

Gallwch ychwanegu'ch targedau o'ch aseiniad diwethaf (Ond yn berthnasol os yr ydych wedi cwblhau aseiniad) / Please add your targets from the previous assignment (Only relevant if you have completed an assignment)

	Targed/target	Yr hyn yr wyf wedi'i wneud yn yr aseiniad hwn What I have done in this assignment...
Targed/Target 1	Extend your reading to include a greater range of journal articles.	I used the online library resource to ensure that I was engaging with a range of peer-reviewed articles.
Targed/Target 2	Make links and connections explicit to demonstrate full understanding (e.g. how differentiation related to the ideas of Vygotsky) – you started this but this needs development.	I attempted to develop all of my points to make all the connections I have made explicit.
Targed/Target 3	Avoid informal language and ensure you use the possessive apostrophe and semi-colon correctly.	I looked online to check the correct use of these different grammatical devices. I also had someone to proof-read my work to check for any errors.

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

Introduction (200 words)

The task required for this assignment was to look at a school development plan (SDP) critically, focussing specifically on one aspect. An SDP is a strategic plan that aids the improvement of a school according to Education Authority (2020). It allows schools to identify what they think their weaknesses are and then implement procedures which permits them to improve on these perceived weaknesses.

According to Estyn (2019), the school in which this task took place in is an English medium, 11-18 school in South Wales, where around 4% of pupils are eligible for free school meals and nearly 8% have an additional learning need, of which 1% are statemented. It is also important to note that the school refers to the SDP as a school improvement plan (SIP), so SDP and SIP may be used interchangeably from now on.

The aspect that will be looked at and analysed is 'All subjects to differentiate and cater for low attaining pupils so that provision ensures engagement and outcomes are improved and in line with/exceed value added projections. ALN Act fully implemented.' Several activities were taken part in while in the school to develop understanding, such as lesson observations, presentations and informal chats with staff members and learners.

Literature review (800 words)

To deepen the understanding of the aspect of the SDP and differentiation and additional learning needs (ALN), some literature has been considered. The process of implementing an SDP and differentiation will also be investigated through the literature.

To effectively implement an SDP, it appears as though a whole-school approach needs to be implemented. Preskar (2014) says that, while the headteacher and school development team play a crucial role in employing the SDP, the changes and improvements are only noticeable if all members of staff are making an active effort to implement the SDP too. So, a limitation of SDPs could be that not every teacher believes in the improvements that need to made, and thus do not implement them in their practice. This is an idea that is also shared by Blane (2011), where it is stated that good leadership helps with the

improvement of schools, particularly when they get into what is happening in classrooms because it creates consistency across the school. This may also be a way of combating the potential limitation suggested because if leadership are visiting lessons often, teachers will have to focus on the SDP or be able to justify why they have not.

Xaba (2006) discovered that schools found it difficult to execute development planning, with some schools 'borrowing' another's SDP just to submit it. This creates the impression that some schools do not tailor their SDP to the unique needs of their setting, instead just taking the 'easier' option to simply tick a box. As a result of this, it could mean that learners, and other stakeholders, are not getting the most they can from schools who do not take the SDP as seriously as they should. A way of combating this, as suggested by Moswela (2006), is to focus solely on problems that are encountered in the classroom when formulating an SDP. This, in theory, will encourage schools and teachers to take the SDP seriously because they will see a knock-on effect on the learners in their everyday practice. Nevertheless, it is important to note that a limitation of this approach is that a lot of planning in school happens 'behind the scenes' rather than in a classroom; this may then be impacted negatively.

It appears differentiation in a classroom is only effective if it meets the needs of all learners. According to Platt (2018), learners do not tend to benefit from being set by ability or from being in a mixed ability class because teachers usually teach to the middle regardless, rather than considering the full range of abilities in either of the types of classes. It is possible, as a result of this, that learners with higher prior attainment will not be pushed to their full potential, while learners with lower prior attainment will struggle to keep up with the content of the lessons. A similar sentiment is shared by Evans & Waring (2011), who say that many teachers do not have a clear idea of what differentiation means, so will often just implement a strategy for the 'less able' learners to be able to cope in the lesson instead of meeting the needs of all learners. This could mean that there needs to be a higher awareness of what differentiation means within the context of a classroom so the full range of learners can have their needs met.

When exposing learners to a new topic, Barton (2018) believes that all learners should have the same experience through direct teaching, rather than differentiating the lesson. He further says that all learners are 'novice' learners when first being exposed to a topic, and thus deserve the same treatment in their exposure to it; the differentiation is something that should come when consolidating understanding of a topic. This may then mean that all learners should have the opportunity to meet the more difficult work and push themselves before differentiation is implemented. He also notes that an important aspect of differentiation is support. So, this might mean that if all learners are exposed to the same content, it will give the teacher extra time to help the learners who need it.

In a sense, learning support assistants (LSAs) are a form of differentiation for learners with ALN if they are used effectively. McLachlan and Davis (2013) found that reflective practice on the part of LSAs benefited learners with ALN. This may then mean that teachers should implement reflective practice on the differentiation they use to help learners with ALN to guarantee that the work is always accessible for them and to ensure they adjust their differentiation if it has not worked as effectively as hoped. Haycock (2011), however, says that developing inclusive education for those with ALN still remains demanding, regardless of differentiation and use of LSAs in lessons. This could mean that lessons are not differentiated effectively for learners with ALN, or that LSAs are not being planned for in a way that optimises productivity and learning for those with ALN. It is important to note, however, that this article focuses on LSAs and ALN in physical education lessons specifically, not lessons across the board.

Developing an action point (800 words)

It is important to note that the school must have effective assessment for learning (AfL) to successfully meet the aspect of the SIP that is being discussed, due to the fact that it involves evaluating the engagement and outcomes of low attaining learners. The National Strategies (2010) states that the development and implementation of AfL is crucial to the improvement of teaching and learning in school. A significant way that the school evaluates learning and enables learners to improve their attainment is through directed independent reflection (DIRT) time in lessons. This allows the learners to reflect on pieces of work they may have got consistently incorrect due to a lack of understanding, and then put the effort into improving their understanding through thinking for themselves, looking through their books, talking to their peers and asking the teacher. Also, because there is no direct teaching happening in these lessons, it means the teacher has a prime opportunity to evaluate the learning that has occurred in their lessons.

Despite having above average results according to WalesOnline (2019), the school is constantly looking for areas in which they can improve, taking a self-evaluative approach, which Schildkamp et al. (2012) says is a range of activities undertaken in the hope of improving the quality of education. This then means that the school can use these improvements to assist in the achievement of all learners, not just the learners with higher prior knowledge. The advantage of self-evaluation is that the school understands the needs of their learners better than others, meaning they can implement things that optimise the attainment of their learners. Kurum (2019) additionally found that schools will often take a self-evaluative approach while thinking about stakeholders (see next paragraph) and using data. This then may mean that all of the ideas that the school puts into their self-evaluation

comes from a place that is backed up by evidence, rather than just what they feel is most appropriate because they would likely need to be able to justify their actions to stakeholders and because using data seems to be a more accurate way of deciding where improvements need to be made. A disadvantage of this approach, however, is that if schools are not completely honest with themselves then they may be biased towards their self-evaluation. Schools may fall into the trap of thinking 'if it's not broke, don't fix it', rather than striving for continuous improvement. Kyriakides & Campbell (2004) go so far as to say that school self-evaluation can be unreliable if not taken seriously. Nevertheless, the school found that their lower attaining learners, and those with ALN, were the learners that needed more differentiation, so seemingly used self-evaluation in an appropriate manner.

Ehlers, Huberty and Beseler (2013) say that a stakeholder is someone who holds some sort of importance or interest towards a situation. So, in this case there are multiple stakeholders, namely the learners, parents/guardians, governors and the senior leadership team (SLT). If teachers do not differentiate effectively in their lessons to cater to lower ability learners, then it can be detrimental to the learners' prospects, both within their school career and when they leave. This then may lead to parents/guardians questioning why the needs of their child have not been met by the school, which could then have a negative impact on the reputation of the school. So, by focusing on these learners in the SDP, a variety of stakeholders should be kept satisfied by how the school is running. Additionally, Ahbabi & Mahdi (2019) say that stakeholders can be used as catalysts in the school improvement process. Very often in the school being discussed, the SLT will instigate the changes they wish to implement, in the hope that the staff will follow, which suggests they may act as this 'catalyst'.

Sanders (2008) notes that data, and data analysis, can be used as an important tool when it comes to educational restructuring. This may mean then that the school can use the data they had access to, such as results, to develop the different aspects of the SDP to optimise improvement. For example, the school being discussed noticed from results that there was a general trend of a significant gap in attainment between lower ability learners and ALN learners, and middle ability learners, thus wanting to close the gap. This then may have led to the discussion that this could be achieved by differentiating in lessons more. In addition, Okilwa & Barnett (2017) say that data can be useful for maintaining school improvement. This may then suggest that having access to data over several years allows trends to be identified. These trends can then be used to plan for school improvement for the long-term, rather than focusing on short-term goals.

By considering all of these approaches, the school decided to implement several strategies that they felt would be most appropriate for their learners in the hope of successfully meeting the aspect identified.

Reflection and evaluation (500 words)

To help with lower attaining learners and those with ALN, there are several intervention sessions on timetables. The interventions focus on literacy and numeracy, the rationale being that literacy is essential for learners to be able to access a variety of subjects and the skills developed in numeracy being vital for everyday life. Through talking to members of staff, it has also been noticed that these sessions help massively with the development of the learners' social skills, particularly those with ALN. These interventions seem to be successful because, not only are they helping the learners access the work in their mainstream lessons, but the social skills they are developing will help them be a more integrated part of society when they eventually leave school. The success of intervention is similarly shared by Bramlett et al. (2010), who found that interventions benefited learners with ALN, thus implying that the school should continue using intervention sessions to benefit the learners' education.

The school has a very strong ALN department, who are enthusiastic about helping the ALN learners reach their full potential; sometimes this includes them delivering alternative provision for the ALN learners. The school uses Prince's Trust as a way of alternative provision, and this is usually delivered by the ALN department or an external speaker. From talking to the ALN department, they view it as a great success because the ALN learners are leaving school with more qualifications than if they were to stick to the mainstream curriculum, and also they get the opportunity to develop skills that they will need for their day-to-day life. Despite the work of the ALN department, when speaking to some of the classroom teachers they appeared to have a significantly lower understanding of the needs of the learners in their class with ALN; this could be for several reasons. For example, they are not necessarily ALN specialists like the ALN department, and so may lack the fundamental knowledge of how to cater to all needs. It also might be the case that some classroom teachers feel that the amount of differentiation they do is enough, when the ALN learners in their class may actually need something extra. Another plausible reason is that they do not differentiate for the ALN learners because of the small number of them in the whole school; 8% with 1% statemented as mentioned previously according to Estyn (2019). A way to potentially help with this is to introduce extra ALN training in the school, so that all the staff can deepen their understanding of what the learners' needs are.

All the subjects observed differentiated to an extent, but the amount of differentiation seemed to vary. Often, the subjects would differentiate in two steps: the main task and an extension task. So, this may have meant that some of the lower attaining learners were unable to keep up with work, particularly in mixed ability classes. To combat this, it might be

helpful to dedicate a whole-staff training session, for example on an inset day, to establish consistency throughout the school for how differentiation should be implemented in lessons. This, in theory, would make the expectations clear for all the staff and give them a better idea of what they can do to differentiate in their lessons.

Conclusion (200 words)

An understanding of what an SDP is and how it is formed and implemented has been developed through the writing of this essay. It is statutory that schools create an SDP, and all schools should be looking for constant improvement through their SDP, even if it is incremental. There are several ways that a school can go about forming an SDP, such as using self-evaluation. It is also important that a school is aware of who their key stakeholders are, so they can ensure that what they do is in line with their best interests, and with the learners at the forefront of minds when decisions are being made.

Moving forward, from completing this assignment, there is a higher awareness of how crucial an SDP is to the progress of schools and how in future practice different strategies can be put in place in lessons to assist with the implementation of the SDP. The importance of being able to justify different actions within school is also something that will be taken forward, be it through data analysis, strategic planning or through research. Also, differentiation in future lessons will be to a better standard, as the literature considered about differentiation has provided a deeper understanding of its importance in the classroom.

Word Count: 2634

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