

	Targets:	What I have done in this assignment:
Target 1	To take your work to an even higher standard, you can now include more of what you think or suggest about a topic as long as you can back up the idea.	I have attempted to include a little bit more of what I think or suggest by using literature and research to back up and support what I have said. Although hesitant, as this leads me to write in first person.
Target 2	Include brief examples of your practice when you can.	I have attempted to suggest how I can bring my new found knowledge forward with me into my future practice, and how this should influence my lesson planning and delivery.

Word Count: 2731

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

Introduction

This written report will focus on one target taken from the School Development Plan (SDP) in the school in which I have undertaken my first professional teaching experience.

In line with BERA's (2018) Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research, I will refrain from including any information that may compromise the school's identity, along with its pupils and staff. For this reason, I will refer to this school as 'School X'.

For context, 'School X' sits in a large town, in an area of high deprivation. The school has roughly 220 learners on roll, 49% of which are eligible for free school meals, with around 30% of children being from a Gypsy / Roma background (ESTYN, 2016). In addition, there are two learning resource centres on site for children with severe and complex needs. It is also stated by ESTYN (2016) that 38% of learners are diagnosed with Additional Learning Needs (ALN), which is well above the national average of 25%.

For the purpose of this assignment, I have chosen to focus on just one priority and action point of 'School X's' SDP. This is to increase whole school attendance and the number of pupils able to achieve attendance levels of at least 95%.

Literature Review

As a result of the *Education (School Development Plans) Wales Regulations 2014*, Welsh Government (2014) states that a School Development Plan (SDP) is a document that outlines a schools' strategic plan to support the development of learner outcomes. The school development planning process in Wales is a systematic approach that integrates various key components to enhance educational quality and ensure continuous improvement for the school and the learners. These key components include self-evaluation, data analysis, stakeholder involvement, strategic planning, and impact measurement (Welsh Government, 2014).

The school development process begins with a thorough self-evaluation, where schools critically reflect and assess their current strengths and performance, but also evaluate and identify the areas in need of improvement. This gathering of information and critical data analysis forms the foundations of the schools' new development plan. Next, the school identifies the top priorities in line with their specific needs, to improve holistically as a school and impact positively and consistently on learner outcomes (Welsh Government, 2022).

The involvement of stakeholders is another key part of identifying and tackling priorities for schools. Giving Compass (2023) explains the importance of actively engaging with all different types of stakeholders such as parents, teachers, pupils and those wider community members to gather a range of different views and perspectives. They further add that by involving stakeholders such as parents, gives them the feeling of inclusivity in their child's education and within the school community, providing them with a sense of belonging and connection, but also the opportunity of contributing towards positive impact (Gillani, 2022).

Guy-Evans (2024) explains Bronfenbrenner's ecological model (See Appendix A), which shows the network of stakeholders that exist around the child, consisting of varying levels. The persons and organisations that exist in these different systems have a direct and indirect impact on the learner, based on the decisions they make. Therefore, it can be argued this collaborative approach should ensure that the development plan reflects a combined vision, ideas and values of the whole community.

Engaging with strategic planning is another necessary action towards developing an SDP. Welsh Government (2014) states that schools design specific, measurable, and achievable objectives based on the data and information they are able to gather. This will positively improve the schools' system and have a direct impact on learners' progress and development.

Here it is important to note that these targets are not only in line with the school's priorities, but they may also intertwine with the National Educational Goals outlined by the Welsh Government (Welsh Government, 2023a). Under objective number 5 of the National Education Goals, Welsh Government (2023a) states schools should publish attendance policies and new framework will outline strategies for stakeholders to increase learner attendance. the school development plan outlines the strategies and actions needed to achieve these objectives over a specified timeframe, which is normally 3 years (Welsh Government, 2014).

Measuring impact is an ongoing and essential part of the planning process. Schools continuously assess their progress against the set targets, using both qualitative and quantitative measures (Schildkamp, 2019). By doing this, schools can monitor the progress of meeting their objectives, and make appropriate changes and adjustments in the necessary areas of the SDP to ensure they are tackling targets to the best of their ability (Welsh Government, 2014). Therefore, this supports the idea that the actions put in place must remain relevant and effective for the school and the children (Head Teacher, 2024).

'School X' has five priorities on their SDP which are outlined in Appendix B. For this assignment, I have decided to focus on just one of these which is to increase attendance percentages for the whole school in line with local authority expectations.

According to the Department of Education (2023), maintaining good attendance at school supports the academic and wellbeing development of learners within the setting, providing them with an impactful environment for learning experiences. Consistent implementation of good attendance allows learners to adopt a sense of discipline and routine, leading to positive developmental outcomes in education (ESTYN, 2023).

In addition, Department of Education (2023) found that children who maintain the highest attendance rates are able to build positive relationships with others which will contribute to improved mental health and well-being. Department for Education (2022) agrees but also suggests pupils with higher levels of attainment at Key Stage 4 were found to have lower levels of absences at Key Stage 2. Therefore, the upkeep of attendance is key for a variety of reasons to ensure learners achieve the best possible outcomes for themselves socially, emotionally, economically and academically.

On the other hand, it can be argued there are various barriers that can affect school attendance. For example, 'School X' is located in an area of deprivation and poverty, therefore families face financial difficulties and limited access to transport to and from school, impacting learners' ability to maintain good attendance (Head Teacher, 2024). Department for Education (2024) supports this idea but argues schools must work in partnership with families to begin instilling routines and support to mitigate barriers for learners. Resolving these barriers requires a collaborative effort between stakeholders and the school (ESTYN, 2023 and Welsh Government, 2024), to ensure learners access their rights to education in line with article 28 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 2019).

Developing an action point

Welsh Government (2022) outlines the main three stages of the evaluation Framework of which developing SDPs falls into 'evaluation and improvement'. In a conversation with the Head Teacher (2024), he stated that 'School X' identified whole school attendance as a priority for their school development plan through self-evaluation methods such as collecting data from morning and afternoon registers and also parental feedback through questionnaires and informal conversations.

It was further explained by the Head Teacher of 'School X' that the COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound effect on pupil attendance due to parents and learners feeling anxious about returning and risk of infection, but also because parents and carers had fallen out of consistent routines for pupils to attend school punctually. OFSTED (2022) supports this suggestion, as they discuss results of surveys completed by families of learners in June 2021, that show clear evidence that COVID-19 was having a continuous negative impact on attendance, with a fifth of schools reporting pupil absences for pandemic-related reasons.

However, upon looking at the annual attendance records for 'School X' since academic school year 2021/2022 (see Appendix C), I would like to argue that a decline in pupil attendance could also be related to the lack of engagement, relationship and traditional ways of life followed by the Gypsy Roma families involved with the school. Welsh Government (2023b) and Welsh Government (2023c) supports this idea by stating schools should be aware of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller traditions, but must encourage and work with the families to find a supportive balance.

Welsh Government (2023c) further adds there are several other barriers linked to tradition for Gypsy Roma learners to attendance school, such as secondary school drop out rates, the RSE curriculum and social exclusion. The Head Teacher of 'School X' has identified after school meetings and conversations with Gypsy Roma families to strengthen relationships and understanding, as part of their success criteria to target attendance (Head Teacher, 2024).

'School X' used mainly quantitative data analysis from attendance records to compile pupil attendance since 2021/2022. Appendix C shows that in 2021/2022, whole school attendance was at 83%. Looking at the annual data for 2022/2023, this figure rose to 87%. Lastly, the whole school attendance figures for the autumn term for this academic year 2023/2024 stood at 90%. This shows that 'School X' is slowly moving towards achieving their target of 30% of learners reaching 95% attendance by July 2024.

Furthermore, several different stakeholders must be involved to support the school in reaching its priority of increasing school attendance. When schools work together with a variety of stakeholders, this results in positive impacts on pupil attendance, as well as their sense of belonging, well-being and thus, their educational outcomes (Welsh Government, 2023b).

In conversation with the Head Teacher, he explained that himself and the attendance officer work together to gather qualitative and quantitative data, and lead the drive to improve the attendance statistics (Head Teacher, 2024). Research suggests that engagement with families is crucial to maintaining and increasing attendance within schools. For example, Department for Education (2024) states that schools should build strong relationships with families, spending time to listen to their concerns and identify the barriers associated with attendance, working in collaboration to remove them.

Therefore, the Head Teachers' plan to monitor attendance progress, through implementing family engagement strategies through the FEO and EWO, holding 1:1 meetings with Gypsy Roma Families shows active strategies being used to meet their target. Continued monitoring of attendance registers will best outline the factual evidence of attendance progress, along with regular monthly meetings with the Senior Leadership teams to ensure they are staying on track (Welsh Government, 2014).

School X has outlined what the success criteria will look like in order to meet the target of increasing attendance for learners. Head Teacher (2024) said the school is aiming to see 30% of all learners on roll throughout the school achieve at least 95% attendance between September 2023 and July 2024. This is in comparison to the previous academic year quantitative data gathered, where only 16% of learners achieved 95% attendance for the entire school year.

To support the school and learners in reaching this target, School X has gone above and beyond by putting into place several strategies to help increase attendance. For example, the school has sourced their own minibuses, which teachers have been trained to drive which collect learners from various pick-up points in the local area every morning and takes them to school every day.

It can be argued that the minibus does imply a large financial cost to the school of £12,000 a year to keep the service running. However, Stobierski's (2019) explanation of cost-benefit analysis indicates that in this situation, the benefits far outweigh the negatives as the barrier

is being removed for learners to access their right to education and achieve to the best of their ability (Head Teacher, 2024, UNICEF, 2019).

In addition to this, the school has been granted access to government funding to employ a Family Engagement Officer full time. The FEO will work with the families of learners with attendance below 95% to come up with strategies that work best for them to enable their children to go to school. Welsh Government (2023d) states that when a school spends time investing in resources for family engagement, it has a positive impact on pupil's school attendance. However, it can be argued that prior relationships and trust between families and 'School X' must be built first, to give parents and carers the confidence to access the support (Welsh Government, 2023b).

Therefore, School X has followed the stages of Welsh Government's (2014) guidance to create a strong SDP to improve learner outcomes in education and wellbeing. They have managed to identify and prioritize areas for improvement, what the success criteria looks like and what actions they are going to implement to meet their goals. They have also identified methods of monitoring their progress regarding attendance through regular review of data and contact meetings with relevant stakeholders.

Reflection and Evaluation

From reflecting on 'School X's' progress and development towards their attendance targets, it is clear from Appendix C that the school is making small strides towards their goal.

The school's specific unit for Gypsy Roma learners who do not complete transition into secondary school has played an integral part in the maintenance of relationships and trust with families, who feel 'School X' is a safe place for their children to go (Head Teacher, 2024). Welsh Government (2016) outlines the importance of inclusion within school, especially for minority groups in line with SDP strategies, therefore supports the idea that 'School X' has appropriate strategies in place to uphold relationships with families from minority backgrounds. Pembrokeshire County Council (2017) further supports this view, by stating 'School X' is a phenomenal example of encouraging Gypsy Roma and Traveller children to reach their full potential by accessing education through their services.

The data shown for academic year 2023/2024 only includes statistics for the autumn term. I would like to argue that although this still shows the attendance of pupils climbing from previous years, there is still two more terms of the school year to go. Therefore, the data for this academic year provides an inaccurate and misleading snapshot of overall progress, as there is still time for the attendance to drop below previous years.

For example, in the final few weeks of my time at 'School X', it was announced that the Gypsy Roma led unit will be closing its doors at Easter. According to the Head Teacher, this is because of a sudden increase in Elective Home Education by traveller families (Welsh Government, 2023e). Although he was unsure of the reasons, he did mention that throughout the schools' history this does seem to be a pattern that occurs (Head Teacher, 2024). Therefore, it can be argued this will have a significant impact on 'School X's' current attendance data when learners return to school after the easter break.

However, the Head Teacher has brought in an incentive strategy to reward learners achieving 95% and over with fun days such as day trips and bouncy castle hire, at the end of the academic school year. This should encourage learners to engage further with school attendance so that they can access the rewards. Therefore, this may have to level out the closure of the Gypsy Roma led unit, with more learners being encouraged to keep up their attendance and thus, their education outcomes.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the process upon which an SDP is built is extensive yet necessary to ensure the school is able to develop successfully to provide learners with the best learning and social experiences possible. There are several different benefits and barriers to achieving and maintaining expected attendance levels across schools nationally.

I have learned how important it is for schools to have their SDP targets at the forefront of all teaching and learning, as well as the importance of monitoring and collaboration with stakeholders. In addition, I have come to understand the imperative importance of constant reflection upon progress towards the SDP targets, and that everybody has a responsibility to help schools reach them, through strategies implemented by the school.

Going forward into my second placement and into my future practice, I would like to read the school's SDP to gain better understanding and deeper context of the school. This will also allow me to think about what I can plan into my lessons to help towards achieving a school's priorities and targets of the school development plan.

Accessing research for this report would link to several QTS standards. For example, understanding in progression in learning, working with in-school colleagues, enabling improvement and learning outcomes and wellbeing.

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some hyperlinks have been removed and anonymised to adhere to the BERA guidelines

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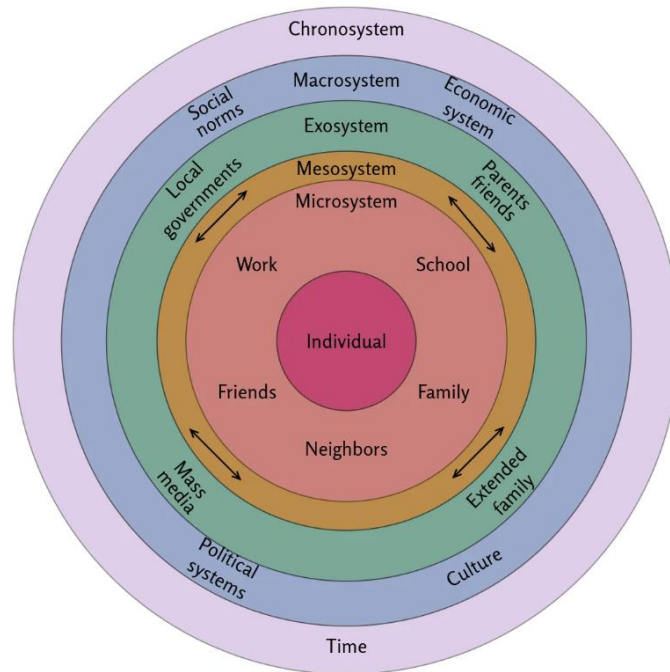
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Appendix

Appendix A: Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model.



Appendix B: School X's 5 priorities of the SDP.

Priorities	
By the end of July 2024, we aim to ensure that:	
1	To improve standards of Literacy, with a whole school focus on Writing
2	To improve standards of Numeracy and the delivery of maths, with a whole school focus on authentic learning experiences across the curriculum.
3	To improve the standards of Science and Technology, in particular improving learners' ability to independently select and use well-chosen digital skills. (Cluster focus on <u>Science</u>)
4	To enhance well-being with a focus on belonging to a caring, vibrant community with a wide range of meaningful partnerships. To develop a whole school focus on raising levels of attendance in line with LA expectations.
5	Leadership – To develop leaders at every level to improve standards and well-being.

Appendix C: 'School X' Annual Attendance Records.

Attendance

2021/22	Whole school Attendance	Whole School Attendance - GT	eFSM	Non - eFSM	Boys	Girls	GT
	82.59%	88	81.49	83.93	83.47	81.69	78.5

2022/23	Whole school Attendance	Whole School Attendance - GT	eFSM	Non - eFSM	Boys	Girls	GT
	87%	89.25	85.34	88.73	87.82	85.99	80.36

2023/24 Autumn Term	Whole school Attendance	Whole School Attendance - GT	eFSM	Non - eFSM	Boys	Girls	GT
	90%	91.77	88.29	90.46	89.9	90.6	84.25

A part time FEO is now placed at the school and supported through WG funding. A number of focuses and strategies have been put into place to tackle poor attendance and the negative impact it has on well-being and standards.