

	Targed/target	Yr hyn yr wyf wedi'i wneud yn yr aseiniad hwn What I have done in this assignment...
Targed/Target 1	Use the original data explicitly to support your work.	In this assignment I have made sure to provide clarity and detail in my discussions.
Targed/Target 2	Proof-read to ensure accuracy in language through your work.	I have checked over my work several times and made amendments where needed.
Targed/Target 3	Make use of direct quotations to support your points directly.	I have used direct quotations within my text to help avoid over explanation.

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

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Introduction

This contribution aims to explore how a modern School develops one aspect of its school development plan, or "SDP", to plan strategically for improvement and raise standards. The school under investigation is an English medium, comprehensive secondary; and I have selected their priority, that is outlined in their SDP, of improving student wellbeing and mental health. The school promotes inclusivity in its environment and having spent my placement there, I was able to experience insight into its implementation first-hand, as well as its outcomes. As mental health can be a sensitive subject, and there remain a plethora of misconceptions

regarding it (Stanley & Manthorpe, 2002), I was interested to explore the strategies and actions the School took to deliver appropriate support.

There is an emphasis on putting the student at the centre of learning to acknowledge ways to develop action plans that support and guide them through their educational experience. Actions and support services that destigmatise mental health issues should be regularly co-ordinated across the whole institution and an acute awareness across stakeholders too. For attending students, School is the most common and available setting that provides wellbeing services such as; counselling and mental health specialists (Dikel, 2014). The school can also be a gateway to external stakeholder services that offer additional support and confidentiality. This sensitivity to integrity and support is highly associated with student self-esteem and positive emotions (Bum & Jeon, 2016).

Literature Review

The School Development Plan itself is a yearly devised plan for strategic improvement of the institute. It evaluates the school's priorities and identifies what the institution needs to execute to perform at a higher standard. The entire Leadership team are involved in the design, implementation and monitoring. The plan is revisited termly, and an internal review is performed to update the progress of the priorities (Ministry of Education, 2014). The school utilises a colour coding system to help monitor the progress. As research has stated, planning an action before execution will help to corroborate the collective analysis of the circumstances and all relevant factors in school (Agi, 2017). With commitment from the leadership teams, the SDP can become a quality foundation to a progressive and conscientious environment.

Developmental planning is highly regarded internationally, and schools that have suffered in performance have been identified as having less commitment to their SDP's (Agabi, 1999, cited by Agi, 2017). The School under investigation ensure that all subject departments have the main priorities from the SDP included explicitly within their departmental development plans. This helps secure a consistent understanding. But this requires clarity and total commitment (Hargreaves & Hopkins, 1994).

On the other hand, exploring reasonings as to why some school's may not be cultivating improvement with their SDP's, it is evident that it isn't always a simple task. A school culture that is demanded to change too much, too soon, may face initial reluctance or rejection from set beliefs or perceptions from those involved (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015). Therefore, for change and betterment to be achieved, strategies are best implemented incrementally and explicitly

discussed with leadership teams. A secure consensus among staff can be a significant catalyst for the success of an SDP. If the SDP demands change, it must be conscious about relieving the stress on teachers so that they can have greater control over it (Hargreaves et al., 1989, cited by Hargreaves & Hopkins, 1994).

The SDP under investigation has outlined the priority to improve mental health pupil support and in extension, have identified specific areas as the success criteria. These are to improve staff awareness of vulnerable pupils, strategies to focus on positive pupil-teacher relationships and increase awareness of mental health issues to provide targeted support for behaviour and attendance. This priority directly supports the four purposes of the curriculum, specifically, helping to develop “healthy, confident individuals who have secure values, by building their mental and emotional wellbeing, developing resilience and empathy...” (Donaldson, 2015, Pg. 30). The SDP success criteria imply that staff are vaguely aware of their responsibilities for mental health support and that perhaps they are uncertain of the content and limits of their involvement in it. This has been a researched issue (Ekornes, 2015), and teachers in similar situations have been concerned that too many pastoral responsibilities will disrupt their pedagogical duties. Plus, the potential distresses of supporting student problems, can be an additional weight of psychological workload for the staff, and risks the mental health for the teachers too (Chaplain, 2008).

Furthermore, research frequently argues that delivering psychological support for pupils is necessary to equip them for survival in the wider society and beyond (Agi, 2017, Stanley & Manthorpe, 2002). Mental health and well-being are arguably prerequisites to attainment, (Prever, 2006), and this is supported by a model known as the “Hierarchy of Needs” (1943, 1954, cited by Mcleod, 2020), which argues before an individual can reach self-actualization, they require consistent psychological welfare. However, this is only one aspect mentioned in the hierarchy. The hierarchy builds up starting with physiological needs, then security needs, compassion and a positive self-perception. These aspects collaboratively develop a stronger motivation for the individual to reach their best potential, without sufficient satisfaction in one need, the less able they will be to fulfil themselves. It may not be so straight forward to order these basic needs into a hierarchy; however, it can be a helpful guide to assist the welfare of a student and to help them reach self-actualisation.

Research reinforces how important mental health is on the individual level as well as the societal level (Dhawan et al, 2019). The functionality of a student can be severely affected without appropriate guidance, and if they are led to believe they are alienated or hopeless, they

will have a very low quality of life and negative self-perception. Studies conducted within Wales have discovered how children suffering from severe stress and adversity during childhood are more likely to develop self-harming behaviours as they get older (Mental Health Foundation, 2016). Therefore, improving mental health pupil support is a vital priority within the SDP, and I would consider this a critical area to be improved.

Developing an Action Point

Within the SDP, the Leadership Team have evaluated the progress of mental health pupil support by documenting their observations and changes in the school every term. A list of actions has been presented, and each one has been colour-coded to represent progress. For example, blue represents very strong progress, while red represents limited progress.

According to the document, the provision of ACE (Adverse Childhood Experiences) training has increased staff awareness of the vulnerable enrolled pupils and has had improved targeted support for identified pupils. There are daily check-ins at break time and lunchtime with the Welfare Officer and an overall heightened vigilance of student circumstances. ACE training has been one useful aspect towards student welfare and other institutes have recognised how employees gain new confidence towards responding to vulnerability following the training (Ford et al, 2017).

However, despite this progress, the SDP does not explicitly explain how students are mentally improving and how this has been measured. It is argued that the ACE training does not specifically assess the mental impact of the adversity experienced by the student, lacks an extent of detail (Barrett, 2018). It does not enquire about the individual's full experiences, nor does it cover all major traumatic events; such as parent deaths. Though scoring data of ACE students are useful for consistent awareness across staff, the practice of ACE scoring is not explanatory enough to be a solution for such complex and traumatic events.

Therefore, targeted support from the Educational Welfare Officer (EWO) would be fundamental to incorporate as their duty is to solely support young people and their caregivers. The EWO is responsible for the communication with the family and the student, they advise on child protection concerns as well as generating reports for pupils with special education requirements (Henderson et al, 2016). In addition, they can assist families in receiving benefits to go towards supporting the child's education, as well as refer students to other professionals for psychological support.

On the other hand, there have been negative correlations between EWO contact and educational attainment in the past (Blatchford et al, 2009, cited by Henderson et al, 2016). This

is argued to be due to the over-dependence the student has on their support, and a deficiency of self-efficacy. School A would benefit from maintaining an awareness of this factor and investigating every student case thoroughly to ensure that they remain on the path to self-actualisation. This is important to allow them to become confident and opportunistic towards school and society beyond. The SDP has stated that the Welfare Officers and the Assistant Headteacher have made satisfactory progress, but still need to improve the analysis of student attendance records. This progress is a significant area to record consistently as persistent absenteeism can be due to a variety of circumstances; mental health difficulties, SEND (special educational needs and disability), long term health conditions or financial problems. It is a “hidden educational crisis” (Jacob & Lovett, 2017) and if not resolved, it can spiral into a vicious cycle of adverse outcomes. These effect academic performance, and especially mental wellbeing (Boulton et al, 2019), because if a young person is not engaged with their learning or school experience, they are missing opportunities to reach fulfilment.

The SDP follows a consistent process of strategic planning by setting specific goals and adding actions that the school must take to achieve those goals. The impact is measured in qualitative data and recorded with brief descriptions for all stakeholders and staff to read. The once self-contained boardroom activity has evolved into a community process (Billingham, 2016), and this has helped to grow positive and collaborative relationships with all stakeholders, especially parents/caregivers. Everyone involved is actively contributing to the strategic plan and is up to date on the latest plans and processes. This enables them to work towards a shared vision and increase effective coordination between departments, which is a crucial aspect for betterment in practise as colleagues can communicate success and failures along the way (Ong, 2016).

Despite this, the stakeholder accountability is a major component that is required before the SDP can be considered effective and not all teachers will consider their involvement empowering (Hargeaves & Hopkins, 1994). As School A’s SDP was delivered to staff and every departmental development plan, there is still room for teachers to interpret aspects of the strategic planning differently. Some individuals may doubt the usefulness and relevance of the plan, thus effecting their attitude (Janssen et al, 2016). Therefore, every teacher must have the opportunity to discuss the document with peers and supervisors to further their professional enhancement.

Reflection & Evaluation

School A has expressed a secure awareness of mental health and wellbeing for the pupil population, identifying the need for staff training to ensure that pupils have access to support everywhere within the school. Despite this, there is no evidence to suggest that all staff are committed to these responsibilities, or that uncertainties of responsibilities have been rectified. The collaborative efforts of the Leadership teams would yield more successes if these pursuits were promoted effectively to the wider staff. Perhaps the school ethos could be extended from its original emphasis on raising attainment and altered into a more pastoral approach that inevitably leads to academic achievement (Salome, 2012). This would encourage wellbeing as a central aspect of the school and remove the pressures to achieving positive performance statistics. Though these pressures may be unintentional, they have been observed affecting students in concerning ways such as “fights, erratic behaviour and even self-harm” (the Guardian, 2018.).

Furthermore, there lacks an awareness of staff wellbeing, which can be a factor easily overlooked when focusing so much on the wellbeing of children and young people. Because of this, staff may not feel valued as much as they should, and refrain from exerting a positive influence on their students. Research has shown how supporting children through difficult times can bring a lot of stress into a teachers’ life (Garland et al, N.D.). As a teacher acknowledges what their students are enduring at home, or the struggles they have with family, it can be hard to disengage from and return to their teaching practice. As Sonnentag & Bayer (2005) argue, the inability to detach from work is detrimental to the Teachers mental health. Thus, School A could implement a staff wellbeing action plan as a termly agenda to ensure that individuals are supported to be in a positive mindset. Some of these recommendations are mindfulness and managing stress sessions, resilience-based workshops, teacher appraisal, buddy up colleague support, development opportunities, and staff recognition meetings (Mentally Healthy Schools, 2020).

Moreover, as a training teacher, I aim to prioritise a dedicated consciousness of every student's wellbeing throughout their school experience. I acknowledge that this a key relationship that greatly affects a student's academic, social and emotional development which collectively influence the community environment. It is important to avoid turning student circumstances and adverse events into scores and statistics.

Conclusion

To conclude, this investigation has brought to light evidence that argues the importance of implementing and communicating positive well-being within schools. The School Development plan acts as a written record for the betterment of a student's learning experience. However, efforts are seemingly easily forgotten to ensure that staff wellbeing is supported too. As research has consistently communicated that staff wellbeing essentially underpins student wellbeing (Erasmus, 2019), this would be a vital concern for any school.

The procurement of an impressive SDP alone doesn't ensure the successful betterment of a school, and it is the actions that follow from these discussions that truly matter. Through this contribution, I have discovered a number of these actions executed in School A, though I suspect that the process is even more complicated and varied from school to school. Nevertheless, as my role as a teacher, it is my responsibility to be confident in my actions to support the plans communicated through the SDP and effectively maintain communication with colleagues and other stakeholders. As we approach and anticipate a holistic curriculum in Wales by 2022 (Public Health Wales, 2020), I believe increasing awareness of health and wellbeing at the core is necessary. However, the implementation should be careful to avoid turning student circumstances into statistics and not to forget the wellbeing of our teachers and stakeholders too.

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