

ECAD7003:
**Improving literacy and phonics skills through the use of a School
Development Plan**

	Target	What I have done in this assignment...
Target 1	Ensure that literature features in all aspects of your assignments going forward.	I have checked that all of my arguments are supported by literature where possible.
Target 2	Occasionally your arguments are a little under-developed. Ensure you use a wide range of literature to fully exploit issues	I have tried to balance out an argument by giving an equal amount of view points.

Word Count: 2748

Introduction

Professional teaching experience (PTE) 1 school was a green rated primary school in South Wales with 474 pupils currently registered (My Local School 2018). During a weekly meeting with the senior mentor the school's performance was discussed alongside a copy of the School Development Plan (SDP). One interesting aspect of the SDP was the performance in literacy, when starting on PTE1 the school was undergoing a change of literacy programmes in September due to poor performance across all phases. Having observed these changes and the results during PTE, I wanted to find out if other schools have had similar experiences in regard to literacy performance. I will be analysing this specific aspect of the SDP and comparing results to find out whether the change of programmes has had a significant impact on the pupil's acquisition of literacy skills.

Literature Review

Campbell (2004) defines a SDP as a document that outlines priorities for the school over an agreed time period. All members of the school community will be asked to contribute to the SDP to ensure that everyone's viewpoints on the school are valued and respected (ibid).

According to Earley et al (2018) the SDP was originally implemented in 1988 as a part of the Education Reform Act, the aim of the SDP was to support the implementation of the National Curriculum and organise a school's finances for the coming year. However, Epstein (2011) explains that the SDP has developed over the years to represent a school's aspirations within the setting and community. Steward (2020) supports this by saying that a school's vision should not be universal, instead it should highlight the specific school's strengths and weaknesses through an honest analysis of data. The Welsh Government advice that the following forms of data can be beneficial when creating a SDP, inspection reports, assessments, observations, staff self-evaluation and questionnaires from parents and pupils (Welsh Government 2014).

A key document when considering literacy development within a school may be the Literacy and Numeracy in Wales research paper published by the National Assembly for Wales in 2013. This paper outlined a national mission to raise the standards of literacy and numeracy across all aspects of education (National Assembly for Wales 2013). The paper stated that there were two main factors that had influenced the research, the first being a failed implementation of the Skills Framework and the second being poor results from the 2009 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) examinations. One recommendation in this research paper was the implementation of the Literacy and Numeracy Framework (LNF), a compulsory assessment tool that should be implemented in

a cross curricular manner to ensure skills are embedded into all lessons (ibid). In 2014 the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the company that established the PISA exams, published a document outlining the results that Wales had received and providing further feedback. In the document there was four key areas of improvement mentioned, one of the key areas was to *“meet the learning requirements of its students and deliver equity and quality”* (OECD 2014 pg 8). Within this key area the OECD encouraged schools to provide a differentiated system of learning to ensure that all pupils are able to engage with the resources and information, as well as to use the support staff available appropriately during lessons and activities (OECD 2014). However, despite the implementation of new LNF and recommendations from the OECD, schools in Wales continued to underperform in literacy tests. The 2015 PISA results were highly disappointing as for the fourth time in a row Wales had performed the worst out of the United Kingdom countries and scored below average in all the examinations (Hume 2016). Estyn (2017) have also addressed the issues surrounding literacy development within schools, stating that practitioners are not working together to co-ordinate strategies to support the development of literacy throughout the school. Another area that Estyn (2017) highlighted in their publication was a lack of understanding surrounding the importance of proof-reading work for spelling, punctuation and grammar from both the pupils and practitioners. The recommendations made in these documents can be used by a school who has prioritised literacy development within their SDP, this provides a starting point for the school when considering how to improve literacy skills and supports the developmental process.

It is interesting that the recommendations made by Estyn (2017) and the OECD (2014) highlight similar elements of literacy development within schools as areas for improvement. Many schools follow a specified phonetic programme that should guide them into meeting these recommendations, however there are still challenges and barriers to achieving the recommendations (Jolliffe et al 2019). PTE1 school had previously used a phonetic programme called Jolly Phonics, a multisensory approach to learning literacy skills during early years of education (Reid 2016). Jolliffe et al (2019) describe Jolly Phonics as a child centred approach to learning phonetic sounds in an organised and orderly manner. Mallett (2017) praises the Jolly Phonics approach for providing a system that supports teachers in the delivery of literacy lessons from early childhood in an engaging and natural manner. However, Ni Putu et al (2018) disagrees by stating that teachers are unaware of the process of delivering the Jolly Phonics programme and often miss out crucial elements of the lessons. The report by Ni Putu et al (2018) also states that a lack of resources and confidence can prevent practitioners from fully implementing the Jolly Phonics programme. The barriers addressed by Ni Putu et al (2018) can be linked back to some of the recommendations made by the OECD (2014) and Estyn (2017), through the improvement of

co-ordination and staff delegation in delivering Jolly Phonics schools may potentially notice a higher quality deliverance of literacy. The new programme that PTE1 had invested in was the Read Write Inc (RWI) programme, the Welsh Government (2012) refer to RWI as a phonics based literacy programme that raises standards across a whole cohort. This description suggests that the RWI programme is the correct programme for PTE1 school as their aim in the SDP was to raise literacy standards throughout the school. Waugh et al (2015) states that the RWI programme is designed to assist the individual in the natural process of developing language and literacy skills, RWI use of scaffolding the pupils learning links to Lev Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (Wellman et al 2018). Vygotsky believed that language and interaction between pupils as more intelligent others is a key aspect of learning and developing in all areas of the curriculum (ibid). The RWI programme groups pupils based on the current attainment level regarding literacy (Johnston and Watson 2014). The RWI programme has 10 sets available for the pupils to be placed in, the pupils are then given a block placement within their group and reassessed to decide whether they are ready to progress on to the next set. Due to the continuous revision of groups the RWI programme encourages schools to involve all members of staff in the teaching process, with many teaching assistants being asked to have their own group of students (ibid). However, Goodwyn and Fuller (2011) states that one criticism of RWI is the lack of freedom that staff have when implementing the programme, due to the heavily scripted lessons it can become overly repetitive for staff and pupils, often leading to a lack of enthusiasm. Gunter and Mills (2017) praise the RWI systems high quality training that is available to all teaching and support staff, linking to the recommendations made by OECD (2014) and Estyn (2017) on effective use of support staff and co-ordination.

Developing an Action Point

The SDP provided by PTE1 states that the SDP has been created with the school's aims and vision in mind, with the opinions of the staff and pupils providing the base for areas of development. The SDP document in PTE1 is reviewed biannually by all members of staff to ensure that everyone is aware of the school's strengths, weaknesses and current priorities. Paulo et al (2016) recommends that all practitioners in a school undertake a self-evaluation assessment prior to creating the SDP. Martin et al (2017) states that through a self-evaluation practitioners can highlight their own strengths and areas for improvement, as well as those of their pupils. Martin et al (2017) further explains that senior leadership can then analyse each self-evaluation to find any trends within the evaluations, these will then

become contributing factors when creating the SDP. However, the OECD (2018) states that while the majority of schools in Wales undertake self-evaluations, the quality of the evaluations is poor due to staff believing they are of little value. It is not just the teaching staff's responsibility to contribute to the SDP, all stakeholders within the school should contribute information that can form focus points within the SDP (Welsh Government 2014). The schools governing body are an influential factor when creating a SDP as they have a duty to monitor, review and revise the SDP and the implementations put in place (ibid). Paramour (2018) states that schools need to then analyse the data they have gathered over the year from pupil voice, self-evaluations, questionnaires and monitoring. The combined analysis of the data should then provide the school with some areas that have been consistently mentioned as poor or needing improvement. Fleming (2019) states that this practice is essential in ensuring that schools are delivering a high-quality education, the points addressed through the data analysis can then be used to create the SDP.

In the 2019 – 2020 SDP the first area for development mentioned is the need to improve literacy skills across the whole school, this was due to in school assessments revealing that 50% of the pupils limited knowledge of phonetics and literacy skills limiting their access to other areas of the curriculum. Teaching staff also reported that pupils within the class were often over reliant on them to read texts rather than independently reading resources provided. To ensure that the school met this target it was decided that there would be a change from Jolly Phonics to RWI in the autumn term of 2019. The implementation of RWI was also a part of the school strategic planning, Dockett et al (2018) defines a strategic plan as a blueprint of the current situation and the aspirations that the school has for the area. The aim of the strategic plan is the guide staff members through the process of change and development to ensure that all are aware of their role and responsibilities (ibid). Cheng (2015) states that strategic planning is crucial to staff when participating in a curriculum reform, without out a strategic planning new educational system often fail or underperform due to a lack of planning and preparation. Albadri and Nasereddin (2019) state that a prominent barrier to strategic planning is a lack of financial stability, while the school may believe they have the funding when they write the plan it is never a guarantee throughout the academic year. Dockett et al (2018) explains that a strategic plan is a three-step process, starting with where the school currently is at regarding education and finances. The second step is the consideration of possible goals and the rational behind each one, the third step is to create a plan stating how they will achieve the goal and who is responsible. A strategic plan will also state an expected time scale for achievement along side a vision of what success looks like (ibid). In the SDP PTE1 have separated the plan into five sections, the first section outlines the changes that are being made alongside a rational that includes quotations from self-evaluation forms. The second section of the SDP states what they

believe success will look like in one years' time, displaying estimated statistical figures and classroom observations that will indicate improvement of literacy skills. The third section displays aspirations of success after two years, this section also states statistics and observations while also predicting that they believe the majority of Foundation Phase pupils will have completed RWI before attending the junior department. The fourth section details the three-year progression aims, one of the predicted outcomes from the third year is that there will be an eight-point improvement in national testing. The fifth section of the SDP details who is responsible for this target and highlights two members of staff who will be the senior leadership team members for the implementation of RWI. In the fifth section on the SDP it also details how the impact of RWI will be measured throughout the year, stating that assessments will take place every six weeks to ensure that pupils are receiving the appropriate level of challenge and support in literacy. This is in line with the opinion of Johnston and Watson (2014), who believe that staff members can regularly see progressing in literacy through the regular assessments and regrouping of pupils throughout the academic year.

Reflection and Evaluation

The implementation of a new literacy programme was a key component for PTE1's aim of improving literacy skill throughout the whole school. The Welsh Government (2012) supports the school's decision to use the RWI literacy programme as they believe the programme is able to raise teaching and learning standards throughout a whole school. According to Ruth Miskin (2019), the creator of RWI, there is a mandatory two-day training programme that teaching staff must attend but is optional for support staff. It is clear that the whole school team are committed to improving the literacy standards within the setting as all members of staff attended the training days available through the RWI programme. Alongside the mandatory days the two nominated leadership staff members had fortnightly meetings with the RWI management team to discuss implementation. This information discussed was then presented back to the other members of staff during a after school meeting to ensure that all staff members were aware of the current progression being made. Overall, the implementation of RWI into PTE1 school has been successful as the majority of pupils and staff have found the programme to be engaging and stimulating, Gunter and Mills (2017) support this by stating that pupils participating in RWI find joy in reading and being read to throughout their education. However there have been a few complaints that the programme is overly repetitive, especially for pupils who are nearing the end of the programme, this link

to a previously made point by Goodwyn and Fuller (2011) on pupils sometimes become bored and disengaged. Due to not remaining in PTE1 for the full implementation time period of RWI, it is difficult to comment on whether the school has been able to meet the literacy target. Cremin and Arthur (2014) state that it is highly difficult to measure long term planning on a daily or weekly basis as the end result is not yet in sight, however it is essential that practitioners are tracking their own pupils progression in literacy to ensure they are being appropriately challenged. Progression reviews regarding implementation of a new programme may happen on a monthly or termly basis depending on the school's current circumstances, the review is purely to ensure everyone is on track and prepared to continue with the programme (ibid). As pupils participating in RWI are reassessed every six weeks it allowed staff to see the progression that pupils were making during these time blocks, throughout PTE1 it was observed that the majority of pupils would progress onto the next stage after a six week block. For the pupils who remained on the same stage it was important that the practitioners were aware of possible misconceptions and areas for further improvement (Johnston and Watson 2014). One recommendation that the OECD make for primary education practitioners is to participate in continuous training, this is to ensure that all members of staff are fully aware of the most recent and relevant information available (OECD 2019).

Conclusion

To conclude, it is clear that literacy acquisition is one of the weaknesses within the Welsh Education system and the raising of standards needs to become a priority within all classrooms (National Assembly for Wales 2013). There are a range of support systems available to practitioners from the government and structured programmes specific for literacy development, however it is essential that practitioners are confident in delivering the materials (Estyn 2017; Ni Putu et al 2018). Through continued training, support and guidance for all staff it is possible for Wales to achieve the targets set by OECD (2014) and Estyn (2017).

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