that pupils transferring into the school, on average, were 1 year below their chronological reading age, therefore highlighting a significant area of focus for the SDP. Likewise, when looking at numeracy, school X decided to review the quantitative data from CAT tests, again inline with the national literacy and numeracy framework (2013). School X discovered that 37% of pupils transferring into their provision were either scoring “below average” or “very low”, especially when compared with the national average sitting lower at only 23%. Again, this reinforces schools X drive for providing significant focus on this aspect within its SDP, and both together, highlight school x’s approach to self-evaluation when identifying areas of concern that fits their SDP.

Moving into the next stage of the SDPC, making improvements, school X’s senior leadership team decided to help support the departments to review their curriculum so that the curriculum is accessible to those with lower reading ages, thinking this will be a suitable intervention to implement change, however the information is vague. Within numeracy, the senior leadership team decided to appoint an individual from middle management to numeracy champion, with the purpose of this individual having deep insight and understanding of the numeracy development within the school. This type of intervention reinforces the national literacy and numeracy framework (2013) published in a report by Welsh Government (2017), where they state the numeracy champion should have strong links with the senior leadership team.

Next, we look at the planned impact of the interventions for school X. The planned impact for literacy will be evidenced by increases in pupil chronological reading ages and pupils access to the curriculum will be improved through adaptation of current content. However, this does not explain how this will be achieved and by who, and when looking closer, it is stating that will be done, without any actionable variables. In addition to this, when looking at numeracy, school X seeks to achieve pupils attainment to reach average (23%) and above average levels within their tests and numeracy champions will have greater insight into the provision of numeracy across the school, feeding back into the senior leadership team.

Finally, we examine the how school X will provide evidence and assess the effectiveness of its interventions. Regarding literacy, school X will persist in its efforts to track and substantiate any impact through an analysis of the national literacy tests as well as by actively seeking feedback from students. Additionally, when considering numeracy, school X will engage in discussions with teachers and leaders at all levels

to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the strategies provision. Furthermore, the utilisation of CAT 4 data should demonstrate a notable enhancement in numeracy proficiency.

Regrettably, following a comprehensive analysis of the SDP, which initiated with strong and specific goal setting, the subsequent stages of the process, from identifying areas of development at the beginning of the SDPC to demonstrating its impact, exhibited an increasing level of ambiguity. This highlighted the need for improvement in future planning. Healey (1997) emphasizes the importance of effective planning, whereby planners must identify the influential variables that can affect the outcomes. Furthermore, Carnoy and Rothstein (2013) argue that solely analysing test scores may lead to an overestimation of pupil progress for those who underachieve, and that other intrinsic factors and variables must be considered to provide accurate data that drives improvement.

After Reflecting on school X's school development plan, a few potential strategies have been identified that could help the success of both literacy and numeracy. Firstly, to assist the development of both literacy and numeracy school X could develop interventions around their transition planning from their feeder schools, proactively addressing issues through early intervention. An example of this can be seen in the Welshpool (2022) transition plan provided by Powys County Council (2023). This plan ensures that coherence is maintain across their cluster to promote equity, understanding of progression steps and identifying the next steps in their learning before reaching high school. By doing so, this ensures that the process is in-line with the transition from primary to secondary school (Wales) regulations (2022), the curriculum for Wales framework (2020) and Donaldsons (2015) report on developing both cross-curricular skills and ambitious capable learners.

Another area of development identified for school X is to effectively utilise stakeholders within their school development plan. After review, it was identified that there was a lack of stakeholder engagement throughout every stage of the SDP. Arnold (2017) explains the importance of ensuring the inclusion of all stakeholders when schools conduct improvement planning, this is further validated by Judah, et al (2014) and Hanover (2014) who both state that strategic planning processes must include all stakeholders in the development process. By school X not including stakeholders in their literacy and numeracy interventions they have missed out on potential positive interventions. A potential solution for this is the development of family literacy and numeracy programs. By doing so, school X could raise the literacy and numeracy of families so that they are better equipped to develop their own child's education, bring families as stakeholders into the foundations of the schools development plan. Thinking in this way is supported by the national literacy and numeracy framework (2013) and FaCE strategies provided by Welsh Government (2015).

Through the completion of this assignment, the student teacher has explored how a school develops one aspect of its school development plan. Relevant literature on the school development planning model has been reviewed and applied to school X's school development plan. School X's literacy and numeracy has been analysed and synthesized, drawing research from Welsh Government legislation, reports, and

programs, national and international benchmarking tests. School X's approach to developing their literacy and numeracy strategies have been critically reviewed and evaluated to provide possible solutions for future practice moving forward, highlighted as proactively bringing families into the schools planning and development process through family literacy and numeracy programs to help aid pupil development and utilising effective transition planning to develop cohesion between feeder schools to the high school environment.

Completing this assignment has helped develop my own understanding of the school development plan process. Moving forward, the knowledge I have gained from this assignment will influence the development of my teaching practices going forward. This has inspired me to ensure that once I am a qualified teacher, and where-ever possible, ensure the parents are included as stakeholders throughout any relevant cooperative interventions in the future. This assignment has also helped my understanding of how important the role of feeder schools are in high school environment and inspires me to work with feeder schools on developing co-productive plans to promote literacy and numeracy in my teaching practices.

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