

ECAD 6009/7003 – Where am I teaching

Component 2:

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

Student Number: 2007653

Word count: 2701

	Targed/target	Yr hyn yr wyf wedi'i wneud yn yr aseiniad hwn What I have done in this assignment...
Targed/Target 1	Link your readings to your practice. This will prevent a more generic and descriptive discussion and will provide good opportunities for greater critical engagement with concepts.	I believe this was done throughout by relating the theory to school A and in turn, my own practice. This was also done in the recommendations and the conclusion.
Targed/Target 2	Re-look at Harvard referencing conventions, particularly in terms of in-text references	I believe this has been done, I have gone through and double checked every reference!
Targed/Target 3	N/A	N/A

Introduction

The school development plan (SDP) (Welsh Government, 2014a) is a statement of a school's strategic plan for improvement over a three year time-frame to raising standards typically in the national priority areas of literacy, numeracy and reducing the effect of poverty on attainment. The SDP is constructed based upon self-evaluation carried out by the school and identifies the steps in place to address a series of short and longer-term targets.

This paper will focus on a priority area in School A's SDP relating to equity and inclusion: *"To reduce gaps in attainment and attendance for pupils from protected groups"*. First the SDP process and the underpinning government policies will be described, then the paper will review the evidence relating to the educational disadvantage experienced by pupils from protected groups, in particular minority ethnic backgrounds, before moving onto the actions within School A's SDP.

School A is a primary school in the centre of Cardiff. At the most recent Estyn inspection in 2019 (Estyn, 2019), there were 523 pupils on roll, including 64 part-time pupils, 16 classes, with 2 additional specialist resource base classes for children with severe and complex needs. 8% of pupils are eligible for free school meals (FSM), well below the national average of 18%. Approximately a third of the children come from ethnic minority backgrounds.

Literature review

The SDP Welsh Government (2014a), serves as a strategic roadmap for a school's improvement, detailing actions to enhance learner outcomes. It includes improvement priorities, short- and long-term targets, spanning three years. It is a dynamic document, regularly updated and informed by self-evaluation and contextual data. Emphasizing national priorities such as literacy, numeracy, and mitigating the impact of poverty on educational attainment, the SDP articulates how the school plans to achieve its targets, utilize available resources, and the strategies for staff development to meet school priorities.

Governing bodies collaborate with the headteacher and staff to prepare, monitor, and revise the SDP. The SDP not only guides school improvement but also serves as a reference for regional engagement and Challenge Adviser interactions (Welsh Government, 2014b) aligning with the national model for regional working (Welsh Government, 2014a).

The planning cycle follows an experiential learning model (e.g. Dewey, 1938; Lewin, 1951) linking knowledge and reflection to action. The use of an SDP to guide the school's actions

are part of the conceptualisation of a school as a “learning organisation” (Kools and Stoll, 2016) with the vision of enhancing pupil outcomes for all.

The focus for this paper is School A's commitment in their SDP to reduce gaps in attainment and attendance for pupils from protected groups. Whilst social deprivation is not included in the definition of protected groups (Equality Act, 2010), there is significant intersectionality of poverty, race, class, gender and disability (eg Gillborn and Mirza, 2000). Economic disadvantage - identified via free school meals eligibility - is a common descriptor for schools because it is recognised how important this is in thinking about education outcomes (Trevenna 2023). Therefore, disadvantage will be considered alongside protected groups when discussing actions to reduce gaps in attainment.

Multiple indices show the impact of disadvantage for pupils in Wales: In 2022, the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) results showed an average difference of 74 points in reading, writing and mathematics between the most and least disadvantaged groups in Wales (Welsh Government, 2023). There are criticisms of PISA eg in the sampling and being overly focussed (Zhao, 2020). However, PISA was a driving force in the new curriculum for Wales, (Donaldson, 2015) and is often used as a benchmark of progress. Another measure, directly linked to impact on pupils' futures, is GCSE results. Wales has a larger disadvantage gap than England and the gap between deprived pupils and their peers in GCSE results has widened between 2016 and 2022 (Cardim-Dias and Sibiet, 2022). The large gaps (20-22 months) in the universal subjects of English language and Maths/numeracy are identified in the report as especially concerning, given the impact these have on pupils' life chances. Clearly trying to tackle the gap in attainment for pupils in the primary school years is an important part of starting to reduce these profound differences.

Understanding why disadvantage impacts on progress is essential in order to address it in an action plan. There may be particular skills eg meta-cognition that children from disadvantaged backgrounds are less likely to have, but that can make a significant difference to their progress if taught (EEF). However others argue that the individual focus is not enough (Chzhen and Leesch, 2023), and policies need to address structural differences such as resourcing of schools in areas of greater disadvantage to improve extracurricular resources and out-of-school opportunities (Gruijters et al 2023)

The Welsh Government commitment to eradicate racism (Welsh Government, 2022b) is included in the Curriculum in Wales (Hwb.gov.wales, 2023). Ethnicity, a protected characteristic, shows a complex impact on attainment: Reports highlight positive achievements among various minority ethnic groups with results exceeding white British

peers but also below-average collective attainment for some Black and Mixed ethnicities in Wales (Brentall, 2017; Cardim-Dias and Sibieta, 2022). Given this picture it is important to consider in finer detail what might be causing the relative disadvantage for some groups.

In 2014 an evidence review and practice in Wales report on ethnic minority pupils (Lewis and Starkey, 2014) listed six factors based on the research literature that were contributing to the attainment gaps: socio-economic disadvantage, special educational needs, English language proficiency, gender, discrimination and culture. More recently, immigration status is identified, as impacting progress in early years (Arday, 2021). Immigrant parents experience challenges of language and unfamiliarity with the education system which affect parental engagement (Anthony-Newman 2018), and having English as an additional language (EAL) may well be the case for their children. Language may also underpin the importance of supporting the development of social skills in the early years which are thought to be key (Arday, 2021). Training for teaching staff in racial literacy and age-appropriate inclusion is crucial to address bias and reduce negative racial attitudes.

Developing an action point

The purpose of this section is to examine the processes employed by school A to enact its SDP. This also draws on the priority improvement plan and the pupil development grant (PDG) (Welsh Government, 2023b), allocated to schools primarily based on the number of students eligible for free school meals (eFSM). The PDG is aimed at raising attainment of pupils from low-income households and care experienced children, so links directly with the focus of this paper.

Throughout the SDP and the key priority areas identified in the most recent annual summary improvement plan, there is a commitment to monitoring progress against the curriculum with multiple references to assessment and measurement across the domains. In practice there is clearly stated intent to evaluate progress through various means, including the review of pupils' books, walk-arounds, and learning outcomes. The approach adopted is in keeping with the four purposes (Hwb.gov.wales, 2020) and Welsh Government's overarching evaluation and improvement principles (Hwb.gov.wales, 2022). However, in the majority of the plans "success criteria" there are no specified forms of measurement or targets and there is an absence of quantitative data in the reviews, with a predominant emphasis on experiential and qualitative data. This was something reflected in the schools most recent Estyn report of 2019 (appendix) with one of the recommendations being to sharpen monitoring. Whilst the Welsh Government evaluation approach to data (Hwb.gov.wales)

does caution against focussing solely on quantitative data due to risk of chasing numbers to hit a target rather than taking a broader perspective, it does also point out that data is important in supporting the self-evaluation process and fit for purpose for the needs of the school.

One of the driving principles behind the PDG is the creation of a community focussed school (Welsh Government, 2022), to ensure that all children have the best preparation for their future: For those from disadvantaged backgrounds this is particularly important, as shown during the pandemic, and is created when all the services, community and the family work together (Education policy institute, 2021). Many of the activities in School A are aimed at creating this community focus and particularly parental involvement.

Parental Involvement and Communication

One avenue through which the school involves parents in the school community is the monthly school newsletter. It serves as a medium to address different aspects of school life, with focus questions derived from the school's strategic evaluation and improvement processes. For instance, in the academic year 2023/24, topics such as "positive relationships" and "writing" were explored. Each issue incorporates feedback from previous months' inquiries, providing insight into the school's responsiveness.

School A has a specific programme for engaging with parents/carers of children looked after, called PLACE (Parents, Carers, and Looked After Children Empowerment). Educational disadvantage is one of the known impacts of the experience of being in the care system (Berger et al, 2015) but school can be a positive experience for these children (Mannay et al, 2017) This initiative brings together parents and carers of looked after children for peer support. Additionally, the school facilitates meetings between carers and their child's teacher and makes sure each child has a one-page profile to facilitate understanding the individual needs and preferences of these students.

Encouraging Inclusion and Equality: The school is dedicated to fostering inclusion and equality across all student demographics, creating a respectful environment where diversity is recognized and appreciated. For example, the curriculum includes teachings on the United Nations rights of the child (Unicef.org.uk). They promote cultural inclusivity, celebrating various festivities related to students' ethnic backgrounds. To mitigate economic disparities among students, the school has implemented practical measures such as a breakfast club and providing free uniforms, to ensure financial constraints do not hinder a student's ability to fully participate in the educational experience. Integration of all children, including those

with additional needs, during non-lesson times such as break periods and assemblies to create an inclusive and supportive environment that caters to the needs of every student.

The PDG statement identifies three Focus areas: Teaching interventions, social and emotional well-being and enrichment and experiences, each area includes a financial commitment, a description and a visible learning effect size (VLES). VLES are based on Professor John Hattie's work which aims to identify the effect size of interventions so that schools can prioritise those with greatest effects. The model identifies an effect size of 0.4 as a year's learning so any intervention delivering greater effect than 0.4 is having a positive effect. For individual children with learning needs, School A's PDG identifies teaching interventions as a focus area (with the visible learning effect size of 0.77), using higher level teaching assistants (HLTAs) to provide literacy and numeracy support, with an Edukey intervention tracker (software used in schools) measuring progress. The HLTAs also worked with teachers to deliver a wellbeing intervention within the school that included parental involvement. This was designated a VLES of 0.62 with a measurable output of 0 exclusions. The enrichment programme (with a VLES of 0.53) included work with parents and improving the indoor and outdoor sensory provision.

Reflection and evaluation

Analysis of School A's implementation of the SDP reveals a commitment to inclusive practices to achieve their goal of closing the attainment gaps, aligning its priorities with national emphases on literacy, numeracy, and poverty mitigation. Evaluating the schools progress highlights a potential improvement area given the absence of specified measurement in success criteria (at least in the public domain). Integrating tracked data and case studies into the SDP could provide a more robust evaluation.

Socioeconomic Factors and Educational Disparities

The school's commitment to fostering inclusion and equality is evident through tangible measures such as breakfast club and provision of free uniforms. The VLES approach adds depth to the assessment of interventions. An exploration of the long-term impact and scalability of these measures would help with reflection on the effectiveness of the strategies implemented.

Addressing Racial Disparities

In the Welsh government report on raising the attainment of pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds (Lewis and Starkey 2014) there were nine recommended practices: School A

mostly incorporates these, including an inclusive curriculum reflecting diverse heritage, respectful attitudes, high expectations, zero tolerance of racism, strong leadership and pastoral care. One area for development would be to ensure the school employ staff from a diverse ethnic background to reflect the community.

The school's restorative approaches (Wales Restorative Approaches Partnership, 2017) combined with well-being interventions and the rights of the child sessions (Unicef.org.uk) create an inclusive school climate: Huguley et al, (2022) identified the importance of these combinations to improve both discipline and equity in academic performance.

Parental Involvement and Communication

School A is committed to parental involvement, identified by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation as one of the most effective form of intervention (Egan, 2013) particularly for disadvantaged pupils, boosting their progress by at least 4 months, or more for those with low attainment (Education Endowment Foundation toolkit). Barriers such as EAL, parents own negative experience of education and practicalities like access to the internet, need to be overcome ((Baquendano-Lopez, Alexander and Hernadez, 2013; Hornby and Blackwell, 2018). Specific bespoke forms of support are needed (Harris and Goodall, 2007)

One such bespoke support in School A is the PLACE programme for children looked after and with ALN (described earlier). School A could potentially set up more bespoke support systems for particular needs, using Joyce Epstein's framework of six models of involvement (Epstein, 2011) and explore the suggestions in the handbook designed for schools (Epstein et al, 2018). For example, the use of HLTAs (from the PDG) in developing ICT skills.

School A makes significant efforts to integrate technology into the general curriculum and engage parents in fostering ICT skills. ICT is vital in reducing the disadvantage gap but also, as discovered in the pandemic, digital poverty at home can compound disadvantage (Blackmore et al 2003). For example on the partnerships schools website (www.partnershipschools.org) there is a case study of "TechFests" where primary age pupils demonstrate for parents the technology they use in school and a "wellness fair" where students and families engage in games and learn about community resources. There is a need for professional development for teachers, ensuring they are well-equipped to deliver effective ICT education and foster partnerships with local technology firms or experts in the field. Collaborating with industry professionals could bring real-world applications into the classroom, providing students with valuable insights and authentic contexts in line with current industry.

In summary, the school's progress review processes, as outlined in its SDP, demonstrate a commitment to holistic development and inclusivity. While the focus on experiential and qualitative data is evident, the school's efforts to engage parents, address economic disparities, promote cultural diversity, support students with disabilities, and care for children looked after contribute to a comprehensive and inclusive educational environment. Further exploration into the long-term impact of these initiatives could provide valuable insights for ongoing improvement and development.

Conclusion

This assignment critically evaluates the School Development Plan (SDP) of School A, with a central focus on promoting equity and inclusion in the educational landscape. The literature review underscores the challenges confronting students, particularly those from minority ethnic backgrounds, highlighting the importance of understanding the underlying causal factors. School A's implementation of the SDP shows a robust dedication to inclusive practices, exemplified through initiatives fostering equality and active parental involvement. The assignment has shown the indispensable role of establishing measurable success criteria to facilitate a comprehensive evaluation of progress.

In terms of personal reflection, two points have emerged. Firstly, an enhanced understanding of the intricate role teachers play in executing governmental policies underscores the necessity for me to comprehend the rationale behind such decisions at the governmental level. Secondly, a heightened awareness of the diverse needs of students within protected groups has transpired, prompting a consideration of varied strategies to address disparities in their educational experiences. Consequently, my personal objective, stemming from this assignment, is to change my approach to qualitative data collection in my classroom, thereby enabling a more nuanced measurement of the impact of implemented strategies.

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