

	Target	What I have done in this assignment...
Targed/Target 1	Address counteracting arguments so that they directly link to the research.	I have selected literature that directly counteracts arguments and other academic literature.
Targed/Target 2	Proofread work before submitting so there are no errors in analysis of data.	I have proofread my work and to the best of my knowledge, there are no analysis errors.
Targed/Target 3	Link research findings back to literature.	I have linked my findings and observations to literature as best and as often as possible.

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

Introduction

This report will focus on how School X develops one aspect of its school development plan (SDP); closing the gender attainment gap, particularly at GCSE level. I will examine how the school has identified areas for improvement and how the school has implemented various activities and strategies in order to make progress with this aspect of its SDP. I will also reflect and evaluate on what the school has done through review of the changes they have made. Due to BERA Guidelines (2018), the school will be referred to as School X throughout this report to uphold its anonymity, and names of any pupils, staff or student teachers will also be anonymised. School X is a coeducational secondary school situated in the South Wales area, with just over 1200 pupils on roll. Of these pupils, just over 24% are eligible for free school meals (FSM), and around 19% have additional learning needs (ALN). Over 27% of pupils are from ethnic minority backgrounds and around 12% speak English as an additional language (Welsh Government, 2019a).

Literature Review

A school's SDP sets out with the purpose of planning strategically in order to move the school forward and improve (Welsh Government, 2014).

The SDP is integral and extremely effective in precisely setting out targets for the future of a school. The SDP is entirely evidence based therefore should be the most effective document used to plan for a school to move forward (Department of Education, 2010). The Welsh Government highlights that a school will use their SDP most effectively through a rigorous process of self-evaluation (Welsh Government, 2014). Ultimately, the most appropriate diagnosis of change must come from within a school.

Comprising the SDP demands expert skills and might at times, prove difficult to articulate concise objectives and strategies that will benefit the whole school (Xaba, 2006). As Welsh Government (2014) states, the responsibility of the SDP lies with the governing body, most of which will not always be educational professionals. Consequently, this could cause potential limitations in the creation of the document, as Xaba (2006) declares. Nevertheless, the senior leadership team (SLT) in School

X consists of experts in the field of education and ultimately they are the creators and implementors of the SDP.

It is important to note that as a result of effective development cultures within schools, research shows that staff are increasingly motivated, and the quality of teaching and learning is positively impacted. However, recommendations were made to school leaders to further improve the way in which they use data to inform the improvement process (Education and Training Inspectorate, 2008).

School X has placed a large focus on striving to close the gender attainment gap, particularly at GCSE level. Statistically, girls perform better than boys; boys achieved 9.8% lower A* - C grades at GCSE in Wales in 2018 (BBC, 2019b).

Closing the attainment gap should be a fundamental part of a school's development plan; it is crucial for schools to focus on the success of every individual pupil and how they aim to use excellent teaching and learning to encourage pupils to be lifelong learners (Brighouse and Woods, 2013).

Estyn (2008) explain that the main reason for the gender attainment gap is that more boys have problems with literacy and therefore cannot always access the wider curriculum because literacy is needed across all subjects. Estyn investigated further and found that boys' behaviour was poorer than girls' and suggest that such behaviour is a consequence of classroom activities tailored to girls, such as extended writing, which research shows girls perform better in (Estyn, 2008). The debate surrounding poor behaviour in schools tends to have various discrepancies; Estyn (2008) touch on poor behaviour as an issue when it comes to boys' underachievement however the Department for Education says that behaviour is less than satisfactory in only 0.3% of schools (Department for Education, 2012). However, research suggests that other factors including health and a child's home and family affect their academic attainment, along with a deeply rooted negative culture linked to low aspirations through a history of disadvantaged backgrounds (Brighouse and Woods, 2013). Offering up an alternative reason, Didau (2015) proposes social factors are the route of boys' underachievement as opposed to biology; biased opportunities, and pre-existing perceptions could be to blame, he reports.

The BBC interviewed a teacher and a pupil from an all-boys' school in Wales who also expressed that societal expectations played a huge role in boys' underachievement in literacy (BBC, 2019b). This is reiterated in a review prepared

for the Office of Education that expresses how stereotypical and traditional gender norms continue to be instilled in children from a young age and are still present in society and schools today (Jyotsna and Pouezevara, 2016). On the contrary, Arnot and Phipps argued that archaic gender assumptions such as a woman's choice between a career and a family have dissipated; a woman's opportunity for both is now the societal norm, as statistics support (Arnot and Phipps, 2003). Their research delves deeper by putting forth the idea that the rising number of women in leading roles, particularly in parliament, suggests that being able to visualise women in these roles has been a motivator to young girls who want to succeed (Arnot and Phipps, 2003). This poses a question of whether motivation is merely the reason behind girls' achievement in comparison to boys', rather than just gender alone.

Although generalisations should not be made or result in assumptions, the gap in attainment tends to be significant in areas where there is high deprivation (Estyn, 2008). 38% of pupils in School X live in 20% of the most deprived areas in Wales (Estyn, 2015); The Welsh Government has a national priority of closing the attainment gap of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds, which means that teachers and support staff have a responsibility to take this into consideration when striving to close the gap within their school (Jones, 2017). Research shows that the largest and hardest attainment gap to close is between the achievements of pupils on FSM compared to those who are not (Brighouse and Woods, 2013). The way in which schools intend to support pupils to succeed has to be done on an individual basis; the most successful schools find ways to support each individual pupil, and do not treat all boys the same when tackling this issue (Estyn, 2008).

Developing an action point

School development planning is a process of evolution that requires a school to plan strategically, in order to improve (Department of Education, 2010). An SDP is created on the premise of the school being the best body to identify where improvement is needed in order to move forward and make continuous progress (Department of Education, 2010). Hanover Research (2014) suggests that while many schools will have identified common areas for improvement, it is important that their individual SDP is specific and clearly sets out what the school wants to achieve, how they intend to do so, and who will do it.

The school development (or, school improvement) process begins with diagnosing which areas of the school need improvement. Action research is typically done by the school's senior leadership team (SLT). Fortunately, I was on placement in School X when SLT were conducting their research and development week. I was also still there when my department had feedback from research and development team, and the department were starting to identify ways to improve and implement change across the subject.

During research and development week, class teachers were made aware that they were going to be observed; learning walks were done through the department by the team who would be walking in and out of classrooms around the department for the duration of the week.

Subsequent to learning walks and observations, SLT discussed and analysed the data collected with the aim of feeding back to the department with positives and areas for improvement. This data is also used to inform the future SDP; SLT would have identified common areas for improvement across all departments, and will typically include this in the plan to develop as a whole school. Data from inspection reports, pupil voice, feedback from stakeholders such as parents, governors and the local community, would also contribute to the future SDP. Additionally, Welsh Government initiatives have informed School X's SDP, as previously mentioned, one of the Welsh Government's priorities is to close the attainment gap.

The SDP includes specific objectives, such as the one I have chosen to focus on – 'reducing the gender gap in attainment particularly at GCSE'. Alongside the objective, the plan sets out activities that key members of staff will implement in order to achieve the objective. Notably, School X have identified a number of specific activities they will implement during the school year in order to achieve the aforementioned objective.

The first activity is to meet with year 11 parents to discuss revision strategies that can be done at home. The benefits of parent involvement include improved behaviour and academic achievement. However whilst the benefits might seem obvious, there are many parents who choose not to be an active participant in their child's education, breaking down communication and relationships with schools (Sapungan and Sapungan, 2014).

Secondly, they will identify the cause of persistent absenteeism and address these factors – figures from 2017 show that absenteeism increased in Wales,

however, persistent absenteeism had decreased from the previous eight years (BBC, 2017).

Additionally, they will provide mentoring for focus groups of boys underachieving – offering extra support and interventions has proved to be an effective way of improving pupil outcomes (Estyn, 2017). In contrast, Edwards reports that on the whole, there is a lack of evidence that supports the effectiveness of school-based interventions and seems to be a lack of evidence that suggests implementation in schools is purposeful (Edwards, 2016).

Lastly, the school will engage with pupil voice; it is important for School X to ask themselves who is being heard when consulting pupil voice; particular groups of pupils, especially underachieving boys, may not be heard (Walker and Logan, 2008).

Further notes under this objective include the number of staff needed and the estimated cost to implement the changes.

Following the completion of the SDP, the school has a responsibility to monitor the effectiveness of the new changes. School X reviews their SDP biannually in order to make any amendments if needed. Accurate data kept throughout the year will inform teachers and members of SLT of how to move forward and improve (Brighthouse and Woods, 2013).

Reflection and evaluation

On reflection, my time at School X proved that positive and continuous efforts were being made by nearly all staff to implement the new strategies set out in the SDP. This was particularly evident in the school's efforts to use intervention as a strategy to improve boys' attainment. In the English department, pupils were welcomed back at form, break and lunch times; this was an effective strategy for more independent learners who wanted to use the time to catch up on work. Pupils were told they had to come back during these times, more typically as a punishment for poor behaviour. School X also has other intervention strategies in place such as catch up for pupils who are underachieving in core subjects so are taken out of non-core subjects to improve in Maths, English, and Science. On reflection of these observations, the aforementioned strategies were effective for some pupils but not all. Moving forward, I think a fair suggestion would be the provision of smaller classes. I recognise that larger or over-subscribed classes is a problem that cannot

necessarily be remedied with classroom teachers, this must come from above. Nonetheless, having smaller classes has multiple benefits, the first one being that the teacher will be able to provide better quality support for pupils who need it, and secondly, teachers could see an improvement in behaviour which should have a positive effect on engagement. This is supported by research which also claims that reducing class sizes could result in an additional three months of progress (Education Endowment Foundation, 2018). Even so, classes would have to have less than twenty pupils to make a real difference (EEF, 2018).

Positively, School X held a number of parents' evenings for year 11 to discuss pupil progress. Moving forward, School X could put even more emphasis on the importance of parental involvement and possibly host an increased number of meetings for parents across both GCSE years to encourage parents continue pupils' learning at home. As mentioned previously, the literature does suggest that it is nearly impossible to build positive relationships and communications with all parents. However, putting pressure on continuing pupils' learning outside of school would ultimately support Donaldson's recommendations (2015). In turn, pupils underachieving may see an increased importance on improving attainment if parental support is present.

Conclusion

This report has evaluated the process in which School X devised their current SDP and I have assessed the benefits and possible drawbacks to this process. The general overview of the SDP process outlined above provides an insight into the importance of reflection, self-evaluation, and most importantly knowing what is best for your school and its learners when moving forward.

I have learned how one of the Welsh Government's priorities to close the gap in attainment is, absolutely just that – a priority for every practitioner in the teaching profession. As a student teacher, I aim to continue my research into this field as it is my responsibility as a future teacher to 'close the gap'. I will continue to foster new strategies that will help us to tackle this problem through well-informed research and practice. I also aim to use this report to influence my future practice by remembering the importance of knowing each learner's individual needs, and continuing to constantly reflect on my teaching practice.

Word count: 2300

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