

	Targed/target	Yr hyn yr wyf wedi'i wneud yn yr aseiniad hwn What I have done in this assignment...
Targed/Target 1	Proofread to eliminate any grammar or punctuation errors.	I have proofread my work to check for any grammatical or punctuation errors. I have also asked a family member to review my work.
Targed/Target 2	Explore alternative theories or models of challenges faced and draw on peer-reviewed research about effectiveness of strategies.	In this assignment, I have looked at further theories I have not previously researched. I have also provided a further evaluation of theories that commonly arise.
Targed/Target 3	Include several authors at once to showcase synthesis to support arguments.	I have provided several authors when reading broadly around a subject within my references to back up my point.

AI Declaration

I acknowledge the use of ChatGPT [<https://chatgpt.com/>] on 26/02/25 to assist with my research. I used the prompts:

Prompt 1: The primary school I am researching has a priority to review and evaluate provision and support for the RVE curriculum in their school development plan. The RVE curriculum in the Welsh curriculum focuses on both religious and non-religious philosophical convictions. What key challenges might be faced whilst working on this target?

Prompt 2: What education theorists might discuss the impact of a child's attendance in their theory?

Prompt 3: What literature could I use to help me reference subjects such as Humanities and Expressive Arts being overlooked in favour of core subjects in primary education?

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

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

Introduction

In this assignment, I will critically evaluate one action point from a School Development Plan (SDP). I will focus on the school's target of reviewing and evaluating the provision and support for the teaching of Religion, Values and Ethics (RVE) within the curriculum. This target is significant within the school, as it aims to enhance learners' understanding of beliefs and values, as well as allowing learners the opportunity to 'make sense of' the human experience, the natural world, and their own place within it.' (Welsh Government 2022a). The teaching of RVE within the curriculum prioritises inclusivity within the school, therefore, results in the school working towards a more equitable environment for all.

The school I will focus on will be known as 'School X' in line with BERA Ethical Guidelines (2018). School X is in the Powys Local Authority in Ystradgynlais, South Wales and has 215 pupils registered as of 2024 (Estyn 2024). 31.4% of pupils have an additional learning need, and 34.2% of pupils are eligible for Free School Meals; Both statistics from this school sit higher than the national average which stands at 13.2% of pupils having an additional learning need, and 23.7% being eligible for Free School Meals (Estyn 2024). This school is also located in the top 10% most deprived areas in Wales and is in the most deprived area of Powys (Estyn 2024).

This assignment will highlight RVE provision development within the curriculum, a priority found within the school's development plan. This is because RVE is an area that was least developed and collectively understood by staff. I will discuss literature that surrounds the school development process and the specific target I have chosen. I will also analyse how the school has worked towards this target, and how my practice has supported this target during my professional teaching experience at this school.

Literature Review

School improvement can be recognised as a process of reflection and self-evaluation, which all schools should undergo to better the learning experience of all pupils. (ESTYN 2016, Goldstone 2022).

In conjunction with this, schools often use improvement models to self-evaluate and guide their development plan. Brighouse & Woods (1999) highlight various models of improvement that may be used within schools during the development process. These are often decided based on the 'climate' of the school, meaning how the school is managed and the school's priorities. They discuss the idea that there is no singular 'correct' model for schools to use, however explain the use of an Appreciative Enquiry model:

1. *Appreciate the best of what is*
2. *Ask what it could be like if you could only have more of the good things identified*
3. *Discourse in order to find out what it should be like*
4. *Decide what it will be like*

(Brighouse, Woods 1999)

They felt that this is a beneficial model as it works upon strengths that the school already has, whereas models such as a problem-solving approach would rely upon weaknesses and reduce the desire to build upon positives.

Furthermore, there is discourse around the idea of having a 'critical friend' approach to school evaluation (Goldstone 2022, Brighouse, Woods 1999, MacPhail, Tannehill et al. 2021). A critical friend is a person who can understand the school environment and sensibly question to support the school's development. They are non-judgmental and support the process of self-evaluation for the school.

(Welsh Government 2022b) would also state that there is a need for a cyclical process of self-evaluation, and in turn, school improvement. Three principles are highlighted to structure the evaluation and improvement model:

1. How well are we doing?
2. How do we know?
3. How can we improve?

This model allows space for a variety of values and takes into consideration that all schools may have different priorities that should be considered by all stakeholders (Welsh Government 2022b, Estyn 2020). This is due to the idea that school improvement should, above all, be a collaborative and on-going process. A similar model is outlined by Schildkamp (2019), discussing the idea that goal setting is carried out through collecting data, followed by sense-making, then action and evaluation.

Focusing on the specific priority I will discuss from School X's Development Plan, I would reiterate the idea that Religion, Values and Ethics within the Welsh Curriculum is not a new element of the curriculum but is an expanded view on religious and non-religious philosophical views. Therefore, RVE maintains an aim of teaching learners about a variety of values and ethics (Welsh Government 2020a). School X introduced this priority as it was an area which was the least developed and collectively understood amongst all staff.

A key challenge of implementing this priority was parental and community engagement. Some parents and people in the community may feel strongly towards the teaching of RVE, possibly against certain religious or non-religious teachings. Schools could result in receiving resistance from parents who might feel some values and ethics should not be taught, which combined with the curriculum aim for inclusivity, may be a sensitive subject for teaching staff and the pupils involved (McCreery 2007).

I have found within my research that there is a gap in literature about the teaching of values and ethics within the reformed RVE curriculum. This was an element I had to consider when deciding to focus on this priority from School X's SDP. Upon speaking with staff at the school, it was highlighted to me that alongside this, there was an issue of low attendance and lateness in school. Low attendance can be argued to have a significant effect on the child's engagement, attainment, and possibly social and emotional development (Cunningham, Harvey et al. 2022). Furthermore, Vygotsky's idea of social interactions and cultural contexts impacting learning is considered here, suggesting that children learn best with these experiences, and more specifically, with a more-knowledgeable other in their environment (Vygotsky 1978). Regarding tackling low attendance, it may be argued that the child will be unable to consistently interact with others, therefore hindering their learning when compared to peers. In connection with this, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory could be discussed when considering attendance (Maslow 1943). It is suggested that if a child is facing issues at home which may impact their safety or well-being, their attendance may suffer as a result.

In order to tackle this issue of low attendance and consider the school's priority, the school implemented a 30-minute lesson in the morning known as 'Amser Lles' (Wellbeing time). Within these lessons, not only would there be a focus on wellbeing, but also a focus on the teaching of religious and non-religious convictions, values, and ethics. Wellbeing is significant within primary education sectors. Highlighted by Cowley (2021), the 'Wellbeing Curriculum' consists of children knowing themselves, knowing others, and putting the values of wellbeing into action. Also discussed is the idea of the wellbeing curriculum running

alongside the academic curriculum, although schools are often judged upon the results of the academic curriculum. Wellbeing is seen by Cowley as a life skill, which consists of teaching children awareness of the society around them and giving them a purpose (2021). This is certainly echoed by the Curriculum for Wales Framework, which is set out using Four Purposes to provide children with high expectations, tackling ignorance and misunderstanding, and providing a positive wellbeing experience (Welsh Government 2020b).

Developing an Action Point

School X's broader aims consist of making sure all stakeholders, such as parents, governors and staff are working towards providing the best education possible for children coming to the school and equipping them for life and work. Their vision maintains the idea that children come first in working for excellence.

When considering the chosen priority from the SDP, I also examined the school's ethos, shared on the prospectus. They state an aim of creating an understanding, caring climate within the school with a focus on mutual respect and worth. Additionally, they aim to provide a curriculum that facilitates children to reach their full potential through fostering respect for others' religion, morals, values, and through creating a tolerance of the creeds and cultures of others. This links with the Curriculum for Wales' ideology behind enhancing the RVE curriculum, as it supports the idea of developing an individual's values, respect, and social awareness (Welsh Government 2022a).

As previously mentioned, the rationale behind introducing this priority within the SDP is that RVE through the curriculum was agreed to require further development and understanding. This priority was highlighted by staff to the senior leadership team during staff meetings, as they felt it was not understood or delivered to a comprehensive level within the school's curriculum. The requirements of RVE in the curriculum were discussed, followed by the formation of an action plan by all staff involved.

In order to implement this priority within my practice, I had to take several steps to fully grasp the concept of the SDP and the priorities selected. Firstly, I contacted the senior leadership team (SLT) to receive the most recent copy of the SDP 2024-2025. I read through this several times, highlighting each priority and taking into consideration which I felt I could effectively implement into my practice during my placement in School X. In order to support this, I met with the class mentor, and we spoke about how I had already been implementing

much of the priorities through my practice without realising. This helped me understand the priorities that the school had selected to a deeper level and allowed me to understand that the priority of developing RVE within the curriculum was not just about focusing on religious and non-religious ideas, but also values, ethics and supporting wellbeing. Also, through meeting with my class mentor, I learned that the school had been implementing 'Amser Lles' or 'Wellbeing time' in the mornings for 30 minutes. Within this, children would learn about values, ethics, wellbeing, and emotional literacy. This was well received by children and staff and implemented elements of the RVE curriculum. Going forward with the priority of developing RVE within the curriculum, I ensured that the planning for my own 'Amser Lles' lessons was clearly developed and highlighted to work towards the school aims.

To evaluate the effectiveness of the target, the school intends on monitoring progress of learners, and through carrying out an official evaluation towards the end of the school year, as stated in School X's SDP. They will also continue to carry out reviews regularly to ensure staff are clear on their understanding and have the relevant resources where needed. The school has also discussed a work scrutiny session, which links monitoring learner progress with the target.

A strength of School X's approach to the target is that they take the school's ethics and ethos into consideration with this target. As mentioned previously, the school prioritises a respectful and caring environment with consideration for the beliefs of others. This links with the RVE curriculum and shows that the school has a clear understanding of what is required to reach this goal.

A further strength that can be drawn from the SDP is that there is clear staff involvement with allocating a whole school target. Staff are supported by SLT to develop a success criterion that can allow all stakeholders to clearly see the aims of the target. The rationale of the target was that RVE was an area that could be developed, which was an issue raised by staff and therefore is being taken forward appropriately.

On the other hand, a potential weakness in implementing this target is the issue of time and curriculum constraints across schools. Curriculums are very tightly packed with expectations to meet 6 areas of learning experience and within this, a wide range of learning knowledge and skills, all of which must meet the Statements of What Matters (Welsh Government 2022c). Therefore, the implementation of an enhanced RVE provision may be difficult to fit in around other areas of learning on a day-to-day basis.

Mentioned within the SDP is the aim to make sure that learners' progress is not hindered by their background or home environment. There is a goal to consider the impact of disadvantage on a child's progress. There is also the element of the child's home environment to be considered, particularly when organising home data collection or organising trips and visits. Therefore, staff are encouraged to make considerations or alternative arrangements.

Reflection and Evaluation

One example of working towards the school priority that I carried out was conducting an 'Amser Lles' (Wellbeing Time) lesson for 30 minutes daily. I carried out several of these lessons which were based around a variety of values, ethics, religious and non-religious ideas and celebrations. However, the lesson I will focus on was based around the children understanding 'Social Connections' and how important good social connections were, compared to bad social connections. I considered how children might feel about being with their social connections and tried to relate it back to simple statements that they might either agree or disagree with. An example of this was the statement: 'being around people makes me feel tired', or 'I like to see my friends daily'. The children would state if they agreed or disagreed, and we resulted in having a very thoughtful discussion, all centred around this key word: 'Social Connections'.

The 30-minute lessons I would deliver were often well-engaged with. I believe this is due to the lessons almost always including an authentic context and a relatable element for the children I was teaching. For example, I taught a year 6 class, and I related the importance of social connections to the transition between primary and secondary school. Not only does this idea link with Welsh Government (2020b)'s Curriculum for Wales framework but is also supported by Vygotsky's idea of learning having a meaningful context (Vygotsky 1978) and Dewey (1938), who stated that learning is best done through real-life, hands-on contexts.

A weakness, however, is that RVE within the curriculum remains to be a subject that can be commonly overlooked in favour of core subjects. I felt this in practice, as often we had to discard our RVE 30-minute session to allow more time for language or maths sessions. I felt this to be an area of development for my future practice. There has previously been a focus towards core subjects such as English, Maths and Science under the National Curriculum (Kelly 2009). However, Curriculum for Wales introduces a new mindset of 'experience, knowledge, and skills' rather than subjects (Welsh Government 2020b), where I feel that

'Amser Lles' could be beneficial to the learners across all ages in the school, particularly when discussing improvements to RVE in the curriculum.

Conclusion

The purpose of this evaluation was to review School X's Development Plan, with a focus on the priority of reviewing and evaluating the provision and support for the teaching of Religion, Values and Ethics within the curriculum. To develop this goal, the school reviewed the RVE requirements set by the local authority, ensured staff had adequate resources, researched pedagogical approaches to RVE, and ensured staff had time to make space for RVE within the curriculum. Following a discussion with my class mentor, it was advised that RVE was implemented in part within the curriculum through a 30-minute lesson labelled 'Amser Lles' (Wellbeing Time), where children would learn about relevant issues centred around both non-religious and religious ideas, develop their knowledge around values and ethics of themselves, their peers, and society around them (Welsh Government 2022a). These lessons would take place in the mornings to also encourage pupils with low attendance or lateness to be present in time for learning.

Though I have highlighted weaknesses such as curriculum priorities and time constraints, implementing a target which focuses on the development of RVE within the curriculum has fostered an inclusive and respectful climate in the school, aligning with the school's ethos. From my practice, I felt that the lessons were engaging, and the children had some extremely mature and insightful discussions, particularly seen with the 'social connections' discussions. To maintain this, I would suggest ensuring there is time in each day to focus on the RVE element of the curriculum, whether this is through separate lessons, or through cross-curricular themes.

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