

LEVEL 7 ASSESSMENT SPECIFICATION

Student name:	Sophie Speck	Student ID number:	1800406
Programme:	Secondary PGCE		
Module:	Investigating Contemporary Issues in Secondary Education		
Module code:	ECSP7001	Contribution to Overall Module Assessment (%):	100%
Lecturer:	Shân Samuel-Thomas	Internal Verifier:	
Assignment Title:	Investigating Contemporary Issues in Secondary Education	Word count (or equivalent):	5,000 words
Submission deadline:	January 28th 2019	Return date of provisional marks & written feedback:	February 19th 2019
Submission method:	All written assessments, where practical and possible, must be submitted via Turnitin unless otherwise instructed by the Lecturer. (Please DO NOT put this assessment specification into Turnitin or it will match many similarities with other students' submissions.) Alternative submission method (if applicable): Late submission of the assessment will result in a late penalty mark. Penalties for late submission: Up to one week late, maximum mark of 50%. Over one week late, 0%. Only the Extenuating Circumstances Panel may approve a change to submission dates.		
Academic honesty / referencing:	Academic honesty is required. In the main body of your submission you must give credit to authors on whose research and ideas your work is based. Append to your submission a reference list that indicates the books, articles, etc. that you have used, cited or quoted in order to complete this assessment.		

Module Learning Outcomes (from module syllabus)

Upon successful completion of this module, students should be able to:

- Critically evaluate current priorities identified by the Welsh Government and the Estyn inspectorate along with their arrangements to secure change;
- Demonstrate an advanced critical ability to reflect upon, discuss and critique the impact of contemporary priorities and initiatives on whole school/college organisation and development processes;
- Critically examine processes adopted by schools to identify areas for development along with the role of Estyn in supporting change and strategic planning procedures to secure improvements in learning and teaching;
- Demonstrate a systematic, creative and comprehensive knowledge and understanding of school improvement processes driven by contemporary issues to support improvements in standards of teaching and learning;
- Critically review research evidence showing sound judgment of complex data to support pedagogic decisions;

TASK DESCRIPTION

ASSESSMENT

Prepare a paper for school governors which explores critically a school initiative or system that is identified in the school / college action plan (This could include a school improvement plan, a departmental improvement plan or a recent ESTYN inspection report) Include a well referenced, evidence based action plan of next steps on the area of focus.

Some of the areas which are likely to be included in the Departmental Improvement Plan **could** be the development of strategies within a subject area to:

- ❖ **Embed aspects of literacy, e.g. extended writing;**
- ❖ **Further develop numeracy;**
- ❖ **Strengthen the use of Welsh in lessons;**
- ❖ **Improve planning for the inclusion of Y Cwricwlwm Cymreig within schemes of work**
- ❖ **Develop subject based strategies to respond to the poverty agenda;**
- ❖ **Prepare for the implementation of the Donaldson curriculum;**
- ❖ **Improve the inclusion of Assessment for Learning within lessons.**

Details of Assignment:

This assignment is to be carried out during PTE 1 and consists of a paper prepared for a board of governors within a school or college.

The word count for this assignment is 5000 words

Recommended structure:

Your paper should include:

- A clear introduction to explain the context of the topic you will be discussing and why it is important;
- An overview of your school or college's Departmental Improvement Plan;
- A thorough explanation of how the topic you have chosen from the Departmental Improvement Plan relates to the whole School (College) Improvement Plan (SIP);
- A critical review of why the role of strategic planning to secure improvement is important, along with clear references to professional and academic research to support your stance;
- A critical evaluation of what literature and key research notes about your particular topic along with suitable references;
- An in-depth critical analysis of evidence which notes why work within the topic you have decided to focus on needs to be improved, e.g. Estyn inspection reports, a departmental review, Key Stage data, external examination results, etc.;
- A detailed critical review of how your school/college is responding, i.e. what are they doing to improve, what new strategies have been put into place and how does this link with key literature and research?
- A critical analysis of the progress made to date along with examples of learners' work, where appropriate;
- Explain how this relates to what the literature/key research says;
- Next steps – what actions would you recommend to drive this initiative further and why?
- References.
- Appendices – e.g. Departmental School (college) Improvement Plan, whole School (college) Improvement Plan, examples of learners' work, images, etc.

GUIDANCE FOR STUDENTS IN THE COMPLETION OF TASKS

NOTE: The guidance offered below is linked to the five generic assessment criteria overleaf.

1. Engagement with Literature Skills

Your work must be informed and supported by scholarly material that is *relevant* to and *focused* on the task(s) set; you should make use of scholarly reviews and primary sources, as appropriate (for example, refereed research articles and/or original materials appropriate to the discipline). You should provide evidence that you have accessed a wide *range* of sources, which may be academic, governmental and industrial; these sources may include academic journal articles, textbooks, current news articles, organisational documents, and websites. You should consider the *credibility* of your sources; academic journals are normally highly credible sources while websites require careful consideration/selection and should be used sparingly. Any sources you use should be current and up-to-date, mostly published within the last five years or so, though seminal/important works in the field may be older. You must provide *evidence* of your research/own reading throughout your work, using correctly a suitable referencing system, including in-text citations in the main body of your work and a reference list at the end of your work.

2. Knowledge and Understanding Skills

At level 7, you should be able to demonstrate a systematic understanding of knowledge, and a critical awareness of current problems and/or new insights, much of which is at, or informed by, the forefront of your academic discipline, field of study or area of professional practice, with a comprehensive understanding of techniques applicable to your own research or advanced scholarship. Your work must demonstrate your growing mastery of these concepts, principles, current challenges, innovation and insights associated with the subject area. *Knowledge* relates to the facts, information and skills you have acquired through your learning. You demonstrate your *understanding* by interpreting the meaning of the facts and information (knowledge). This means that you need to select and include in your work the contemporary concepts, techniques, models, theories, etc. appropriate to the task(s) set. You should be able to explain the theories, concepts, etc. meaningfully to show your understanding. Your mark/grade will also depend upon the *extent* to which you demonstrate your knowledge and understanding; ideally each should be complete and detailed, with comprehensive coverage.

3. Cognitive and Intellectual Skills

You should be able to: evaluate critically current research and advanced scholarship in the discipline; evaluate methodologies and develop critiques of them and, where appropriate, to propose new hypotheses; deal with complex issues both systematically and creatively to make sound judgements in the absence of complete data. Your work must contain evidence of logical, analytical thinking, evaluation and synthesis. For example, to examine and break information down into parts, make inferences, compile, compare and contrast information. This means not just describing what! But also justifying: Why? How? When? Who? Where? At what cost? At all times, you must provide justification for your arguments and judgements. Evidence that you have reflected upon the ideas of experts within the subject area is crucial to you providing a reasoned and informed debate within your work. Your choice of methodologies to gather data and information must be rigorously defended. Furthermore, you should provide evidence that you are able to make sound judgements and convincing arguments using data and concepts. Sound, valid, persuasive conclusions are necessary and must be derived from the content of your work. Where relevant, alternative solutions and recommendations may be proposed.

4. Practical Skills

At level 7, you should be able to demonstrate originality in the application of knowledge, together with a practical understanding of how established techniques of research and enquiry are used to create and interpret knowledge in the discipline. This includes acting autonomously in planning and implementing tasks at a professional or equivalent level, originality in tackling and solving problems, and decision-making in complex and unpredictable contexts or situations.

You should be able to demonstrate mastery of the leading edge subject-related concepts and ideas as they relate to real world situations and/or particular contexts. How do they work in practice? You will deploy models, methods, techniques, and/or theories, in those contexts or circumstances, to assess current situations, perhaps to formulate plans or plausible, justifiable recommendations to solve problems, or to propose new models, or to create artefacts, which may be innovative and creative, thereby demonstrating your understanding of how the boundaries of knowledge are advanced through research and/or application. This is likely to involve, for instance, the use of real world artefacts, examples and cases, the application of a model within an organisation and/or benchmarking one theory or organisation against others.

5. Transferable Skills for Life and Professional Practice

Your work must provide evidence of the qualities and transferable skills necessary for postgraduate-level employment in circumstances requiring sound judgement, personal responsibility and initiative in complex and unpredictable professional environments. This includes demonstrating: the independent learning ability for continuing professional development to advance existing skills and acquire new competences of a professional nature that will enable you to assume significant responsibility within organisations; that you can initiate and complete tasks, projects and procedures, whether individually and/or collaboratively, to a professional level; that you can use appropriate media to effectively communicate information, arguments and analysis in a variety of forms for a variety of audiences; fluency of expression; clarity and effectiveness in presentation and organisation. Work should be coherent and well-structured in presentation and organisation.

STUDENT FEEDBACK FORM

This section details the *extent* to which the assessment criteria are demonstrated by you, which in turn determines your mark. The marks available for each category of skill are shown. Lecturers will use the space provided to comment on the achievement of the task(s), including those areas in which you have performed well and areas that would benefit from development/improvement.

Generic Assessment Criteria	Marks available	Marks awarded
1. Engagement with Literature Skills		
2. Knowledge and Understanding Skills		
3. Cognitive and Intellectual Skills		
4. Practical Application Skills		
5. Transferable Skills for Life and Professional Practice		

Assessment Mark (Assessment marks are subject to ratification at the Exam Board. These comments and marks are to give feedback on module work and are for guidance only until they are confirmed.)	Late Submission Penalties (tick if appropriate)		%
	Up to 1 week late (50% Max)		
	Over 1 week late (0%)		

GENERIC ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

Level 7

In accordance with the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications, at the end of Level 7 students should be able to demonstrate: a systematic understanding of knowledge, and a critical awareness of current problems and/or new insights, much of which is at, or informed by, the forefront of their academic discipline or area of professional practice; a comprehensive understanding of techniques applicable to their own research or advanced scholarship; originality in the application of knowledge, together with a practical understanding of how established techniques of research and enquiry are used to create and interpret knowledge in the discipline; conceptual understanding that enables the student to evaluate critically current research and advanced scholarship in the discipline to evaluate methodologies and develop critiques of them and, where appropriate, to propose new hypotheses. They will be able to deal with complex issues both systematically and creatively, make sound judgements in the absence of complete data, and communicate their conclusions clearly to specialist and non-specialist audiences. They will demonstrate self-direction and originality in tackling and solving problems, and act autonomously in planning and implementing tasks at a professional or equivalent level to continue to advance their knowledge and understanding, and to develop new skills to a high level. They the qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring the exercise of initiative and personal responsibility; decision-making in complex and unpredictable situations/professional environments; and the independent learning ability required for continuing professional development.

Level 7	FAIL	MARGINAL FAIL	SATISFACTORY (Pass)	GOOD	VERY GOOD	EXCELLENT
Category	F	E	D	C	B	A
Engagement with literature (including current research, referencing, academic conventions and academic honesty)	Poor engagement with essential reading. No evidence of wider reading. Reliance on inappropriate sources, and/or indiscriminate use of sources. Heavily reliant on information gained through class contact. Inconsistent and weak use of referencing.	Engagement with a very limited range of relevant and credible sources. Some omissions and minor errors. Referencing conventions evident though not always applied accurately or consistently.	Engagement with an appropriate range of research-informed literature, including sources retrieved independently. Some over-reliance on texts. Referencing may show minor inaccuracies or inconsistencies.	Engagement with a wide range of research-informed literature, including sources retrieved independently. Selection of relevant and credible sources. Very good use of referencing, with no/very few inaccuracies or inconsistencies.	Engagement with an extensive range of relevant and credible literature, informed by the latest research. Consistently accurate application of referencing.	Exceptional engagement with an extensive range of relevant and credible literature, informed by the latest research. High-level referencing skills consistently and professionally applied.

Knowledge and understanding (A systematic, conceptual understanding of knowledge, and a critical awareness of current problems and/or new insights, much of which is at, or informed by, the forefront of the discipline; a comprehensive understanding of techniques applicable to their own research)	Gaps in knowledge, with only superficial systematic understanding. Some significant inaccuracies and/or irrelevant material. No critical awareness of current problems, insights, or latest research within the discipline.	Limited knowledge and systematic understanding of the concepts and principles within the subject area, which to some marginal extent, is informed by current research and scholarship. Some critical awareness of current problems and/or new insights, but often under-developed.	Knowledge is accurate and reasonably detailed. A systematic understanding of the field of study informed by, to some extent, current research and scholarship. A critical awareness of current problems and/or new insights though this may be under-developed occasionally.	Knowledge has a well-defined focus, which is reasonably extensive, coherent and detailed, with a critical awareness of current problems and/or new insights. Exhibits good understanding of the breadth and depth of contemporary and established views, and the work is, at least in part, well-informed by current research and scholarship.	Excellent mastery of a complex and specialised area of knowledge. A systematic, excellent understanding of the concepts of the subject informed by current research and scholarship. Highly critical awareness of current problems and/or new insights. A critical, awareness of how the boundaries of knowledge are advanced through research.	Exceptional mastery of a complex and specialised area of knowledge. An exceptionally critical awareness of current problems and/or new insights. An outstanding understanding of the concepts of the subject, well-informed by current research and scholarship. A critical, sophisticated and nuanced awareness of how the boundaries of knowledge are advanced through research.
Cognitive and intellectual skills (Critical evaluation of current research and methodologies and develop critiques of them and, where appropriate, to propose new hypotheses; make sound	Largely descriptive work, with superficial use of critical evaluation of research and methodologies. Absent or weak development of hypotheses and judgements.	Limited attempt at critical evaluation/critique of current research and methodologies, tending towards description. Limited attempt to propose new hypotheses. Can deal	Some critical evaluation/critique of current research and methodologies, though slightly underdeveloped in places, Proposes adequate but limited new hypotheses,	Sound critical evaluation/critique of current research and methodologies, Proposes new hypotheses, where appropriate. Can deal with complex issues	Excellent critical evaluation/critique of current research and methodologies, Proposes innovative hypotheses, where appropriate. Can synthesise complex issues	Exceptional critical evaluation/critique of current research and methodologies, Proposes innovative hypotheses, where appropriate. Exemplary systematic and

judgements in the absence of complete data.)	Information accepted uncritically, uses generalised statements made with scant evidence and unsubstantiated opinions. Ideas sometimes illogical and contradictory.	with complex issues but not systematically or creatively. Some evidence to support emerging judgements but these may be underdeveloped or with a little inconsistency / misinterpretation. May assert rather than argue a case.	where relevant. Can deal with complex issues but not fully systematically or creatively. Ability to make judgements based on data (that may be incomplete) but with some tendency to assert/state opinion rather than argue on the basis of reason and evidence.	systematically and with some creativity. Ability to make sound judgements based on data (that may be incomplete)	systematically and creatively. Ability to investigate contradictory or incomplete information and make strong, persuasive, arguments and sophisticated judgements.	creative synthesis of complex issues. Ability to investigate contradictory or incomplete information and make strong, persuasive, arguments and sophisticated, nuanced, judgements. Potential for journal publication or doctoral research.
Practical skills (Originality / creativity in the application of knowledge, tools and techniques and in tackling and solving problems in complex and unpredictable professional situations; practical use of established techniques of research and enquiry to create and interpret knowledge in the discipline.)	Rudimentary application of methods, materials, tools and/or techniques but without consideration and competence. Flawed appreciation of the context of the application. Weak understanding of the application of theory to practice, with only occasional evidence of making appropriate links between the two. Weak problem-	An awareness and mostly appropriate application of well-established methods, materials, tools and/or techniques, with occasional errors. Basic appreciation of the context of the application. Theoretical knowledge and understanding applied in practice, but not always making logical links between the two.	An appropriate application of standard methods, materials, tools and/or techniques. Clear appreciation of the context of the application. Mainly consistent, accurate and logical application of theory to practice, making appropriate links between the two. Can identify problems and propose mostly appropriate solutions in	A very good application of a range of methods, materials, tools and/or techniques. Very good consideration of the context of the application, with perceptive insights. Can identify problems and propose appropriate solutions in complex and unpredictable contexts. Evidence of	An advanced application of knowledge, methods, materials, tools and/or techniques. The context of the application is well considered, and insightful. Can identify complex problems and propose excellent solutions. An excellent grasp of techniques applicable to own research or	Exceptional application skills in complex, unpredictable, contexts, drawing skilfully on the latest research within the discipline. Can identify complex problems and propose sophisticated, original solutions. An outstanding application of techniques applicable to own research or advanced

	solving skills in complex and unpredictable contexts.	Can identify problems and propose basic solutions without fully appreciating the complexity of unpredictable contexts.	complex and unpredictable contexts, with elements of originality.	originality and creativity.	advanced scholarship . Shows originality in application of knowledge and techniques, and of how established techniques of enquiry create and interpret knowledge in the discipline.	scholarship . Shows originality in application of knowledge and techniques, and of how established techniques of enquiry create and interpret knowledge in the discipline with assimilation and development of cutting edge processes and techniques.
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Transferable skills for life and professional practice (Exercise of self-direction, autonomy and personal responsibility; plan and implement tasks at a professional level; independent learning; use appropriate media to communicate effectively and professionally to a variety of audiences; fluency of expression; systematic approach; clarity and effectiveness in presentation and organisation.)	Communication medium is poorly designed and/or not suitable for the audience. Work is poorly presented in a disjointed manner. It is loosely, and at times incoherently, structured, with information and ideas often poorly expressed. Weak use of language and/or inappropriate style. Weak independent initiative (or collaboration, if relevant). Limited evidence of the skills required in professional, postgraduate employment.	Can communicate in a suitable medium but with some room for improvement. Mostly ordered presentation and structure in which relevant ideas / concepts are reasonably expressed. Work may lack coherence in places. Can work as part of a team, but with limited involvement in group activities. Demonstrates some but not all of the basic skills required in professional, postgraduate employment, with some areas of minor weakness.	Can communicate effectively in a suitable format, but may have minor errors. Mostly coherent, organised work, in a suitable structure and is for the most part clearly expressed. Can work effectively independently and/or as part of a team, with clear contribution to group activities. Demonstrates the skills required in professional, postgraduate employment, with some areas of strength and some of minor weakness.	Can communicate well, confidently and consistently in a suitable format. Work is coherent, fluent, well-structured and organised. Can work very well autonomously and/or as part of a team, with a good contribution to group activities. Demonstrates comprehensive professional, postgraduate employment skills.	Can communicate professionally confidently and consistently in a suitable format. Work is coherent, very fluent and is presented professionally. Can work autonomously with initiative. Where relevant can work professionally within a team, showing leadership skills as appropriate, managing conflict and meeting obligations. Demonstrates excellent professional, postgraduate employment skills and a strong appetite for further development.	Can communicate with an exceptionally high level of professionalism. Work is remarkably coherent, very fluent and is presented professionally. Can work outstandingly well and professionally within a team, showing advanced leadership skills. Demonstrates exemplary professional, postgraduate employment skills and a strong appetite for further development.
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THIS DOCUMENT IS ALSO AVAILABLE IN WELSH

School A is a school in Caerphilly County Borough. School A is a pioneer school for the new Donaldson curriculum, and are undergoing a lot of change in implementing the new curriculum at Year 7 level. The school has 785 pupils, and 46 full time qualified teachers. Of these pupils, 20.4% qualify for free school meals – higher than the Welsh average of 16.6%. 16.9% are on School Action and 11.9% are on School Action Plus; both above the Wales average. 2.1% are Statemented, 0.2% below the Wales average of 2.3%. 0.5% of pupils are EAL; this is below the Welsh average of 3%. The percentage of pupils achieving at least a GCSE at Grade A*-C in English is 42%, well below the Welsh average of 63.7%. School A is an amber support category, as categorised by the National School Categorisation System (MyLocalSchool).

Since 2012, School A has always been below the Wales average regarding the percentage of pupils achieving at least a GCSE at Grade A*-C in English. While the English GCSE isn't specifically measuring literacy, English incorporates aspects of literacy more explicitly than other subjects, and gives us a clear indicator of how pupils perform in general. The school has consistently scored between 50 and 60% since 2012, until 2017 when this fell to 42%, well below the national average that year of 63%. Results in Maths and Science saw a similar pattern – with pupils consistently improving and gaining above the Wales average until in 2017 the results suddenly dropped – in Maths to 48.9%, well below the Wales average of 58.7%; and in Science from 90.5% in 2016 to 47.3% in 2017 – well below the Wales average of 75.6%.

There is a higher than average percentage of pupils who qualify for free school meals. The ESTYN report notes (2018) that the area that the school covers is one of high unemployment and poverty, and there appears to be a link on face value between the level of attainment in the school and the level of poverty in the surrounding area. The school teaches only boys up until key stage 4. Literacy levels are weak, as reflected in GCSE results and national tests, and this is something that the school has noted as a priority area for improvement in their School Development Plan (SDP – Appendix 1).

The latest ESTYN report for School A is from 2018. Before this, the previous ESTYN report was written in 2012, and the school had ranked higher in all key areas. In 2012, the ESTYN report ranked all key areas as 'good'. In 2018, all key areas were ranked 'adequate and needs improvement'. The number of pupils enrolled in the school also declined from 2012 to 2018, and the ESTYN report from 2012 notes that the number of pupils had declined from the previous inspection in 2006. This is despite a population rise in Pengam from 3570 in 2001, to 3848 in 2011, and to 3915 in 2017 (UK Office for National Statistics, 2017).

Therefore, the reasons for the decline in the number of pupils in School A are not obvious. The ESTYN report from 2018 notes that there was a sharp decline in performance in 2017. In every indicator related to literacy – the use of subject specific vocabulary, verbal responses, the use of reading strategies and producing extended writing – there are areas for improvement. Only a minority of pupils use good subject specific vocabulary. The use of questioning is weak as pupils are enthusiastic but provide only brief responses. Although only a minority of pupils have weak reading skills, only a minority of pupils are able to use inference and deduction in the appropriate way. Pupils make limited progress in improving the quality of their writing. This suggests that literacy skills are not being developed in the way that they should be, and there is massive room for improvement. The first recommendation noted in the ESTYN report is to "improve standards at key stage 4 for all pupils" (2018, p.3). Other recommendations include the need to "improve the quality of

teaching and provision for the progressive development of pupils' skills", and "increase...the precision of improvement planning". With results dropping so suddenly in 2017, there is an urgent need to address the areas for improvement that ESTYN have pointed toward.

School A produced their SDP after the latest ESTYN inspection. The SDP has noted that literacy skills need room for improvement, listing it as a priority area (Appendix 1). It relates directly to the ESTYN report in addressing the need to progressively develop pupils' skills in oracy, reading and writing. It says that they will appoint a SLT lead for literacy. Oral skills will be improved by implementing a Socratic Smackdown approach, Role Modelling, and giving adequate thinking time. Reading skills will be improved through the use of PEE/PEEL/PEET, using a Q Matrix across the curriculum and Accelerated Reader. Writing skills will be improved by the use of structure strips, Vocabulary Builder, and using a whole school approach to spelling. Training sessions were given to staff on 8th November to give whole school training to all staff. These are clear and specific attempts to address the issues related to poor literacy skills, and address the issues as noted by the latest ESTYN inspection.

It is essential to improve literacy skills in School A. Good literacy skills are essential for all aspects of life. They provide the skills needed personally, in order to succeed in the school context, and in order for individuals to live fulfilling lives.

In a personal context, literacy provides the skills needed in order to be able to participate in other areas of adult life, and for a sense of personal well-being and social cohesion. PISA points towards the European Commission, who say that literacy skills are "key to all areas of education and beyond, facilitating participation in the wider context of lifelong learning and contributing to individuals' social integration and personal development" (2016, p.86). In 1990 the UN linked poor literacy skills to poverty (1990, cited in Hannon, 2013). The ESTYN report for School A (2018) notes that the school covers an area of high levels of poverty and unemployment, perhaps going some way to explaining why literacy skills are so poor.

Embedding literacy skills are a priority of the Welsh Government, who have introduced a number of initiatives in order to better improve literacy skills in schools. The Skills Framework was implemented in 2008, and says specifically what pupils should be able to do at different year levels. The Literacy and Numeracy Framework was introduced in 2013 to embed literacy and numeracy into all subjects; and replaced some of the aspects of the Skills Framework. Disappointing PISA results has influenced Welsh Government thinking. Wales came 40th in the most recent results, with a score of 477; the lowest score in the UK for all areas including reading (PISA, 2016). The score was lower than the last two PISA results, although only slightly. Kirsty Williams in her response (2016) said that because of the range of reforms they have put into place, the Welsh Government will wait to see if these reforms work; this may take a long time to become apparent.

Improving literacy skills are important in the school context. The Improving School report produced by the Welsh Government (2012) puts a high emphasis on the need to improve literacy skills, listing it as one of its three priorities to improve educational outcomes. The report talks of how the Literacy and Numeracy Programmes set high expectations, and reading tests are intended to achieve standardisation. Therefore, the intention for the Welsh Government is to get all pupils to meet the same high standards in their literacy. Donaldson, in his Successful Futures report, says that literacy is so important that it should

be the responsibility of all teachers, because it is one of the “essential foundations of education” (2015, p.18). He gives four aims of the curriculum, one of which is for pupils to become “ambitious, capable learners” (2015, p.29); this includes being literate in English and Welsh. Similarly to Donaldson, the PISA results themselves stress the importance of reading as an essential skill in order to perform well in other subject areas. The Donaldson curriculum is due to be rolled out into all schools, and so schools will have to respect his philosophy in implementing his ideas on literacy into their teaching.

In a broader context, literacy skills are essential in order to succeed in all areas of life. The Future Skills Wales Generic Skills Survey (2003, cited in Skills Framework, 2008) says that employers say that IT skills are the most common skills lacking, followed by communication skills. So in order for young people to become employable upon leaving school, literacy skills are vital and in desperate need.

While the importance of literacy is obvious and acknowledged on all levels, it is important to remember why improving literacy skills are important and what issues people may have in this. Goodwyn (2002, p.7-8) says that teachers are increasingly frustrated with teaching because of the way that external policies impose high pressures on schools to produce results in measurable data. Teachers are frustrated at the lack of creativity allowed in their teaching, and the lack of enjoyment that this produces from pupils in lessons. He argues that any changes in policy have to be careful not to further take away enjoyment in learning. We should encourage pupils to become creative in their literacy to ensure that this does not happen. This is an important thing to consider when looking at how to incorporate the Literacy Numeracy Framework and other key external policies into teaching.

Goodwyn argues that poor literacy skills in schools have always been criticised and this is nothing new. Literacy is always in transition, which doesn’t allow us to accurately measure literacy skills. We must be careful about not looking back with nostalgia at a seemingly golden age of spelling which stops us from stopping “to enjoy the benefits of the spellchecker” (2002, p.2). Any changes in policy challenge teacher’s autonomy and professionalism. In other words, should improving literacy skills be a priority? Are we already in a good place?

Literacy therefore is important as it covers so many aspects of our personal, academic and daily lives, and so without good literacy skills it will be hard to succeed. Because of this, teaching and developing literacy skills should be the responsibility of all teachers, reaching out across the curriculum. The need to read, write, infer, deduct, etc, presents itself constantly in our day to day lives. We are bombarded constantly with information, opinions and media. Employers are saying that they want young people with communication skills. So to give young people the best chance in life we should strive to improve their skills. The issues with poor literacy can be easily addressed because they are not specialised skills. They should come naturally to all teachers, so they should be easily implemented in to everyday teaching.

The changes that School A have put into place in their SDP have been made because in five years time they want to see better literacy skills across the school. Exam results and data have shown that School A is getting results below the Wales average. The ESTYN report has noted that literacy skills in lessons can be better improved. School A wants better oral, written and reading skills from its pupils in order for them to learn the skills needed for life,

and to get better exam results. They have implemented a number of approaches in the SDP in order to see this happen.

Fidler (2000, p.89-90) talks about the difference between a bottom up approach and a top down approach. A bottom up approach is where teachers tell senior staff what needs to be done and what needs to be addressed. A top down approach is where senior staff tell teachers what to do. Bollen et al. (2005) say that a top down approach includes setting aims, strategy, and plans; this is the framework to follow. There is then a 'bottom up' response which includes diagnosis, setting goals, and implementation.

We can see this top down approach in how School A has taken in developing the SDP and appointing a SLT lead for literacy, with individual departments within the school going forward with the aims and objectives listed here and producing their own Departmental Improvement Plans (DIP). Implementing the same strategies across departments evidences a top down approach.

According to Fidler (2000), whether taking a top down or bottom up approach, the SDP has to include teachers in a holistic way or it is little more than the private document of the headteacher, and doesn't contribute to successful strategic planning. Teachers need to be included in change, and it is this that School A tries to do by laying out in the SDP that there will be training days where the PE department exchanges knowledge of best practice, and encourages other departments to do similar. This is essential, because as Fidler points out, most schools don't have much difference between one another – the biggest source of variation is between departments and classrooms and teachers being not equally effective in teaching key skills. This is essential to bear in mind when thinking of how to improve literacy skills – there needs to be a consistent whole school approach.

A study in the 90s of secondary schools in England (Fidler, 2000, p.72) identified a number of factors associated with effective schools (effective to represent when pupils outperformed that which would be expected of them). These factors include high expectations, consistency in approach, and shared vision and goals. The whole school approach to literacy taken by School A evidences this.

Fidler (2000, p.11) talks about long term and short term plans. It is necessary to start with very long term plans, i.e. what the school will look like in the future. In this case, School A wishes to better improve literacy skills. In the very long term, pupils will become more confident in their literacy and we will see that these objectives have been met when exam results improve. According to Fidler, long term plans are more broad brush plans. Regarding to School A, we can narrow this down to oral, written and reading skills. Broad brush plans will include addressing these three areas. Medium term plans are more clear, focussing down on five year plans to approach these areas identified in the near future. For School A, the focus will be on pupils being able to read well, pupils being able to write extended pieces and for different audiences, and pupils being able to voice their opinions orally. Short term plans are precise and about what the school will be doing right now. These are seen in the SDP. For School A, they note specific approaches that they will take to improve oral, written and reading skills. These include the Socratic Smackdown, Role Modelling, the use of PEE/PEEL/PEET, a Q Matrix, Accelerated Reader, structure stripe, Vocabulary Builder, and a whole school approach to spelling (Appendix 1).

Fidler (2000) talks of change being a process, and not one single event. There are three stages to this process – initiation, implementation and then making the change permanent. Lewin (1951, cited in Fidler, 2000, p.92) also talks of change in this way, of how it comes in three stages – unfreezing, movement, and then refreezing. School A is currently in the

implementation, or movement, stage of this. Changes made now need to be evaluated before permanent change, or refreezing, can take place.

The SDP (Appendix 1) says that School A is to improve written literacy through the use of PEE/PEEL/PEET, structure strips and vocabulary builder. The Skills Framework (2008) says that pupils should be able to use sentence structures and a wide range of vocabulary, so the SDP is explicitly addressing the frameworks for this. The DIP (Appendix 2) for RE tries to incorporate these by placing an emphasis on guided writing tasks and the use of structure strips to improve 15 mark questions once a fortnight.

Another approach that School A has taken is the use of literacy starters. The SDP says School A are to appoint a SLT lead for literacy. The SLT lead has taken a whole school approach to literacy by implementing literacy starters that are to be completed every day at the start of the first lesson. These include work on basic literacy skills, including the use of apostrophes, common spelling errors, homophones, etc. The intention is to make these part of the daily routine of all staff. But learning walks in January picked up that two thirds of staff do not include the literacy starters in their lessons.

The intention of literacy starters is to teach the basic skills of literacy to all pupils, taking up ten minutes of lesson time every day. Hunt (2002, cited in Goodwyn, 2002) says that on the one hand, dedicating a set amount of time to improving literacy skills can increase awareness about the importance of literacy to pupils. But on the other hand, it can have a negative effect as pupils see literacy as something that belongs to school and has no relevance to everyday life outside of school. Hunt (2002, cited in Goodwyn, 2002, p.130) points to pupils who were interviewed at Key Stage Three, who expressed a utilitarian view that literacy is important in order to do well at exams, and exams are important in order to get a good job. Goodwyn (2002, p.8) warns against this, “developing literacy is not simply a daily activity because this may give rise to simplistic notions of a literacy hour or something similar”. He clearly warns against time devoted purely to literacy. Donaldson (2015) takes this further – we should be more concerned with providing the appropriate learning contexts where the different components of literacy can be appropriately developed. He says the literacy component of the Literacy Numeracy Framework provides guidance about the kinds of skills that should be developed at different stages, and teachers should use this as a basis. But “repetition and drill” (2015, p.40) is not the key to developing these skills. Donaldson lists twelve things involved in good teaching and learning. Of note are that learning should create authentic contexts, and should regularly reinforce literacy: “expectations related to literacy...will be embedded and not require to be planned for separately” (2015, p.90).

Literacy starters may be more effective if the general theme of them are given to teachers who are able to put them into their own contexts within their lessons. This inauthentic context at the beginning of the first lesson of the day is cold and boring to some; perhaps this explains why only one third of teachers are including them in their lessons.

Although the literature advises against literacy tasks on their own and out of context, from my experience in School A, basic literacy skills are so poor that it is very rare when marking any piece of written work for there not be basic mistakes. School A has a guide to marking that includes circling any spelling mistakes and writing ‘sp’ in the margin. But if you were to do this for every piece of written work, the mistakes noted would be overwhelming. While writing in authentic contexts is important, pupils will never be able to do this without applying the basic components of literacy, and these literacy sessions are there for this

purpose. Taking an approach to literacy that goes back to basics is incredibly useful in this case. If some teachers don't want to include literacy starters in their lessons they need a good alternative in their place.

The SDP (Appendix 1) says the focus on vocabulary takes a whole school approach. In the RE department I have seen this strategy used in key word tests starting each GCSE lesson. The keyword tests in this instance were not out of context as the literacy starters implemented by the SLT are. The intention of this approach is so GCSE pupils can answer 'a' style questions in their exam and be able to easily achieve full marks. In the mock tests that they sat before Christmas, pupils done incredibly well in getting full marks in these questions. The key word tests are an excellent example of good practice. This could easily be something that could be rolled out across the school in all departments, addressing the need to improve subject specific vocabulary and improving literacy skills. If done correctly they could also be seen by some as an alternative to the literacy starters that they do not complete in their lessons.

Noted as one of the priorities in the SDP, the intended outcome for oral literacy is that "oracy improves in that many pupils speak in a fluent, considered way consistently and use precise language and subject specific vocabulary" (Appendix 1). In order to do this, teachers should use a Socratic Smackdown approach, and use a Q Matrix so that they use fewer 'what' questions and more 'why?' and 'how?' questions. This is done through effective questioning and extending pupils' verbal responses. The LNF says that all pupils should be able to speak clearly, and adapt to their audience. Over time, they should learn to structure their responses so that they give conclusions and use a range of techniques, eventually engaging with more contentious issues.

A lot of the DIP for RE talks about how to improve written literacy (Appendix 2), but it doesn't talk about oral literacy at all. It doesn't talk about Socratic Smackdown, nor does it talk about the Q Matrix. A lot of the literature on how to improve oral literacy comes from Bloom, who was only briefly touched upon in the SDP when talking of the need to introduce higher-order questioning. The SDP says that pupils should discuss in pairs so that they can rehearse answers. This could be clearly developed into a think pair share method, and make its utilisation more obvious to teachers who have to implement this going forward.

The ESTYN report picked up that while pupils are enthusiastic to speak, they only provide brief responses. They also say that the school does not have a co-ordinated approach to improving oral literacy skills. The SDP is trying to address this, but gives perhaps too many examples of how. When trying to get pupils to speak in a more "fluent, considered way" (ESTYN, 2018, p.2), Bloom's taxonomy is essential in developing pupils' responses. By getting pupils to talk together in pairs and then using Bloom's taxonomy when questioning, this could easily be developed into a whole school approach that is clear to teachers when developing their DIPs and putting this into their lessons, and shows consistency to pupils who will come to expect this as they expect their literacy starters first thing every morning.

The SDP (Appendix 1) says that reading skills can be improved by using inference and deduction. This is vague, and doesn't give teachers a clear idea going forward about how to implement this in their lessons. It is not surprising then that the DIP for RE (Appendix 2) address how to improve reading skills.

The Skills Framework says that pupils should be able to use different strategies to pick out information and identify key points and ideas. They should be able to respond to what they

have read and express opinions and discuss what they have read, appreciating that there are different opinions. This is a lot more useful than the SDP when it comes to looking to develop reading skills. It gives far clearer ideas of how to implement this in lessons. This could easily be translated in a lesson as pupils reading a text and picking out the key points and intentions, and then discussing it as a class; enabling pupils to practice both their reading and oral skills in one lesson. Better quality ideas are needed to improve reading skills or DIPs and individual lessons will continue to neglect this area.

Goodwyn (2002) says that when questioned, 50% of pupils said they sent and received text messages, emails, surf the internet, read comics or magazines, read games cards, read adverts, read road signs, read junk mail, play word games, and read while watching television or playing computer games. Less than 50% said that they participated in activities like writing or reading graffiti, passing notes, etc. These are what Hunt (2002, cited in Goodwyn 2002, p.138) calls “‘sub-rosa’ literacies” – those literacies that are not assessed in the mainstream of schools; he points to research by Gilmore (1986, cited in Goodwyn, 2002), which says that working class communities engaged in literacy activities that employ specialist language and sophistication they weren’t credited for in schools – he gives the example of the technical language used in Dungeons and Dragons. School A covers a working-class community, and it is important that we bear in mind that we live in a world where pupils will be overwhelmed by media and written content every day. As Moss (2000, cited in Goodwyn, 2002, p.138) says, “the divide [between the literate and illiterate] is rather between those whose literacy is recognised in schools and those whose literacy is not”. We can infer from this that the skills are there but are not being utilised and brought out in the correct ways to engage and appeal to all pupils. This goes back to Donaldson’s (2015) earlier point about the need for a wide variety of literacy tasks, all with rich, authentic contexts in order to keep pupils engaged. By engaging pupils with reading texts that are on their level, teachers will see that pupils seem to enjoy the content more and seemingly do better. Perhaps more emphasis should be placed on this in development plans.

Much has been spoken about the differences between the genders in educational attainment and literacy skills. This is something that should not be ignored when looking at improving literacy skills in a school that teaches all boys until Key Stage 4.

Maynard (2004, p.9-18) says that throughout history girls have always outperformed boys and there was never a ‘golden age’ of boys’ education. Issues like race and class also play a role, but these are issues that do not belong to teachers to solve. Boys have always had a laissez-faire attitude towards learning, but now the difference is that this has been measured and flagged up by test results. Maynard argues that boys have issues relating to gender and masculinity; they are disaffected by the world and no longer have a traditional breadwinning role. It is boys’ attitude to learning that is the issue, and the gender gap only exists in this context. This suggests that it is society and attitudes that need to change. Maynard says that biologically, any evidence for difference between boys and girls brains are “tentative and inconsistent” (2004, p.26), so we should be careful not to use this as an excuse for teaching boys and girls differently. How boys and girls learn to interact with one another, the way they are brought up and encouraged to behave, how they see themselves through popular culture, and the use of language in gender contexts; these all have far more impact on how they approach their education and influence their attitudes to literacy. Feminism has come a long way in changing the way girls see themselves in the world. This

has forced boys to reconsider the way they see themselves, and this is going through an ongoing constant change. Until issues of masculinity are addressed at a society-wide level, underperformance in literacy-based assessments will continue to be an issue. The impact that teachers can have will only ever be minimal and individual.

School A is an all-boys school that covers a working-class area with high levels of poverty. In light of this evidence, this may go some of the way to explaining why pupils are seemingly underachieving in literacy. Instilling in these boys the importance of education in order to get ahead in life.

Results in 2017 dropped suddenly across subjects. The ESTYN inspection was in January 2018 and the SDP followed. It is still too early to tell whether the methods of improvement that the school have employed have yielded any changes to exam results.

Although School A has its aim to improve literacy skills over what Fidler (2000) refers to as the very long term, the school is still in the short term in their plans. They are still in the initiation, or implementation stage. They are now at the point where the changes need to be evaluated before permanent change is made, and they are currently adapting their SDP to do this.

The key word tests introduced at the beginning of every GCSE RE lesson meant that when completing their mock tests recently, there was a massive number of pupils who scored full marks on their 'a' style questions. This approach to improving keyword knowledge is clearly working. Key word tests at the start of every lesson could be developed as a whole school approach for GCSE. Extensive writing pieces on the other hand continue to be full of basic errors. If the literacy starters are used in more than one third of lessons then perhaps a more suitable conclusion can be made on their effectiveness.

While the literature says that setting time aside for literacy starters are not necessarily a good thing because they avoid the work being put into authentic contexts, the basic literacy skills in School A are so lacking that a whole school approach where time is set aside to specifically address these problems is very much needed.

While on teaching practice I have not noticed a difference in the reading skills of pupils. Texts still need to be highly differentiated in order for pupils to understand them. More work needs to be done on raising reading skills. Reading needs to be taught in authentic contexts, and be on the pupils' level so it is interesting to them.

On a day to day basis, I have observed that effective questioning works very well in developing pupils' answers and understanding, encouraging them to think about what they are saying from different viewpoints and in more depth. But this isn't being done in the way it should be on a daily basis. The use of Bloom's taxonomy and higher order questioning should be emphasised.

There are lots of different approaches in the SDP and it may be beneficial to focus on a few key areas. This approach may be beneficial to teachers who need examples to implement the changes in order to choose what is best for them, but it doesn't contribute to the whole school approach School A wishes to achieve.

Going forward, School A should focus on a few select areas in order to achieve this whole school approach. Bloom's taxonomy and higher order questioning is useful to address oral skills, introducing reading tasks in authentic contexts, and using key word tests at the start of every GCSE lesson to address writing skills. Key word tests should be used as a whole school approach across departments. It has already seen excellent results in RE, and this

could be seen across the school. Literacy starters are useful in addressing the basic skills needed in literacy. But School A needs to ensure that all of the teachers within the school are implementing the changes that are recommended in the SDP, or they will not be able to monitor their progress or see any changes taking place.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 – School Development Plan

Appendix 2 – Departmental Improvement Plan