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

Within any school, consistent reflection and improvement are vital regarding efficacy and achievement. To ensure this is accomplished, plans for development must be created and revised on a consistent basis. A school development plan is a vital tool that helps to guide self-assessment and improvement. A school development plan outlines the school's priorities, goals, and objectives and sets out a clear plan of action for achieving them. Developing any aspect of a school development plan requires a critical reflection on the actions taken, their impact, and the evidence base. Also, school officials must be able to critically assess what their schools' areas for improvement are. This ensures that the school is moving in the right direction and is making progress towards its goals. For this assignment, I will be discussing the parental engagement aspect of a school development plan from a school in the South of Wales. The school will be referred to as ‘School X’ to ensure their anonymity. This is done in accordance with BERA (2018) guidelines. Before I continue, I will establish the context behind ‘School X’. The student population is four hundred and thirty-five. Approximately 29% of students qualify for free school meals. The student attendance percentage is currently at an average of 91%. This contextual information is important when considering its relation to the parental engagement aspect of School X’s school development plan.

Literature Review

The theory behind and role of a school development plan has been investigated in this part of the assignment. Also, a critical review of parental engagement has been done.

This aspect of the assignment is not directly related to how School X created their school development plan. This investigation of school development plans and critical review of parental engagement is reviewed meant to give an objective understanding of their application and role within any given school. Only in the next part of this assignment has this research be applied to School X.

The role of a school development plan

A School development plan is created with the intention of improving a school. It details the goals that the school is planning to achieve to improve their learners' outcomes (Welsh Government, 2014). School development plans have become increasingly relevant for teaching staff as practitioners are being urged to work collectively towards coordinated goals (Fullan, M. Quinn, J., 2016). As well as teachers, the school development plan provides shareholders such as parents, Governers and community partnerships offers insight to help them ensure that they are making the best decision for the school and pupils. This can include how the school is utilizing available resources such as funding. It will also inform shareholders of how the school is planning on developing targets to ensure that priorities are met (Welsh Government, 2014).

A school development plan is a 3-year plan where priorities, the details of such, and the actions intended address the priorities are stored. The previous school development plan targets are also recorded. To undertake the production of a new school development plan, every school will need to collect data through self-evaluation as well as contextual data (Welsh Government, 2014). This process will give schools awareness of their areas for improvement and help them plan accordingly. This seems to be the most effective way for the school to continuously improve their performance.

Each school’s development plan is typically available to any person wanting to view it. Otherwise, it should be accessible upon request. School development plans are live documents. Because of this, they should always be kept up to date. This is so anyone viewing the document will get the most up to date version of it (Welsh Government, 2014).

Parental engagement

The aspect chosen from School X’s school development plan was parental engagement. Parental engagement is defined as the involvement parents have with their child's education and the school as a whole (Topor, et al, 2010). Parental engagement does not look the same in every school, as there are a variety of approaches that schools may choose from (ibid). This can range from virtual communication at home or in-school opportunities facilitated by the school (ibid). Nevertheless, effective parental engagement is a key component in student attainment (ibid).

The effects of parental engagement have been well established. As we can see in **figure 1**, Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory provides a framework for understanding the importance of parental engagement in schools. The theory suggests that human development is influenced by multiple environmental systems. There are 5 systems established by Bronfenbrenner (1979): the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem (Bronfenbrenner, U., 1979). The closer a system is to a child, the greater impact it will have on their development. The microsystem relates to the most direct environment which the child interacts with. Examples of this are their family and school. The mesosystem is the connections

between different microsystems. A paramount aspect of this system relates to the relationship between the family and school. As we can see, the innermost factors for childhood development center around family, school and the relationship between these two. According to Estyn (2018) schools with effective parental engagement experience higher attainment in their students. Because of this, schools are increasingly adopting approaches that encourage connectedness between the school and parents (Estyn, 2018). However, there is some ambiguity in how well these approaches are working (ibid). While there is a positive response to school engagement initiatives, many parents feel as though their child’s school is not constructively meeting them at their level. Furthermore, schools frequently only engage with one parent in each family. In most cases, the mother is the parents communicated with a majority of the time (ibid). This unwittingly ostracizes fathers from playing a role in their child's learning. It can be understood that thoughtful and inclusive methods for parental engagement should be chosen by each school. This will look different for each school and must be constructed accordingly.

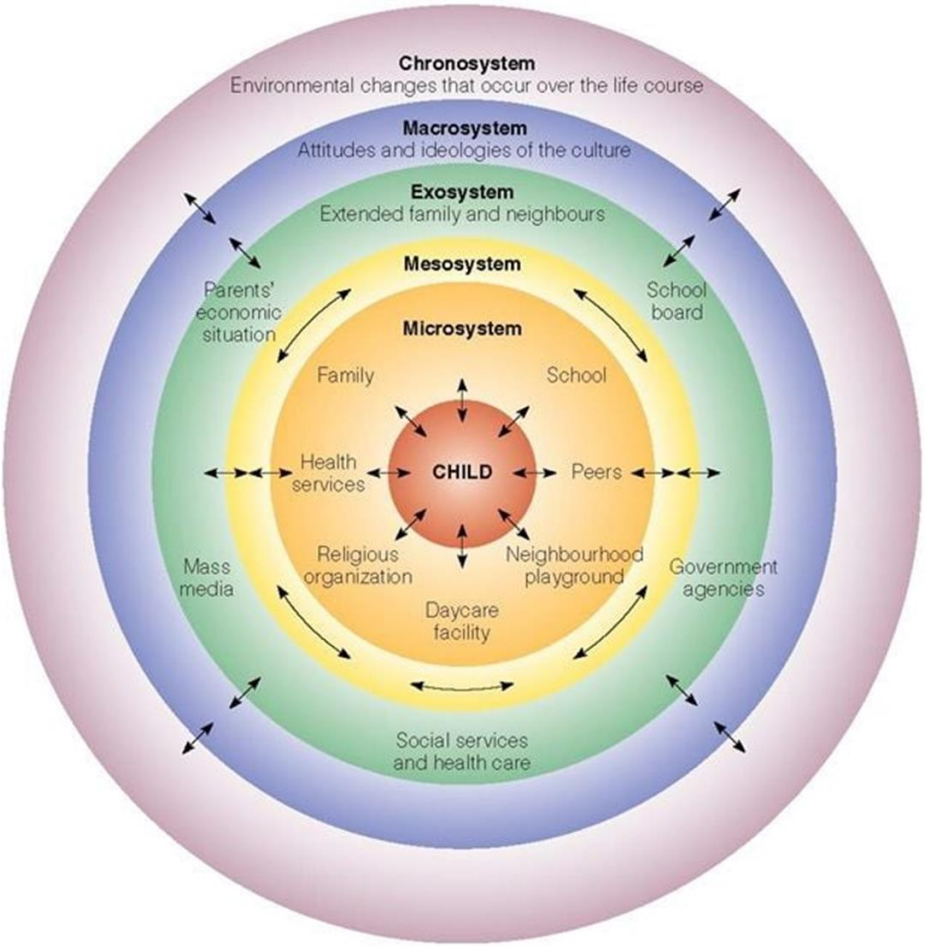

Figure 1 – Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems (Mcleod, 2023)

Developing an action point

The school development plan of School X has been reviewed for the purpose of this assignment. Within the school development plan, one of school X's chief priorities was improving parental engagement. For this part of the assignment, an account of the self-assessment and data analysis process for this aspect of the school development plan will be discussed. How the school plans their targets, involves shareholders and measures this targets impact will also be discussed.

Self-assessment

The first step school X took when developing this aspect of the school development plan was first identifying it as an area that required improvement. This could have been identified by the need to raise standards in a particular subject area or improving student behavior. Within School X, feedback was collected from previous Estyn reports. Also, anonymous feedback was requested from all individuals within the school system. This anonymous feedback was collected from learners, faculty and learner's families. From this, the head teacher and deputy head determined how to summarize this information. Within School X, any areas for development were titled 'priorities' within their school development plan. Within School X, parental engagement was determined to be a prominent priority in their school development plan.

Data analysis

During the Covid-19 pandemic, School X experienced a significant decline in student attendance. Even after the school reopened, student attendance remained lower than previous years with an average of 81% [Placement School, 2022]. Because of this, the head teacher and deputy head investigated the possible causes. They found that increasing engagement between the school and parents would improve student attendance and participation. This priority was entitled 'Priority 1- To continue our recovery, post pandemic, focusing on attendance, parental engagement and whole school wellbeing' or 'Priority 1'.

Target planning

After identifying aspects for improvement, the following step involves creating an action plan. It should include clear objectives and targets. Strategies for monitoring progress

and evaluating the impact of the actions taken must also be incorporated. For ‘Priority 1’, there were a variety of targets set out regarding parental engagement. These include reintroducing parental engagement events such as ‘Cuppa and Chat with Head’. As well, monthly ‘Well Being Wednesdays’ were established to encourage family support. Furthermore, ‘Well Being Wednesdays’ activities were set up for families alongside facilitating partnerships with external agencies. For each target related to parental engagement, expected and measurable outcomes are listed. The outcomes from these targets are the increased engagement of parents in school life. Additionally, positive reception from parents regarding their experience in the school. The faculty members responsible are named. Any necessary resources and expenses for each target are also detailed. A time scale of 10 months was set for these targets. After that, the success (or lack thereof) of these targets goes up for review. The next step was the implementation of the plan and monitoring progress towards the objectives and targets set out in the plan. This involves regular monitoring of performance data, classroom observations, and feedback from staff and students. The evidence collected should be used to evaluate the impact of the actions taken and to make any necessary adjustments.

Involving shareholders

Regarding shareholders, School X uses the ‘national level approach to professional learning’. This model can be seen below in **figure 2**. This model iterates the importance of utilizing relationships with shareholders (Welsh Government 2022). Examples of such by School X include their collaboration with The University of Wales, Trinity Saint David. As well, various student support programs such as ‘Flying start’ and ‘Partneriaeth’ are in

partnership with School X. School X also local companies who come to the school to support ‘wellbeing Wednesdays’. Indeed, School X level of engagement with shareholders is so extensive that Estyn has chosen to include them in a case study regarding community engagement.

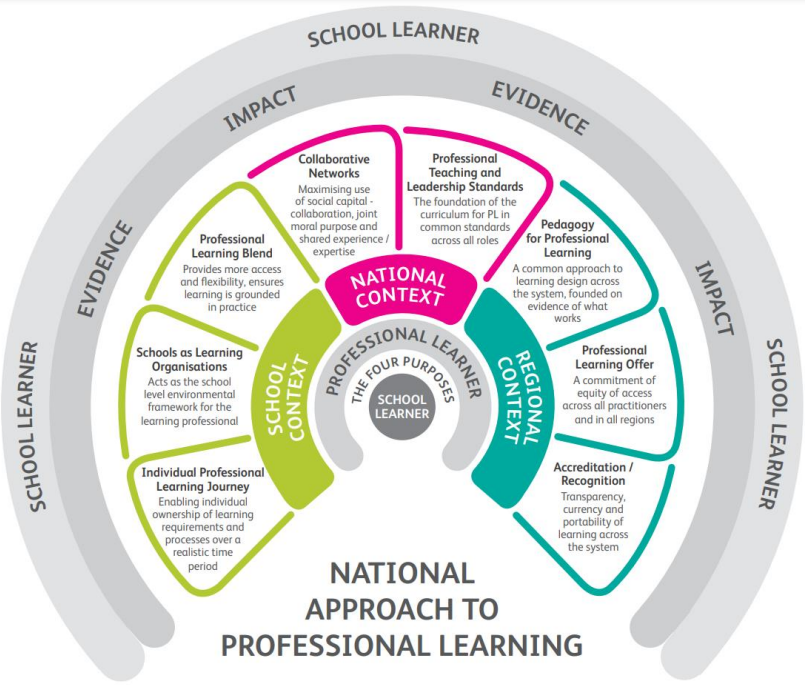

Figure 2 – National level approach to professional learning (Welsh Government, 2022)

Measuring impact

When critically reflecting on the actions taken, it is important to evaluate the evidence base. This means considering the reliability and validity of the data collected and the methods used to collect it. It also involves considering the wider research evidence on effective strategies for achieving the desired outcomes. By critically evaluating the evidence, the school can ensure that it is using the most effective strategies and that the actions taken are based on sound research evidence.

A new school development is created after 3 years. However, the priorities and targets were set to be reviewed after 10 months. This means that the school has given itself 10 months to improve each of its priorities. Even so, the impact of each target is still reviewed with a degree of frequency. If a target is consistently being met, the head teacher can edit the live document to represent this. Each target's impact is colour coded to represent the school's assessment of its success. Green means it is being met, yellow means it is a work in progress. Lastly, red means this target is not yet being met. For each of these, there is a justification of why they are measured as such. If they are in green, the benefits from this attainment are reported upon. This gives anyone reading the school development plan a clear idea of where the school feels they are with each of their targets.

Regarding parental engagement, many targets related to this priority are either green or yellow, with few in red. The school development plan expresses the positive impact each of these targets has had on the school, as well as their goal of maintaining the continued support of parental engagement.

Reflection and evaluation

The school development plan is a pivotal document. If the school was without this, it would be much harder for them to track their success regarding their priorities. School X’s school development plan is comprehensive and easily deciphered. The actions related to parental engagement are agreeable and include accessibility using both an in-person and virtual approach. School X has outlined what staff and stakeholders are responsible for each of the stated priorities. From my review of the document and

specifically the parental engagement priority, there is a suggestion that I have which the school could use to further develop this priority. This suggestion would be to invite parents to the weekly ‘seren’ assemblies. As of right now, these assemblies only have students and faculty present. If parents were invited, this could offer them the opportunity to take part in an aspect of their child’s school day (as these assemblies occur during the last session every friday). Also, they would be able to witness the accolades being given by the school to their child for their achievements.

Conclusion

This report has shown how school X establishes, analyses and develops the priorities within their school development plan. This report also focused on parental engagement priority within school X’s school development plan. The school uses previous Estyn assessments alongside anonymous feedback to establish what priorities are pertinent. From this assignment I have learnt how school development plan priorities are created as well as developed and revisited. School X was used to represent how one school has constructed a chosen aspect of their school development plan. The insights from this assignment will benefit my work as a teacher. Once I am employed at a school, I will be able to help develop priorities, action points and solutions to maximize student performance. Having this information will also help me to understand and support school development plans already in place in the school I join a school as a newly qualified teacher. Certainly, the understanding I now have of school development plans will play a consistent part in my role as a teacher.

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