

	Targed/target	Yr hyn yr wyf wedi'i wneud yn yr aseiniad hwn What I have done in this assignment...
Targed/Target 1	Make greater use of journal articles at this level of writing.	I struggled with this point, but spoke to the lecturer who said it wouldn't be as applicable to this assignment but I know in future I would need to actually seek out to find support for finding relevant journals as I have struggled with this.
Targed/Target 2	Increase the level of critically in your use of literature.	The word count on this essay is so low I have really struggled, however I have tried throughout to keep this in mind.
Targed/Target 3	Use your appendices to support the points that you make wherever possible.	I have done this throughout.

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

Word Count: 2750

Introduction

Educational reform in Wales had a catalyst moment in 2009- Wales underperformed in international PISA testing, scoring lower than the other nations within the United Kingdom (OECD, 2014). This prompted a journey of large-scale reform which continues to drive education policy (Donaldson, 2015). The reforms would include: changes to curriculum design, initial teacher training, assessment and the vision for education in Wales (Williams, 2017). An OECD report (2014) on improving education in Wales recommended the development of a clear framework for school improvement- the current system was incoherent and underdeveloped.

By 2014 the Welsh Government regulated the production of School Development Plans to be a statutory requirement for governing bodies. Their purpose: short-term and long-term planning in which schools should reflect on their performance, identify weaknesses, develop strategies to overcome these weaknesses and measure impact (Welsh Government, 2015).

This report will consider the school development process and how one strategy was developed from school X's (Appendix A) plan, namely- to tackle the school's poor performance in the end of foundation phase national reading tests. Consideration will be given to how the school identified the target, planned improvement and how the impact was measured.

Context

School X has been anonymised in line with BERA (2018) ethical guidelines - which recognise the right of individuals and entities to their rights to confidentiality and anonymity. The school self-identifies as serving a predominantly disadvantaged community (Appendix A), the free-school meal (FSM) figure is 21.5% which is higher than the national average of 16.9% (PLASC, 2019). FSM may be the best proxy indicator of disadvantage (EEF, 2018) however it is not synonymous with disadvantage and does not encompass all children living in the lowest income households (Hobbs and Vignoles, 2010). The socio-economic context of the school both within a disadvantaged community, and a national context in which almost one third of children live in poverty (Pollock, 2019) is a vital consideration for school development planning, in which context plays an important role (Brighouse and Woods, 2003).

Literature Review

In an increasingly globalised society, education must balance the conflict between an education for a global culture with transferable skills, but also an individualised education for communities (Sahlberg, 2016). Surveys such as PISA facilitate international comparisons and concerns about global competitiveness can consequently drive reforms (Donaldson, 2015:10). Whilst this can be positive- PISA is not without its critics. Some of the numerous concerns being: the focus on reading, numeracy and science ignores the importance of other subjects; the questions asked may be more favourable to certain curricula (Eivers, 2010, Sahlberg 2016); the three-year cycle results in short-term solutions; increased use of standardised testing and as an economic development organisation their focus is skewed towards economic benefit rather than wellbeing (Andrews, P. et al., 2014).

A consensus on what effective school planning looks like does not exist (Macbeath and Mortimore, 2001) and what may work in some schools may not work in all (Brighouse and Woods, 2003) however the government in Wales developed a non-prescriptive model for schools to use (Appendix B). School Development plans would be working documents, prepared three-yearly which would set out self-evaluated targets, as well as address the national targets of raising literacy, numeracy and the attainment gap (Welsh Government, 2014), these national targets would change as new curriculum reforms began, however the focus on the education system being equitable and focused on reducing the attainment gap would continue (Williams, 2017).

Desforges and Abouchaar (2003) undertook a literature review into the effects of parental engagement on achievement and attainment. Literature Reviews synthesise research which is particularly useful for teachers as they present information in an accessible format (Hendrick and Macpherson, 2017), however, it is also important to remember that although synthesis of data is useful there is little empirical evidence on the validity of the method- for example how is research that is included selected (Wyborn et al., 2018). Their research focused on parental engagement and concluded children from disadvantaged backgrounds would benefit from higher achievement if a systematic intervention in parental engagement was made. Research such as theirs helped inform the Welsh Government that it is imperative to engage parents in children's learning. In 2014 the 'education begins at home' campaign began, shortly followed by the Face toolkit (2014) which outlined the importance of engaging communities and families and gave practical support for schools to engage parents, the toolkit says successful schools outline how they are going to meaningfully engage the community in their planning.

Groves and West-Burnham (2020) support the view school improvement, traditionally more school-centric, should become more outward facing. They assert school improvement in the U.K. is stalling, particularly with regards to the attainment gap, a focus on the many spheres of influence on learners' lives (Appendix C) and engaging families and communities, would allow greater improvements to be made. It is salient though to remember evidence also supports the greatest impact comes from interventions within the classroom (EEF, 2017, Visible Learning, 2017). Didau (2019) argues the interplay between genes and schools is underplayed and focusing on better home environments is a misapprehension- educators should prioritise powerful, culturally rich knowledge-based curriculums and create nurturing environments for learning. It seems any shift towards community should not forget the importance of the school environment.

The gap in attainment, refers to the difference in attainment levels that exists at age five when children first enter school and consequently widens thereafter throughout school life (EEF, 2018). In Wales (Williams, 2017) and education internationally (OECD, 2014) a key focus is closing this attainment gap- education systems in which all students learn well impact positively on the economies and wellbeing of societies (OECD, 2014:12, Donaldson, 2015).

One proposed solution to ameliorate the pernicious effects of the attainment gap- is the role of reading (Didau, 2014, Save the Children, 2014, Quigley, 2018, Quigley 2020), links exist between the amount of books a family owns and academic success, and reading for pleasure is the biggest indicator for children's success (OECD, 2002). Quigley (2018) describes how disadvantaged pupils are less likely to be read to daily and experience vocabulary rich environments, this results in a vocabulary gap which exacerbates the gap in attainment.

Regardless of decades of focus on reading and the knowledge of its profound impact on young people's happiness and success, consensus does not exist for the best way to impart the key skill to children (Hendrick, 2017). A 'reading war' continues to rage against the best way to impart this skill to young people. The school was following Read-Write-Inc a synthetic phonics policy. There is evidence to support synthetic phonics as being effective (Glazzard, 2017, Quigley, 2020) however whether this method is the best for disadvantaged areas is contested (Clark, 2018). A balanced view seems to be whilst phonics is important, we must not forget comprehension, reading culture (Quigley, 2020) and the important role of reading in facilitating access to cultural capital (Didau, 2014).

Finally, when engaging communities and focusing on socio-economic factors it is important to distinguish between generalisations of populations, and treating learners as individuals (Peal, 2009, Smyth and Wrigley, 2013). Particularly with parental interaction- it is important to understand the effect lack of opportunity has on aspiration (Harrison and Waller, 2018). It is imperative when schools engage with communities it is with a focus on being authentic places of trust and mutual respect (Groves and West-Burnham, 2020).

Developing an Action Point

The cyclical approach recommended in the Welsh Government guidelines, should be set against a context of a clear school **vision** (Welsh Government, 2014). The most common word in school X's vision statement is community. The focus on community was consistently

reflected throughout the school, evidence of this was community partnerships had recently led to the community winning a national competition. There was a constant dialogue with the community, an open door policy (Appendix D) and the homelife of students was recognised as being a contributing factor to children's achievement (Groves and West-Burnham, 2020), this all set the context for the intervention. However, effective vision is often revisited and updated and guides the direction of school improvement in all areas (Brighouse and Woods, 2003). The school's value statement seems to have been unchanged since 2010. This suggests the school are not using it to guide their improvement journey. School 'vision' has been criticised as sometimes being no-more than vacuous words without substance (Wrigley and Smyth, 2013), the mere existence of a vision statement is not sufficient- the school could benefit from a more up to date and specific vision.

Schools should undergo a process of **self-evaluation** in which they consider their strengths and weaknesses (Welsh Government, 2015) I am not aware of whether this happened. A wide range of data should also be considered during self-evaluation (Welsh Government, Donaldson 2015, Estyn, 2016 Schildkamp, 2019). An analysis of national tests data identified pupils in year two were underachieving in national reading tests (Appendix E), it was unclear how the national tests scores were analysed- test data alone would not provide enough information to design a strategy and over-reliance on any one set of data should be avoided (Schildkamp, 2019). Although a data-led approach is recommended this does have shortcomings- data literacy has not traditionally been included in teacher training (Schildkamp, 2019) and sometimes data is not used meaningfully (Farley-Ripple et al. 2018). It is important to use data not just to identify issues, but also diagnostically- the unique range of data available to Welsh schools (OECD, 2014) can be used to hypothesise why the poor scores are happening. Consideration could have been given to: whether teacher best-fit assessment levels indicate children are arriving at school with lower than average levels of language development, do the levels show children are making progress at the expected level, are the lower than average scores occurring when comparisons are made nationally or with schools in the same family.

Strategic-planning was informed by research, and evidence-informed school practice is considered effective (EEF, 2018), the research is summarised as 'all having one clear message- the need to engage parents in the learning of their children' (Appendix F), whilst my own research into improving reading supports this assertion, criticism of research-informed practice is the selection of research to support existing beliefs (Farley-Ripple et al., 2019). There would be value in not only knowing the approach that was being taken, but any other avenues that were explored and why they were discounted. It can also be argued

research in the field of education is not as valuable as people think- it can often be misapplied and misunderstood, we should focus more on a 'value based' model (Biesta, 2017, cited from Didau 2016:113). The evidence again seems to show merely using research to inform practice does not mean it has been used effectively.

Strategic planning should engage all stakeholders (Welsh Government, 2014)- governors and senior leadership were involved in the planning process, they were presented with the data and the research findings and together a plan was formulated - to hold reading breakfasts which the parents would be invited to. The wider community was engaged when continuing mutually beneficial partnerships were created with a college whose childcare students came into the school to help with the intervention (Appendix G).

The United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (2012) state children have the right to a voice when adults are making decisions about them, and the value of children being involved in the SDP process is being recognised (Estyn, 2017), pupil voice is mentioned during the scheme (Appendix I), but whether the children were involved in the developing of the action plan was unclear.

Parents were sent surveys (Appendix J) to better understand barriers to engagement as FACE (Welsh Government, 2014) advocates. A possible barrier which could have been considered is- in Households earning below £10000 one quarter of adults are illiterate (Save the Children, 2014)- these children would be specifically vulnerable, and a survey may not engage these parents. An opportunity to engage parents more deeply as Estyn (2018) suggests could have been to hold a workshop before the reading breakfasts. They could have communicated why reading was being targeted, schools can be a conduit of research to communities, and parents can be empowered by the stark facts – research shows links between poor literacy and unemployment and just 10 minutes a day reading at home can make a difference (Save the Children, 2014). Parents could also have been given practical support with phonics instruction, tips on how to promote a reading culture at home, pointed in the direction of appropriate reading material (Quigley, 2020) and most importantly a collaborative relationship to learning could have begun to be fostered before the breakfasts.

Teachers have been accused of having a tokenistic role in school development (Smyth and Wrigley, 2013:168) and there is little mention of the role of teachers, who not only could have added insight into planning but also whose professional development should have been considered (Welsh Government, 2015). Read-Write-Inc was being used to teach reading in the school and groups were being led by a variety of individuals including teaching assistants still in training, explicit reading instruction is an area that needs development

within education (Quigley, 2020) and additional training for staff throughout the school could have been considered.

Strategic planning should define a target, and how its success (preferably quantifiably) will be measured (Welsh Government, 2014). Market-driven education reforms have meant there has been a shift toward accountability (Sahlberg, 2016). The target was to improve underperformance in the national tests and the aim of the reading breakfasts was to develop reading confidence whilst providing support and resources for parents (Appendix G). The school **measured impact** by the high attendance rates for the breakfasts and an increased number of reading books being returned (Appendix K). I think a vital opportunity to gather data was missed when a survey sent to parents to identify possible barriers to learning, was not followed up with a survey after the scheme. Data could have been included to measure parent's confidence in supporting their children. Another option to measure success might have been to track teacher assessed levels for pupils whose parents attended, and pupils whose parents did not. Longitudinally, if the scheme lasted a few years you could look for trends in national test data, but this would need to take into account the difficulty of equating correlation to causality (Didau, 2016) as well as the small sample sizes and the many uncontrollable variables such as gender breakdown in classes.

Evaluation

The school did not grant us access to their school planning which made it difficult to sometimes understand exactly what the target was and whether there were numerous strategies working together to improve the national test reading score results. I have outlined how research shows the importance of parental engagement in disadvantaged communities but if schools are to take a more outward approach at school improvement as Groves and West-Burnham (2020) advocate, they must not lose sight of what is happening within schools. My observation from time spent in the school was the school could have taken a more holistic approach by focusing on both. During my month in the year two class, I only saw one storybook- whilst reading daily is encouraged at home, fostering daily reading habits in the classroom can also be valuable (Quigley, 2020). Whilst Read-Write-Inc and reading scheme books have their place, focus should not be lost on the other aspects of reading- what better way to motivate children than by introducing them to the range of fantastic literature reading will allow them to access.

In their last Estyn report it was noted the school lacked specificity and measurability within their development planning, there probably could have been improvements in these areas,

however this does not necessarily mean the interventions were not successful, the high attendance level showed they managed to bring parents into the school and to engage with them. The scheme could continue to be held annually as an opportunity to build the important collaboration in learning between home and school.

Conclusion

I have learnt whether using data, engaging stakeholders or creating a vision statement, it is not enough to merely include these elements, in practice you must engage in why you are doing so. There are parallels to be made to effective teaching practice- where it is important to understand the reasoning to any new practice applied to the classroom. This criticality is something I will apply throughout my career in teaching.

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Appendix

Appendix A

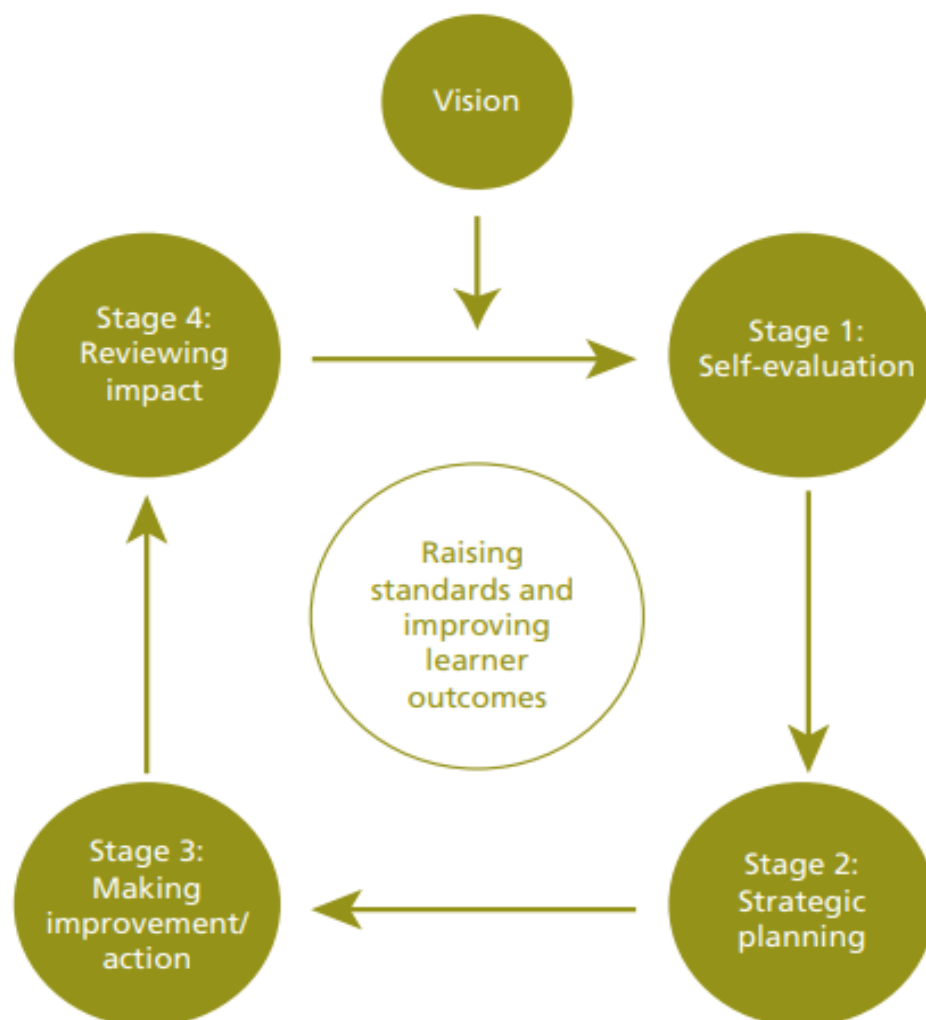
████████ Primary School is a community school for children aged from three to eleven years. The school is situated in the centre of the busy town of ██████████, a traditional ex-mining community with an established residential area, in the ██████████ approximately eight miles north west of ██████████ in ██████████ Local Authority. The area has a mixture of privately owned and housing association rented properties. Although ██████████ is not a Community First area, there is a high level of economic inactivity in the village and a high level of unemployment. Approximately 55 pupils live in Community First areas and attend the school through parental choice. The area can be described as predominantly disadvantaged with many children living in homes with no working parent and many have single parents.

There will be approximately 425 pupils on roll in September 2019 organised into 14 classes- Foundation Phase pupils are organised according to age and ability and KS 2 according to age with two form parallel classes. There will be approximately 49 part/ full time Nursery pupils. There will be 14 full time teachers, including the Head teacher. To enhance this provision, there are three Grade 7 additional practitioners, along with eight Grade 6 additional practitioners based in the Foundation Phase and one Grade 7 teaching assistant, four Grade 6 teaching assistants and three Special Needs Support Assistants based in KS 2. The school also employs a full time Family Engagement Officer from the PDG.

The school's intake comprises of the full range of ability. PLASC 2018 - 19.4% pupils were identified as having additional learning needs which is slightly below the national average of 22%. Currently 3 pupils have statements of SEN although 1 more is going through the process.

This percentage has remained relatively stable over the four past years.

Appendix B

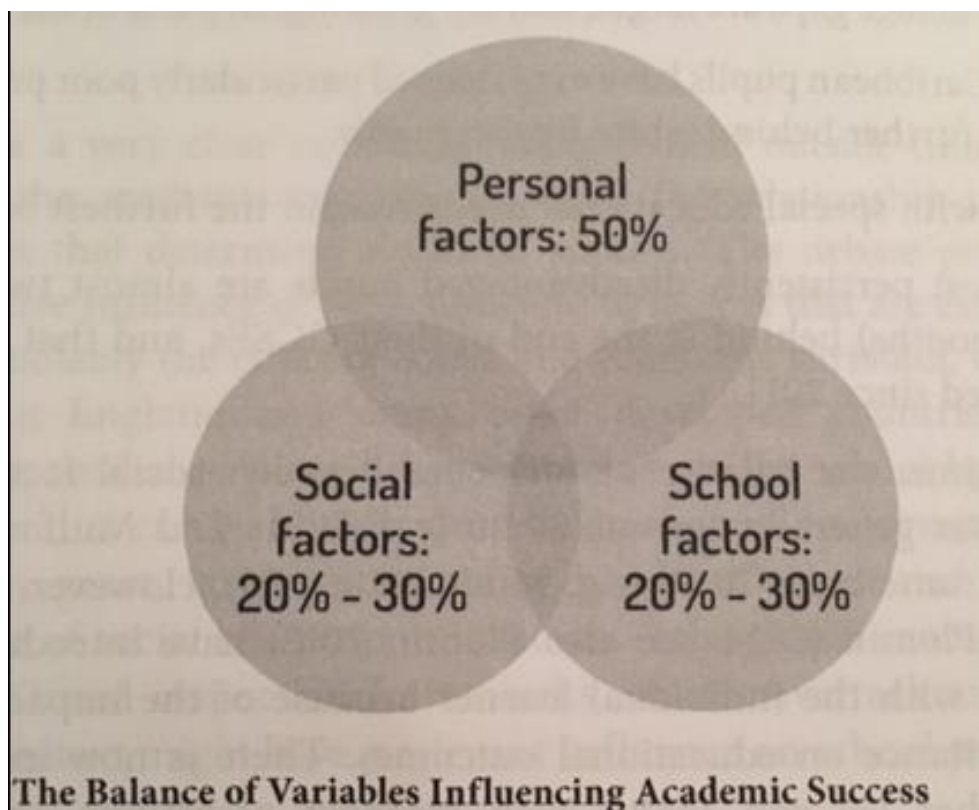


Source: Welsh Government (2014) *School Development Plans* Cardiff: Welsh Government [Online] Available from:

<https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-03/school-development-plans.pdf>

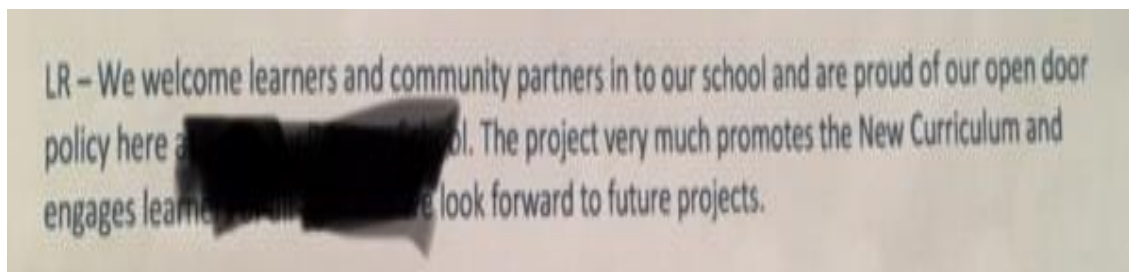
Accessed: 12.04.20

Appendix C



Source: Groves, M. and West-Burnham J. (2020) *Flipping Schools- Why it's time to turn your school and community inside out* Woodbridge: John Catt Educational

Appendix D -



Appendix E

Following an analysis of National Reading test data, it became apparent that a high percentage of pupils in Year 2 were achieving standardised scores in the lower bracket (under 85) and a low percentage in the higher bracket (above 115).

Appendix F

After discussion as a SLT, we decided that we would carry out research into making improvements in reading in order to address underperformance. I undertook a range of research, looking at, amongst others, the

- Education Endowment Foundation research into effective interventions, the
- Council of British International Schools paper, "How to engage parents with reading" and the
- National Institute for Professional Practice's analysis of "Literacy partnerships with parents".

This research all had one clear message, the importance of and need to engage parents in the learning of their children.

Appendix G

We now began our improvement journey. We placed reading as a priority on our School Improvement Plan and I presented our findings to the Governing Body thorough a combination of data analysis and research evidence. When discussing the issues that we had with regards reading it was important to ask for their input in identifying the ways forward. One governor discussed links that they had with Coleg y Cymoedd which I felt was an important avenue to explore. I set up a meeting with the campus director and quickly established an effective working relationship that led to the development of a collaborative project with Coleg yr Cymoedd (CyC) aimed at developing reading confidence whilst providing support and resources for parents.

Appendix H

the project. Throughout the project, I conducted Pupil and Parental voice activities to ensure continued engagement.

Appendix I

in" and thus enable a strong partnership. We Compiled online and paper-based surveys to engage all parents/carers in the project. The aim of the survey was to establish parental views of reading and any barriers that needed to be broken down in order for the project to be most effective for the learners.

Appendix J

Attendance

Week 1 - 92 families out of a possible 147

Week 2 - 107 families

Week - 48 families (after half term) Revitalise the project

Pupils returning reading books.

Reception - increased by 10% as not all pupils were on reading books. Now 80% of the class are taking home reading books.

Yr 1 - 48% to 81% (22 - 37 pupils out of 46)

Yr 2 - 55% to 87.5% (31-49pupils out of 56)

