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Y Drindod Dewi Sant

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**How a School Develops One Aspect of its SDP: A
Report That Critically Reflects on the Actions, Impact
and Evidence Base.**

Introduction

This report requires an inquiry into how a school develops a specific aspect of its SDP. Through analysing information and material gathered within placement school 'X', the report will demonstrate how a particular target from their SDP has been addressed and evaluated within an evidence-based framework. Miles et al. (1987: 3) define school improvement 'as a systematic, sustained effort aimed at change in learning conditions and other related internal conditions in one or more schools with the ultimate aim of accomplishing educational goals more effectively. Hopkins (1996: 32) suggests two general definitions for the term school improvement. The first, 'is a common sense meaning which relates to general efforts to make schools better places for students and for students to learn'. Secondly, a more specific definition in which Hopkins (1996: 32) depicts, school improvement as a 'strategy for educational change that enhances student outcomes as well as strengthening the school's capacity for managing change'. School 'X' is situated in the local authority of Carmarthenshire and has grown rapidly over the last four years. There are currently 153 pupils on roll aged three to eleven. There are six classes, all of which are mixed-age. The school site includes a gypsy traveller service and a Welsh Government funded Flying Start facility. Very few pupils come from an ethnic minority background, speak English as an additional language or speak Welsh at home.

Literature Review

School Development Process

The school development plan (SDP) is a strategic plan for improvement which assembles a school's priorities, an action plan, necessary resources and the targets and outcomes the plan intends to achieve (Department of Education, 2010., p8). Miles *et al* (1987:3) explain that school improvement is a 'systematic, sustained effort aimed at change in learning conditions and other related internal conditions in one or more schools with the ultimate aim of accomplishing educational goals more effectively'. Theorists such as (Reynolds *et al.*, 1996) and (Harris, A., p112) express the several fundamental features required for successful school improvement. Reynolds *et al.*, (1996) assert that the characteristics of highly reliable organisations include effective training programmes, concentration on a few goals, standard operating procedures, attention to minor detail and identifying and rectifying weak links. Additionally, (Harris, A., p112) states that successful school improvement requires collaboration and mutual support amongst staff for innovation and change and without this high level of commitment amongst all staff, improvement is unlikely. Fullman (1991:21) further supports this statement, declaring that 'educational change depends on what teachers do and think, it's as simple and complex as that'. Thus, teacher development is crucial for delivering effective teaching and learning and continuous training opportunities should be available to ensure that teachers can implement strategies for school improvement adequately.

Welsh

The focused priority for this report is the use of the Welsh language used in and around school 'X' to achieve the Welsh Silver Safon Iaith Accreditation. School 'X' is located in Carmarthenshire, a county which is dedicated to promoting and using the Welsh language in each of its schools. Data derived from (Welsh Government, 2022) *Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC)* for Welsh language demonstrates this commitment in Carmarthenshire, which during the year 2021/22 achieved the highest number of English-speaking pupils with significant use of the Welsh language inside school within South West and Mid Wales. Within Carmarthenshire, 2,458 pupils are recognised as English-speaking individuals with significant use of the Welsh language day-to-day inside of school. This number is significantly higher than other counties in South West and Mid Wales such as Powys with 1,267 English speaking pupils with significant Welsh Ceredigion with 1,086. Additionally, Carmarthenshire has the greatest number of dual-stream schools in the LA region, with 2,685 pupils in schools in which both English and Welsh are used in the day-to-day business of the school. Again, this figure is significantly higher than other counties such as Powys with 1,295 pupils in dual-stream schools.

This data is significant in regards to the Welsh priority for school improvement as it demonstrates the current standard of the Welsh language used within the local authority schools and also supports initiatives such as (Welsh Government, 2021) *Carmarthenshire's Welsh in Education Strategic Plan* and (Welsh Government, 2017) *Cymraeg 2050: A million Welsh Speakers*. Welsh Government (2021) *WESP* emphasises its aspiration to make Welsh the primary language of the county through implementing strategies such as *Siarter Iaith* (language charter journey) within primary schools. The local authority is committed to providing a bilingual service to Carmarthenshire's learners by increasing opportunities for learners to use Welsh in

social contexts and inside school through the use of *Siarter Iaith* and encourages schools to strive to achieve the Silver and Gold *Siarter Iaith* awards. School 'X' currently holds a *Siarter Iaith* bronze award and aspires to continue its efforts to achieve the silver award through its priority to use spoken Welsh in and around schools and immersing the staff and children in the language day-to-day. Through the implementation of strategies outlined within the Welsh Government (2021) *WESP* and the use of *Siarter Iaith*, school 'X' furthermore supports Welsh Government (2017) *A million Welsh speakers*, which identifies three strategic themes to achieve their vision; increasing the number of Welsh speakers, increasing the use of Welsh and creating favourable conditions.

Developing an Action Point

Welsh Government (2014) states the key to school improvement is effective school development planning which will be set out in the context of the school's short and long-term vision. School 'X' utilises the 'school development planning cycle' approach which outlines priorities and targets based on honest and robust self-evaluation (See figure 1 for school development planning cycle). Fundamental to this approach is the ongoing review and evaluation that forms a key element of the planning cycle. Within school 'X', the SDP covers a three-year period and is closely monitored and reviewed termly. Headteacher 'X' explains the school development planning cycle begins initially with a clear vision of what the school aspires to accomplish, which must be motivational and achievable and underpinned by logical practical strategies, this will then set the context for their SDP. Once a clear vision is established, school 'X' undertakes the first stage of the planning process: self-evaluation. Harris, A., (2003, pp.45) declares that school evaluation is crucial in reshaping or modifying school culture as it provides imperative feedback and information that empowers those within a school to reflect upon

change and to modify practices. The self-evaluation aspect of planning provides an opportunity for reflection and to assess performance, strengths and areas for improvement and the necessary actions which will support any areas for improvement. School 'X' relies on both qualitative and quantitative data derived from questionnaires and feedback from stakeholders to progress meetings, tracking learners' progress, school banding information and wider contextual factors to evaluate their progress against a set of targets. Each of these evaluation processes allows school 'X' to recognise strengths and how to continue efforts further and address developmental requirements.

Welsh Government (2014, p11) states that for effective school improvement planning, it is essential that all stakeholders and school partners are involved and engaged, ensuring that everyone has a commitment to the school's improvement agenda. Teacher 'X' explains that during the planning process, the collaboration between internal and external stakeholders, including all staff, pupils, parents, governors, challenge advisors and the community is vital. In regard to the Welsh priority outlined in school 'X' SDP, internal stakeholders such as teaching and support staff are aware of their roles and responsibilities to use Welsh in and around the school to immerse the pupils within the language. Staff are committed to developing their Welsh language skills and there is the opportunity for professional development to support this, such as the Welsh Government's *Welsh Language Sabbatical Scheme*. Alongside this, each class from Year 2 to Year 6 has two nominated pupils who are part of the 'Criw Cymraeg' organised and managed by one of the school teachers. One role of the Criw Cymraeg is to engage each of the classes in different strategies which encourage the use of the Welsh language in and around school, this contributes to monitoring the priority through sharing qualitative feedback in progress meetings to indicate and measure impact.

Following the above, headteacher 'X' asserts that any actions and strategies outlined in the SDP will then be implemented. Internal stakeholders such as teachers and support staff are aware of their responsibilities in implementing actions and strategies for improving specific priorities and how this can be done effectively for successful development. When developing the SDP, the collaboration between SLT and teaching staff is necessary to outline details of individual responsibilities, accountability, actions and timescales for priorities. In regards to the Welsh priority within school 'X', all of the staff are responsible for immersing the pupils in the Welsh language day-to-day throughout the school through communicating bilingually and encouraging pupils to speak Welsh in certain contexts. Headteacher 'X' also states that all staff are aware of the requirements in order to achieve the silver Siarter Iaith award and how they can achieve this as a whole school. School 'X' follows success criteria produced by the Welsh Government to support schools implementing Cymraeg Campus and striving for the Siarter Iaith awards. The success criteria include ten challenging but attainable targets in connection with promoting the use of the Welsh language which differ for each award level (see figure 2 for silver award success criteria). The final stage of the planning is reviewing impact, which is conducted by internal stakeholders including SLT, teachers and governing bodies and external stakeholders such as challenge advisors. Headteacher 'X' explains that their SDP priorities are displayed around the school and that the main SDP is a live, working document which is regularly monitored and updated to assess what is working and the areas which require further development.

Reflection and Evaluation

At present, headteacher 'X' declares that the current standard of Welsh is satisfactory, however, requires further development to achieve the silver *Siarter Iaith* award. Despite a commitment to implementing strategies such as Cymraeg Campus and Criw Cymraeg to promote the use of Welsh and the strong Welsh ethos within the school, further improvements are required to attain some of the silver *Siarter Iaith* success criteria. Headteacher 'X' explains that the school continues its commitment to promoting the Welsh language in support of (Welsh Government, 2021) *Carmarthenshire's Welsh in Education Strategic Plan* and (Welsh Government, 2017) *Cymraeg 2050: A million Welsh Speakers* by implementing strategies for the SDP priority Welsh. Headteacher 'X' further asserts the strategies currently implemented to increase the use of Welsh are maintained at a decent standard and the internal stakeholders are aware of their roles and responsibilities in regard to the action plan for this priority. Some of which include introducing a new or significant Welsh word or phrase of the week inside the classroom, reward systems, reading Welsh books and using Welsh incidentally throughout the day and in assemblies.

Nonetheless, concerns arise regarding teachers' ability to speak and understand Welsh. Despite the whole-school commitment to encouraging the use of Welsh, only few of the staff are fluent or confident with the language. Hopkins *et al* (1996) state schools that are failing tend to be characterised by an impoverishment in teacher and teacher development. Further to this, Hopkins *et al* (1997: 17) also notes that successful schools encourage coordination by creating collaborative environments which encourage involvement, professional development, mutual support and assistance in problem-solving. School 'X' supports professional development by encouraging teachers to undertake the Welsh Government's *Welsh Language Sabbatical Scheme*. However, due to its intensive nature and the period of time required to complete the

course, it is difficult for a group of teachers to leave school and attend at once. Harris (2003., p56) declares that teachers develop through enquiry into and reflection upon their own practice. It must be taken into consideration that a Siarter *laith* questionnaire is used to measure the impact of current strategies to promote the use of Welsh. The questionnaire is completed online by pupils throughout years 3 to 6 at the beginning and end of the Siarter laith process which allows an opportunity for reflection and to express thoughts and opinions regarding the use of Welsh in and around the school. A practical suggestion should be that a similar instrument is adapted and used amongst staff in regard to their Welsh language skills. Theorists such as Wilson and McLean (1994) express the usefulness of questionnaires for collecting information as they often generate structured, numerical data and are straightforward to analyse. A questionnaire completed by staff throughout the school allows reflection upon practice and could provide feedback regarding their personal thoughts and opinions regarding their Welsh skills or the strategies they use day-to-day to promote the use of Welsh. Data derived from the questionnaires would provide insight into the teachers' current Welsh language skills. They could then be used to inform the need for professional development or INSET training on bilingualism to ensure that all staff are confident in promoting the use of Welsh and are able to operate the SDP action plan for the Welsh priority effectively. Data can also measure how current strategies to promote Welsh are being implemented by staff and the impact they are having. Yet, the limitations associated with the use of questionnaires must be considered. Youngman (1984: 163) contests positive viewpoints by Wilson and McLean (1994), arguing that when answering questionnaires humans naturally agree with statements rather than disagree, implying that responses are likely to be biased. Thus, questionnaires are a useful instrument, however, one must be aware of the lack of honesty in respondents' answers.

Conclusion

Through enquiry into how school 'X' develops a specific aspect of its SDP, there is now a greater understanding of fundamental factors vital to the planning aspect and implementing action plans for educational change and improvement. It has become increasingly noticeable that within school 'X', collaboration between stakeholders is valued and they each share the same vision for improvement and success. Such collaboration is an aspect which will influence personal professional practice due to understanding the significance of teachers sharing the same vision and aspiring to achieve these together. Vescio, Ross, & Adams, (2008) state that all teachers deserve the opportunity to engage in a professional collaboration aimed towards bolder and deeper learning for school improvement. Additionally, Datnow et al. (2018) assert that professional collaboration motivates, inspires and energises teachers and supports learning for teachers and students. Fullan and Quinn (2016) reinforce these claims, declaring that professional collaboration is team-related, connects teachers' passions and has real-world significance. Thus, collaboration is vital amongst teachers for promoting a growth-based learning environment and successful outcomes for pupils, teachers and whole school development.

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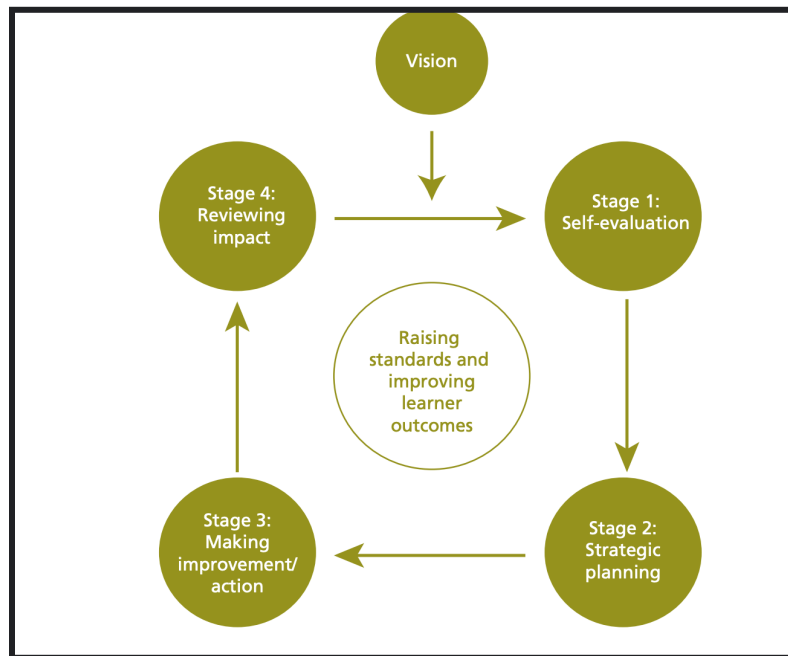
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Appendices

Figure 1: School Development Planning Cycle.



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