

Acknowledgement of AI

I acknowledge the use of [ChatGPT] on [8th and 9th of February] to [assist with ECAD7005 Part A]. I used the prompt(s):

1. Please summarise the Welsh Government 2014 preparation and planning cycle of making a School Development Plan (SDP)
2. Can you suggest a clear structure for the literature review section of my essay using the Zone of Proximal Development Theory
3. Is the “Bump it up” strategy by Sharratt (2018) an official formative assessment?

I confirm that I have not presented any AI generated text as my own work. I confirm I have copies of my drafts, notes, and other resources I used before, and after the use of AI tools which I may be asked to provide in evidence.

Previous Targets:

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	Consider using different backgrounds for your slides to "lift" the content off the screen.	This target was for my presentation in my previous assignment. I haven't been able to improve this target because it's a written assignment.
Targed/Target 2	Please ensure that you provide evidence for every assertion you make.	I have systematically reviewed my work to make certain that I have cited in support of every claim I have made.
Targed/Target 3		

Total of 2,480 Words

A Critical Evaluation of the Development of a Strategic Target in a School Development Plan: Actions, Impact, and Evidence-Based Reflections

This assignment evaluates the strategic target of “*providing sufficient challenge to pupils of all abilities*” contained in a School Development Plan (SDP). The strategic target is consistent with the school’s dedication to deliver high academic standards whilst encouraging a culture of equity and inclusion within the community. The SDP is a school document to establish clear goals and objectives in order to improve the overall quality of teaching and pupils learning (Welsh Government, 2014a).

In accordance with the British Educational Research Association’s (BERA, 2024) privacy guidelines, I will refer to the school as ‘School X’. Estyn (2023a) reported that School X had 135 pupils and served a diverse rural community, with 30.2% of pupils qualifying for free school meals over a period of three years, (this exceeds the primary school national average of 23.0%). Furthermore, 11.1% of pupils were identified as having Additional Learning Needs (ALN), compared to the national average of 16.1%. Only 5.9% of pupils spoke Welsh at home, no one had English as an Additional Language (EAL).

I will critically evaluate the importance of a SDP and a school’s strategic targets. Then I will analyse the selected target and assess its impact within the classroom. Finally, I will reflect on my own practice and consider how well this aligns with both the school’s strategic target, (contained in the SDP) and national aims.

Literature review

The Welsh Government (2014b) explains that the preparation of the SDP begins by evaluating the schools’ goals to ensure a clear, shared purpose for the school’s future, consideration of informed data and contextual factors such as the local community and aligning targets with national curriculum priorities. To plan a SDP target, evidence based data is utilised such as pupils’ attainment results, and qualitative data, like inspection reports and questionnaires. Schools consider the data to identify strengths and areas for

improvement. This is supported by Creemers et al. (2022) who state that continuous reflection enables schools to adapt to emerging challenges.

After analysing the data, schools are expected to translate their vision into an actionable plan based on self-evaluation of the findings. The process involves collaboration with all stakeholders to agree on common targets, ensuring consistency by aligning goals with national priorities and local community needs. One effective approach is using Doran's (1981) SMART targets, which are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound, that can help schools identify clear, precise, actionable and achievable goals. Care should be taken that aligning with national priorities does not result in standardised solutions that overlook the diverse requirements of individual schools and communities.

The Welsh Government (2022a) states that to ensure the process functions effectively, all stakeholders must grasp not just their own responsibilities but also how they interact with the various roles of others to allow all parties to successfully contribute to the school's progress. To ensure alignment with the current context of the school, the governing body must update the SDP annually and refer to it as a live document. Revision of the SDP after an inspection is necessary, however the pressure to modify it quickly may lead to rushed decisions that do not fully meet the school's requirements. This can be prevented by designating a team to review and update the document and establishing milestones, ensuring a methodical process.

My chosen strategic target aligns closely with the Welsh Government (2023a) objective 4 "*high-quality teaching and leadership*" that states that the appropriate amount of challenge, enables pupils to produce the best quality of work, promoting a culture of high expectations. It also supports the Curriculum for Wales's (Welsh Government 2022b) goal of developing "*ambitious, capable learners*" by ensuring that pupils are suitably challenged, to develop into more independent pupils.

Borland (2003) proposes that, focusing too much on low-achievers can unintentionally lead to disregarding the needs of the high achievers and inadequately challenging the highest-achieving individuals. This imbalance can lead to gifted pupils being uninterested as they are not given sufficient opportunities to fulfil their potential.

Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) theory provides an effective strategy for addressing this issue. According to Eun (2019) the ZPD theory suggests that the most optimal learning occurs when pupils engage in activities that are slightly exceeding their present level of ability with assistance and guidance. This can be applied to high achieving pupils not being overlooked as teachers should attempt to push these pupils by providing them with enough challenge that matches their ZPD.

To ensure that every pupil, particularly high achievers, are adequately challenged, differentiation in the classroom can be utilised. Deunk et al. (2015) defines differentiation as the process of modifying material and tasks in a classroom to accommodate pupils' various learning requirements, ZPD and interests. For high achievers, this may entail assigning more challenging and wide-ranging activities, developing higher-order thinking abilities, and encouraging independent learning, whereas more scaffolding and supervision can be implemented with underperforming pupils.

With regard to the strategic target of 'providing sufficient challenge to pupils of all abilities', differentiation can be achieved through a variety of approaches, including mixed ability pairing or grouped differentiation. Mixed-ability pairing is a strategy of putting pupils with different academic levels together for collaborative tasks (Taylor et al. (2015), where the approach aims to maximise on the abilities of higher-ability pupils while aiding those with lower abilities. This peer-learning enables pupils to gain insight from one another, bridging comprehension and knowledge gaps and higher-ability pupils can regularly reinforce their own learning by discussing the content with peers, whilst lower-ability pupils might get more direct and personalised guidance. Furthermore, the mixed ability pairing is in line with the ZPD theory as pupils work within their ZPD while receiving peer support, promoting their learning progress. However, this approach must be managed carefully, as lower-ability pupils may struggle with the complexity of the tasks, while high-achieving pupils may be given work that does not challenge them enough. If tasks are not appropriately differentiated, this can lead to frustration for both groups, hindering any potential for growth.

On the contrary Gail and Gerig (1994) discussed that ability grouping allows pupils to work collaboratively but pupils are grouped based on their ability level. This allows for high achieving pupils to work with other high achieving pupils where they receive work that is intellectually stimulating for them. Whilst lower ability and other pupils are provided with tasks that are still challenging enough but suitable for their ability level, and are more achievable for the individual whilst still working in their ZPD. Nonetheless this enables pupils to collaborate and exchange ideas with their peers with the same capabilities as them. Alternatively, McGillicuddy (2021) stated that ability grouping can have an adverse emotional impact on the pupils, especially on lower-level pupils who may feel inadequate or isolated. This result can impact their self-esteem and even social relationships. Establishing an appropriate equilibrium between these various approaches is critical for maximising pupils progress as well as challenging pupils to reach their full potential.

Developing an action point

The strategic target “*providing sufficient challenge to pupils of all abilities*” was developed to align with School X’s broader goals of increasing standards, inclusivity and establishing a supportive learning environment, Estyn (2023b). The target is also in line with School X’s mission statement to “*Enjoy, Explore, Achieve*” as stated on School X’s Website (2025a), to provide sufficient challenge and to constantly improve and adapt to the different needs of the pupils. This mirrors the national objectives such as increasing educational standards, and equal educational opportunities may be obtained by all pupils (Welsh Government (2023b). School X promotes the national objectives to guarantee that each pupil, despite their background or skill set, has the same possibilities to achieve by providing enough challenge to pupils of all abilities. This target was mentioned by Estyn (2023c) to help the school fulfil the needs of every pupil.

School X currently implements a range of actions to evaluate the success of the target, for example, teachers regularly evaluate their pupils’ work by using formative evaluations and classroom observations. This allows monitoring of progress, identification of areas of difficulty, and alteration of lessons as mentioned in an Estyn report (2023c). Additionally, teachers gather data on the individual progress of pupils and assess whether they are meeting the anticipated benchmarks. The school intends to meet the target by establishing specified vocabulary, grammar and punctuation criteria as stated on the School X Website (2025b).

During my teaching placement I reviewed pupils work and progress to pinpoint areas of weakness and determine where additional assistance may be needed to address the target. Also, I attended staff meetings to obtain a thorough grasp of the school's goals, priorities, and approaches. Currently, school X uses the “*two stars and a wish*” strategy where pupils provide two positive evaluations (“*stars*”) and one constructive suggestion (“*wish*”) regarding literacy lessons and written pieces of work. This strategy encourages pupils to have a balanced perspective of their strengths and opportunities for progress, which fosters a growth attitude (Serret and Correia (2009). However, this approach is relatively simple, which could result in feedback that is too vague. Pupils may also submit feedback just to fit the requirements without being truthful or, particularly in peer evaluations can hinder the effectiveness of the feedback. Despite this, the method is straightforward for teachers and pupils to grasp and apply on a regular basis especially with foundation years, thus being beneficial for everyday classroom use. Through observation and conversations with my class mentor, I recognised a gap for improvement where pupils weren’t being stretched sufficiently during their literacy and language lessons.

I conducted further research into how to challenge foundation phase pupils during their literacy lessons. I noticed that the gap for sufficiently challenging pupils within literacy lessons aligns with Wales' performance in the 2022 Programme for International Students Assessment (PISA) (Ingram *et al.*, (2023) for maths, reading literacy and science. Wales' overall scores, 466 in 2022 compared to a higher score of 483 in 2018. This may be attributed to the implementation of the new Curriculum for Wales that started in September 2022 in primary schools (Curriculum for Wales (2024), which could have caused disruption in schools as they adjusted to the redesigned framework. It was also acknowledged that the global COVID-19 pandemic had a significant disruption throughout schools during this period (Welsh Government (2023c). According to Sibieta, L. (2024), the decrease in scores correlates with those observed in other countries during the worldwide pandemic, yet Wales still had a larger decline score in science and reading literacy.

Reflection and Evaluation

The PISA results prompted me to find an alternative strategy from *"two stars and a wish"* to improve and challenge pupils' literacy and writing quality. I discovered the *"Bump It Up"* strategy developed by Sharratt, L (2018). This is a formative assessment that consists of displaying a visual chart on a classroom wall including a success criterion for different levels of work quality. As pupils are prompted to independently *"Bump Up"* their personal work, from one standard to a higher standard by referring to the success criteria. Allowing pupils to compare their work to the success criteria given in the *"Bump It Up"* wall, provided a sense of autonomy over their learning, inspiring them to implement appropriate steps to challenge themselves and improve their work to the next level. It instils a pupil growth mindset, allowing all to act before feedback from teachers to challenge themselves and take ownership of their accomplishments. However, it has yet to be generally recognised as an official strategy in academic literature due to the lack of research on the subject. Nevertheless, I decided that I would incorporate this strategy into my practice to replace the *"two stars and a wish"* strategy to help address the target of *"providing sufficient challenge to pupils of all abilities"* specifically in literacy lessons.

The class I taught comprised of pupils in foundation years, and the *"Bump It Up"* strategy is typically intended for pupils who can already read and write successfully. To help the younger pupils who were less competent readers, I developed a visual success criteria. The pupils were learning about letter writing in their literacy lessons, and their activity was to create their own letter. We devised a success criteria as a class, deciding upon different visual cues for each component of the letter, for example, a mailbox indicated the

sender's address, while a waving hand indicated the greeting. The pupils enjoyed developing this process together. When it was time to begin their letter-writing task, the younger pupils were given visual cues to place in the margins of their books to guide them as they wrote their letters. The pupils who were able to read and write were also given the visual hints as well as their own "*Bump it up*" table in their books. This encouraged pupils to refer to the table at any time, to ensure that they were using challenging vocabulary and grammar at various levels, and allowing them to properly self-assess their work.

This strategy was incredibly beneficial, the pupils produced high-quality work, aligning with the strategic target of "*providing sufficient challenge to pupils of all abilities*". The use of visual signals for younger pupils, as well as the "*Bump It Up*" success criterion for older pupils, helped distinguish and deliver suitable challenges for each ability. This experience underlined the significance of scaffolding learning with both visual and written aids, as well as allowing pupils to take ownership of their work through a clear success criteria which did lead to greater results and greater engagement. Aligning closely with one of the four principles in the Curriculum for Wales (Welsh Government (2022), "*ambitious capable learners*" using the success criteria, pupils could reflect on their progress and recognise areas for improvement whilst taking ownership of their learning and independently challenging themselves to meet the criteria.

Conclusion

This assignment evaluated the strategic target from School X's SDP, specifically "*providing sufficient challenge to pupils of all abilities*". Collaboration and self-reflection are required to develop strategic targets in the SDP. The strategic targets are necessary to develop achievable goals to enhance teaching standards in line with the school's vision, mission and national priorities such as increasing educational standards, and equal educational opportunities for all pupils. The targets guide actions and deliver positive impact, that are reviewed regularly to ensure they are met, and any further enhancements can be incorporated.

My enhanced understanding of the development of a SDP will influence my delivery of the professional standards and future teaching practice. The practical experience I gained of evaluating the strategic target "*providing sufficient challenge to pupils of all abilities*" and enhancing classroom methods to ensure that the target was met and improved upon will encourage me to ensure each pupil is guided to reach their full potential.

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