

	Previous Targets	What I have done to improve in this assignment
<u>1</u>	Ensure the quality of presentation is maintained throughout.	Proofread assignment aloud to ensure a consistent academic flow. Upkeep the presentation standards of font, spacing and size.
<u>2</u>	Omit punctuation after date in brackets in the references.	Revisit the Harvard UWTSD guidelines.

Word count: 2740

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

The productivity of an academic institution is inseparable from strategic planning. The cyclical nature of self-reflection, identification of priorities, developing approaches to address priorities, implementation of action and reviewing impact ensures that quality is never accidental. Excellence is the result of high standards, sincere effort, effective direction and skilful execution (Tupa and McFadden, 2009). The purpose of this paper is to critically examine the actions, impact and evidence of a specific School Development Plan (SDP). In line with BERA Guidelines (2018), which state anonymity is necessary, the focused institution will be referred to as school x. To exercise a thorough examination of the SDP at school x, the environment must be contextualised. School x is an 11-18 English medium faith-based institute, situated in a fairly affluent area of Cardiff city. The school is highly oversubscribed with around 1300 pupils on roll and boasts academic success throughout all phases. The three-year SDP was created in 2018 with four strategic aims. For a concise and focused report, this paper will conduct an in-depth examination of strategic aim 1: teaching for learning. This objective is crucial in endorsing the consistency of high standards and the learners at school x embrace the four purposes of the new curriculum.

Graham Handscomb (2019) insinuated that all aspects of school function, including teaching and learning, is regulated by the research the institute engages with. An SDP is a live document that is regularly monitored through formal review at least once annually.

Essentially, development planning is the recognized need for a systematic and whole-school approach to seeking improvement. Advocates for development state that it is a method used to identify the short comings of an establishment so that intervention can be put in place and success rates can be enhanced (Hargreaves and Hopkins, 1991). SDPs afford autonomy to schools in decision-making based on what is most required in a specific context. Moreover, development plans encourage communal aspirations in a school environment through the requirement of all stakeholders to participate in the development of the plan.

In the creation of an SDP, there are key components to be considered that ensure the plan is as practical as possible. These include clarity, challenge, communication, consistency, data, resilience, pace, effort and excellence (Brighouse, 2013). Estyn (2013) illustrate that the relationship between excellent leadership and excellent teaching is successful when professional development that places the ownness on national priorities for advancement as well as on progressing expertise is accessible. Accordingly, staff training forms the foundations of a progressive workplace.

For an SPD to be successfully implemented, school culture must be represented in the planning process. Harris (2002) supported this when stating that SPDs can only be beneficial when the objectives correspond with the environment. Thus, school improvement is subjective to an institute and must consider national, local and individual priorities.

Although schools are autonomous in determining the cycle they wish to adopt in the creation of their SDP (Welsh Government, 2014: Regulation 5(1)), producing an SDP is commonly a fourfold cycle of self-evaluation, strategic planning, action and review with the purpose being to improve the prospects of learners. Regular self-evaluation informs a school of its performance and results in the identification of improvement priorities (Welsh Government, 2014). The very basis of self-evaluation is the notion of reflective practice, which is said by academics to be transformative to education in that it addresses the preconceptions which may unintentionally impact on teaching and learning (Brookfield, 1995). This is supported by Harrison (2004) who alludes to the point that professional learning and the development of superb education is advanced through reflective practice.

The process of self-evaluation involves drawing upon all available data and including all stakeholders in the analysis of data to give a representative picture of the current school position. A broad range of both qualitative data such as inspection reports and quantitative data such as attainment results must be gathered, and made sense of prior to the creation of an SDP. Research has implied that data-based decision-making can contribute to increased learning and achievement (Van Geel et al, 2016). Furthermore, small scale action research such as learning walks and cross departmental review, commissioned around whole-school issues provide evidence that enables amendments to policies and practice. However, Estyn (2012) found that data analysis is an underdeveloped skill and identified that one in five schools fail to effectively infer information from data that challenges and progresses school function. For that reason, development planning is complex and requires intellectual rationale.

Strategic planning refers to the participation of all stakeholders in the formation of next steps for improvement (Hanover Research Group, 2010). Then, communication with all schooling

staff shares the expectations, goals, responsibilities and timescales which forms the foundations of the action process. Here, CPD for practitioners enables understanding in how to best implement the aims of the plan. Finally, an annual review of the functioning of the strategic aims is mandatory to reflect on school progress and direct further action. The ideal outcome is that measurable improvement is made to prevent an ambience of demoralisation.

In certifying improvement planning is functionable, short-term goals and an inward focus in a low morale environment should be avoided. This is said to impede on the success of organised improvement (Deal and Peterson, 1994). Furthermore, the cycle applied must precedent the principles presented in the new curriculum for Wales that promote the inclusion of high expectations, holistic development, collaboration and challenge in order for the four purposes to be embedded into Welsh citizens (Donaldson, 2015).

It has been expressed that a successful means of improving school function is through the enhancement of the teaching and learning process (Hargreaves and Hopkins, 1994). The Education Endowment Foundation (2018) exclaim that teaching is done by students rather than to them, indicating that without a motivation and intrinsic desire to engage with learning, no teacher can accomplish their purpose. This promotes the notion that effort, attitude and mindset of learners is the key to progressive learning. Thus, the cultivation of growth mindset principles need to be evident throughout schooling (Dweck, 2006).

Teaching for learning involves the techniques employed by a professional that avoid surface learning and instead stimulates deepened knowledge. Deep learning occurs where problem solving, and social interaction is present in the classroom. Mercer (1995) implies that social learning influences the development of higher order thinking skills, a distinguishing feature of successful citizens. On the contrary, surface learning ignore the ability for learners to apply knowledge in various contexts and therefore does not fit the requirements of the new curriculum. This strategic aim recognises the requirement for content to be memorable and reproduced in authentic, alternative contexts and continues to identify methods of effectively embedding this degree of understanding. Academics have recommended that for children to acquire knowledge, they must be placed in the learning zone (Hattie and Clarke, 2019). If learners feel too comfortable or too panicked with the content, then learning will not occur. Children need to grasp that learning should be challenging as it advances progression. The learning zone is a pit of uncertainty whereby the teacher facilitates and scaffolds until understanding is achieved. The theory of the learning zone compliments Vygotsky's (1978) theory of the zone of proximal development, a social constructivist approach to education.

Moreover, teaching for learning is said to be enhanced when assessment for learning strategies are consistently utilised. The Welsh Government (2010) define assessment for

learning as methods that allow for the identification of a student's position on the learning continuum. Wiliam (2009) alluded to the theory that assessment for learning methods advance the relationship between teaching and learning. Consequently, for deepened understanding to occur, teachers must exemplify a skill in assessment for learning.

This development point is the focus of this paper as the essence of teaching for learning is to enrich the experiences and capabilities of each individual learner (Jonassen and Land, 2012). This encompasses the whole purpose of education and, consequently, is an element of the education that must be mastered.

For a school to make sustained improvement and progress, a clear purpose that is shared and understood by all is required. To strive for clarity, the aims of the SDP at school x are specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and timely. School x devised their SDP in line with their mission statement, ethos and values which exclaim that the institute should fully support each individual on their path of self-discovery and growth. From this derives the school vision which informs the strategic aims for the improvement.

School x state they adopt a bottom up approach to strategic planning. For a bottom-up approach to be present in the school development process, participants need to have shared beliefs on what is important and why (Fullan, 1994). Their process is as follows: an open invitation to join the creation of the SDP is shared with all staff, the improvement group consists of volunteers from all areas of the school to strive for a balanced and fair perspective, four strategic aims are devised and agreed upon by the whole group, participants are divided into four groups where they will meet separately and identify actions needed to achieve the strategic aim, the whole group collectively share action points for their aims to ensure ideas are reflected upon and enhanced, a draft 3 year plan is produced and shared with the whole school, suggestions are welcomed and necessary amendments made, student congress then have an opportunity to contribute, then governors deliver their input and the SDP is approved.

The four strategic aims developed by school x are:

1. Teaching for learning
2. Ethos and environment
3. Achievement and standards
4. Maximising opportunities for staff

The acronym 'team' is used to discuss the aims as it signifies the importance of the schooling community working as one collective organisation to create a wave of improvement throughout the wider community.

Educational decision making is scientifically reliable where evidence-based education is central to planning (Victoria State Government, 2018). School x relied upon data collected internationally, nationally, from the local authority and at a personal level. Inferences from quantitative data suggested that school x excels locally and nationally in core numeracy, literacy and science skills (My Local School, 2019). However, qualitative data alludes to the point that all teaching throughout the school must be categorised as best practice (Estyn, 2018). This implies that teaching across all departments must encourage the holistic development of learners and all achievements must be recognised and supported.

Restrictive focus on national priorities such as literacy and numeracy may address the position of Welsh learners on PISA league tables (OECD, 2019), however it does not promote the four purposes and new curriculum. Therefore, effective practice must be daily practice across the whole establishment.

Teaching has been defined as a means of excelling potential. Student progress should be the benchmark by which teacher effectiveness is measured (The Sutton Trust, 2014). The actions outlined by the SDP of school x are extensive and promoted by academic literature. The development of three measures for action will be discussed to support the teaching for learning strategic aim.

Firstly, teaching for learning is only possible when the needs of each child are adhered to. School x achieve this through tracking pupil attainment from year 7, appropriate intervention and collaboration. A culture of self-evaluation is only effective when processes for identifying groups of pupils not meeting their potential is common practice. Formative and summative assessments from year 7 allows for early intervention which closes the attainment gap and raises standards. Attainment gaps present themselves in various ways such as gender gaps, ethnicity gaps and social class underachievement (Francis and Skelton, 2005). Intervention and tracking of vulnerable groups prevent students from slipping through the net. A plausible reason for attainment gaps is the societal norms that influence a subconscious bias for professionals (Skelton et al, 2007). These norms influence expectations of learners, such as boys being more STEM capable and girls being more Literate. Tracking and intervention is a means of abolishing preconceptions as disparities are made explicit. Moreover, Jones (2017) implies that to tackle the poverty impact on the attainment crisis, it is beneficial to assist families in actively supporting their child's learning. Therefore, school x ensure consistent parental engagement and offer advice in how to enhance education at home. Likewise, it has been exclaimed by academics that involving families in education restores parents' confidence in the system and improves communication and interaction between the school and the community (Garcia and Thornton, 2014; Llamas and Tuazon 2016).

Henceforth, tracking, intervention and community engagement is a pivotal action in enhancing teaching for learning.

Secondly, staff collaboration in the form of cross departmental review, monthly staff meetings and sharing practice are widely celebrated at school x. While routine is important in education, exhausting the use of a teaching strategy results in a passive student response and disengagement with learning (EEF, 2018). Therefore, professional collaboration and sharing expertise improves professionalism and aids teaching for learning.

Finally, the SDP at school x highlights that all learners should experience an education that stretches and challenges them. Staff development is central to creating an environment of excellence. Teaching for learning is met by quality CPD led by professionals for professionals (Loxley et al, 2007)

School x have demonstrated that they are a forward-thinking organisation with a focus on results, action, opportunities, possibilities and relationships through the analysis of their improvement plan. Their SDP is clear, detailed and based on the necessities of the environment. The four strategic aims are attainable and coincide with the targeted recommendations or no more than five priorities that would dissolve the capability of achieving each aim (Hanover Research, 2014).

While school x describe their development process as a bottom up approach, the support and endorsement from higher authorities ensures a checks and balance system. This emphasizes the contribution of teachers in effectively evaluating their experiences and guidance is secured from senior leads. It is agreed by most commentators that neither extreme is ideal and a balance of both bottom-up and top-down creates a unified consensus within school management (MacBeath, 2005).

It is important to keep in mind the lack of transferability and generalisation of the SDP when evaluation the procedure at school x. As previously mentioned, an improvement plan is relative to the context it is written for and actions such as encouraging parental engagement may be unfeasible to institutes with socio-economic obstacles (Singh and Mo, 2008). In the current climate with welfare support being complex for many families, often parents take on multiple occupations to provide. In turn, this means time spent at home to assist with learning can be difficult. Furthermore, social mobility is becoming increasingly uncommon. Advice from educators may come across as condescending. Therefore, attitudes towards education can be uncooperative due to personal schooling experiences (Gorard and Huat See, 2013). An option in circumstances like these is for schools to offer extensive opportunities to develop academia and extracurricular activities. However, with expectations

of the education service continuing to rise, it seems almost impossible to enrich opportunities for learners without substantial funding and support (Hargreaves and Hopkins, 1991).

An alternative approach to the formation of an SDP is collaboration with successful schools and the adoption of their procedures. However, with the nature of a schooling environment being so diverse between each institution it would be a challenge to mimic the function of one school to fully meet the requirements of another.

This paper has provided an insight into a school development process and taken a deep dive into a particular strategic aim with a discussion surrounding the action to be implemented for improvement. It is practical to suggest that a perfect method of improvement planning is non-existent. Approaches will be distinguishable from school to school and alter to correspond with the milieu of a specific institute. In continuing professional practice and embarking upon a career in the field of education, the findings have enhanced my appreciation of what it means to be an active member of schooling staff. Participating in improvement planning has the ability to benefit a whole community and acts as a form of social justice in that it enhances the educational experiences of learners. Chow et al (2015) promote that teachers are frontline researchers who have the capability to make vital changes to school function when supported by higher authorities. Regarding future professionalism, teaching for learning will subside at the forefront of planning to maximise opportunities for learners to exceed potential.

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