

How a school develops one aspect of its School Development Plan (SDP): a report that critically reflects the actions, impact, and evidence base.

Looking at how my chosen school can increase student achievements before they leave school. Focusing on how the school develops action plans to increase the pass rate of students.

Introduction

One of the key initiatives, highlighted by the Welsh Government is the development of a School Development Plan (SDP), aimed at enhancing the performance of schools across the country. The SDP is a framework that provides a structured approach to school improvement, with an emphasis on collaboration and continuous learning.

It is a comprehensive plan that outlines the steps that schools in Wales can take to improve their performance in various areas, including teaching and learning, leadership and management, and community engagement. The plan is closely links with 4 principles of the Welsh government's education policy written by Graham Donaldson. This emphasises the importance of creating a culture of learning, promoting equity and inclusion, and encouraging innovation and creativity (Donaldson, 2020).

The Welsh government has invested significant resources in the development and implementation of the SDP, and schools across the country have already started to benefit from this initiative. The plan provides a roadmap for schools to identify their strengths and weaknesses, set clear goals, and measure progress towards those goals.

The focus of this assignment, is a comprehensive school west of Carmarthenshire, looking at how the school uses an SDP to offer the most for their students, planning around grading and ensuring the pupils leave school with as many skills and qualifications as possible.

'As a school wanting to maximise the numbers of pupils who can attend the school whilst also Utilising the point of programme blending to allow students to gain the most' (*School X SPD 2021/ 2022*).

The school is both English and Welsh medium and has around 922 students. The percentage of free school meals is 11% and the total number of pupils receiving additional learning support is 16%. Both percentages are averagely low in comparison to other schools in the area. In addition, the school has a sixth form and is aiming to expand in the following years, to gain more pupils and aim for more pupils to stay and complete A levels in the sixth form.

Literature Review

The first mention of the importance of school development plans in Wales was in 2014, by the Welsh Government in a document 'School Development Plans Guidance'. In the document there is a clear purpose of how the Minister for Education and Skills has set out a challenging and ambitious programme for educational reform in Wales. The document talks about raising standards of education and how improving learner outcomes should be at the heart of all educational bodies in Wales (Government, 2014). The ideals of this development plan share themes of Bret Davies and Linda Ellison 2003. 'The New Strategic Direction and Development of School and the use of a key Frameworks' talks about how an SDP plan can be used as a method that involves measurable aspects that prioritise. These key aspects can be used to find a direct way of impacting the students learning whilst in school, to guarantee and ensure a level of achievement throughout a student's learning (Brent Davies, 2003).

Evidence can be shown that the practice of SDP is still relevant today and implemented thoroughly by the Welsh government. The SPD course of action is analysed and assessed regularly, for the responses given in "School Development Planning in Wales: An Exploration of Policy and Practice" by Louise Hayes and Alastair Morgan (2017). Evidence in this text highlights the implementation SDP in Welsh schools, drawing on interviews with headteachers, governors, and local authority officers. It highlights the challenges and opportunities associated with SDP and provides recommendations for improving its effectiveness through challenging those who have authored the SDP, as means of checking how successful the SDP is to the teaching body of practice (Morgan, 2017).

Setting improvement and action to take place work key with SDP schemes within schools, because after targeting an area it is important to come up with a method or a idea, a form of action, to comprehend the area that needs developing.

Developing Effective School Improvement Plans in Wales" by Estyn (2018) talks about such an idea. The report provides guidance to schools on developing effective school improvement plans (SIPs) that come after SDP. It emphasizes the importance of setting measurable targets, and regularly monitoring progress as means of completing targets as accurately as possible (Estyn, 2018). The report also provides examples of good practice in SIP development and gives a structure that schools across Wales should aim their SDP around.

Critical evidence on SDP, is presented in 'School Development Planning in Wales: A Critical Review' by Philip J. Woods (2019). This article provides a critical review of the SDP process in Wales. It argues that SDP has become too bureaucratic and disconnected from the real needs of schools. The article suggests that SDP needs to be simplified and made more relevant to individual schools (Woods, 2019). Too much structure and planning takes away from the actual aspect of teaching the learners that lies at the focus of school in Wales. Adding to the critical evidence of SDP for Welsh schools, it would be important to mention the written evidence presented by Don Marlett, 'Why Do School Improvement Plans, Initiatives, and Implementations Fail'? This report talks about when schools reflect on results, they may employ a Fundamental Attribution of Error to explain the possible results being shown by students. The idea is that schools try to explain the results based on factors that are not under its control, thus making a similarly poor decision later (Marlett, 2022).

An example, asking a school why they may be failing to improve, the teachers may blame students' home environments, while the principal reason may be a lack of funding for professional development, in turn leading to wrong target areas being decided. To make sure a SDP idea works to the highest efficiency and complements the teaching successes of the schools, there should be education and training in the area of constructing the SDP within the school. This is mentioned in the writings of Zeichner & Liston, 'Reflective Teaching: An Introduction'. It states the importance of teacher training within a school, the value of allowing for teachers to be continually reflective, thus improving themselves and learning new strategies which can be implemented into the classroom. Teachers also need to be taught to successfully detect areas that need to be improved and work on improving them in acceptable and realistic time frames (Liston, 2013).

Another important aspect to consider when researching SDP efficiency is the time frame that is expected for the success of development. According to studies, The SDP is required to cover a 3-year period, on a rolling basis (regulation 5). Therefore, actions will be most detailed for year 1 of the plan, with targets, timescales and responsibilities recorded. For years 2 and 3, action planning will be at a higher level, focusing on targets and actions to be taken forward.

In this assignment the focus on how schools in Wales can increase the grades students can achieve. "Developing a School Development Plan in Wales: A Guide for Governors" by Welsh Government (2021) provides practical advice for developing a school development plan in Wales. It outlines the key components of an effective SDP, such as setting priorities and the importance of monitoring progress. The guide also provides examples of good practice in SDP development and what teachers can do to structure elements of their teaching and offer more to their students (government, 2021).

Overall, the literature suggests that SDP is an important process for improving school performance in Wales. However, there are challenges associated with its implementation, such as the lack of relevance to schools and the overall planning and carrying out of a plan of action. To overcome these challenges, there is a need for more support and training for teachers and for SDP to be simplified and made more relevant to schools.

Developing and action points

As mentioned in the literature review, SDP works hand in hand with self-evaluation. Self-evaluation in the concept of a school environment should be used to improve the teaching and learning by allowing the school to gain an assessment of how well the school is performing on a whole, with an insight into what steps need to be taken next (MacBeath, 2005).

Self-evaluation is a key aspect, it leads to evidence-based improvement planning, therefore showing its importance in SDP of school. The SDP is the central document in which School Leaders map out their strategic plans for the development of a school. Based around the school's established values, it sets out the actions and resources needed to achieve priority objectives (Kilminster, 2021). This evidence highlights how the core of all SDP should include self-evaluation. A direct link between self-evaluation and student achievement was noted in a study produced by

Demetriou Demetris (2012), This study showed the more self-evaluation took place within a school the higher the grades would become within the school (Demetriou, 2012).

A way that all Welsh schools aim to evaluate themselves is through the means of data analysis (Wales, 2023). An example of this includes external support such as Estyn documents. Using these allows the leadership teams within schools to self-evaluate, report and act on improvement. The Estyn board helps inspect five areas, these being learning, wellbeing and attitudes to learning, teaching, and learning experiences, care support and guidance and leadership (Estyn). Data is collected and provides evidence to schools that aid in self-evaluation. Data analysis is another ideal used by school in self-evaluation, a report by (SHAW, 2010) provide the idea that schools can assess teaching of students by the overall grades that the students leave their education body with. The idea is that the more grades a student leaves with, the better understanding the data analyse of the teachers as a collective of those students.

The school chosen for this assignment adopted this idea of using data and self-evaluations to write their SDP. The school was able to identify an area of development in terms of teacher performance and consistency from focusing on grades and attainment of students to particular subject areas, following the structure present both by the Welsh gov and the Great Teacher Tool Kits (WELSH GOV 2023) & (GTTK 2021).

Another way the school focused on structuring their SDP was to identify through internal valuation, such as learner walks and meetings which are conducted by fellow departments to identify strengths and improvements (Allen, 2014). This idea involves teachers meeting on a regular basis to discuss what data and observations could be picked up from each other's lesson within the school.

The school took this idea seriously pairing teachers together and having them assess each others progress through the year, grouping teachers in departments and each term gathering all the departments feedback.

Strategic planning is considered a key element in the success of education. Helping schools to systematically identify their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT analysis) and align their efforts towards achieving their vision and goals. Strategic planning provides a roadmap for schools to make informed decisions, prioritise resources, and monitor progress towards their desired

outcomes. For strategic planning to be optimal within a school, it must involve time scales and desired outcomes at every point whilst also being continuously reviewed on its progress (OCDE, 2008).

The school in this assessment focused most of their planning of their SDP around SWOT analysis methodology. They stated that all departments aimed to implement it into their teaching, by having their students fill SWOT analysis forms on their lessons and pieces of work. This allowed teachers to assess their teaching as well as the learning of the students.

Another key point implemented by the school was the use of time scales, for example an action points including 'time scale' were mentioned in the school SDP. 'the need for leadership to provide feedback training for teachers, with curriculum leads to prioritise this focus in the week post training,' and 'the end of Autumn term.' The use of a time scale sets targets and allows for teaching staff to prioritise key aspects of teaching that need to be addressed first 'what needs targeting first' (HAGGARTY, 2010).

Stakeholders was another aspect that was consider in the school's SDP.

Stakeholders are essential so that everyone has a voice and opinion into the development plan of the school. These stakeholders tended to be student and parent voice. Also, school's governing body and other important individuals from the school. Having stakeholders onboard will ensure ongoing commitments for everyone to focus on, the action points put in place by the school gives parents a better idea of the targets set in place for their children (Sanders, 2003). The school in focus implemented the idea of stakeholders on board to help with their SDP by the means of the annual governing body meeting and sending informational material out to the students' parents.

Reflection and evaluation

The overall teaching quality and consistency within the school has definitely show to have improved with the introduction and planning of its SDP. Although it can be argued that there are some limitations to this improvement, for example an increase in teacher workload. At the school the attendance record of the staff had shown to have fallen since the return to school from the COVID-19 pandemic. This form of data analysis links to research produced (Petrakova, 2022) and (Schiman, 2017) both reports showed that returning school teachers have been presented with too

much of a workload which has led to stress related absences. The teachers within the school have been asked to change from online learning back face to face learning and have not been given any additional support.

Teachers have also had to complete 'new curriculum' decided lessons. Whilst this is beneficial for some of pupils in the school, this has shown in the improvement of the most recent exam results. However, it may not be beneficial in the long run-in terms of teacher absence and those considering retiring. A different approach that could have been adopted by school, would be to integrate online and adopting more IT equipment throughout the school. Many of the teaching staff have still not received online computer training and not all classes have or even use electronic learning to deliver lessons.

However, the school has seen improvements in its teaching across the school which has resulted in improved pupil engagement, thus having a positive relationship with classroom management (Davis, Summers & Miller 2012). The school has aimed to offer a wider range of subjects and has even open its doors to after school learning club 'homework & revision'. Supporting those students who are trying to gain extra skills and qualifications and those students who need extra support in their learning. The school has clearly shown they are using evidence to come up with informed decisions for their planning within the use of the SDP. Teacher have chosen to offer extra time and resources to aid in improving areas of learning and by offering students a choice in learning.

conclusion

In conclusion, the school has taken a significant step towards achieving their SDP by focusing on developing one specific aspect. That is increasing the amount of grades student can achieve. Through careful planning, collaboration, and dedication from the school staff and all stakeholders, the chosen aspect has been addressed with thoughtful consideration and strategic implementation. The school has shown a commitment to continuous improvement and innovation in their approach to education. The development plan has provided a roadmap for achieving their goals and has helped create a positive impact on the overall learning environment and student outcomes.

As a result, the school is better equipped to meet the evolving needs of their students, parents, and the community they serve. The success of this effort serves

as a testament to the school's commitment to excellence and sets the stage for further growth and success in the future. With a clear vision and proactive approach to school development, the school in Wales is well-positioned to continue making positive strides towards achieving their overall educational goals.

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