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ECAD7003

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

Word Count: 2,697

Targets

	<u>Target</u>	<u>What have I done in this assignment</u>
<u>Target 1</u>	You should include references in your concluding statements which would add more credibility to your closing remarks	I have included reference used within my assignment to support my conclusion
<u>Target 2</u>	More links to literature and a clear rationale would allow you to show deeper reflections	I have explored more research and incorporated them into the assignment

Introduction

At my Professional Teaching Experience (PTE) school, I identified a specific focus which the school was targeting to improve and identified the action points required to fulfil their targets found within their School Development Plan (SDP), following a discussion with the acting headteacher. The action point which I have chosen to research and discuss from the SDP is 'ensuring an appropriate level of challenge to all pupils including the more able'.

The school is located in a rural area within the City and County of Swansea authority and will remain anonymous in this assignment and therefore will be referred to as 'School A'. As stated by the Estyn (2023) report, School A is a primary school for children aged three-to-eleven-years-old with 416 pupils, including 57 nursery class pupils. The percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals is 40.9%, which is above the national average of 23%. The national average percentage of pupils in a primary school with additional learning needs is 16.1%, however, School A has a percentage of 23.9% of pupils with additional learning needs. 5% of the pupils attending School A have been identified as English as an Additional Language learners.

Literature Review

An SDP is a strategic plan for school improvement by drawing together the school's primary concerns, the actions which will be taken to increase school quality and the resources which will be required to increase quality, which guides in building the aims the school wishes to achieve (Department of Education, n.d.). An SDP is advantageous as it allows educational practitioners to comprehend the action points which must be addressed to tackle issues faced in the school and develop and guide the school in the right direction moving forward (Körkkö et al., 2022).

A key step of developing an SDP is the self-evaluation process, which is where the school develop action points to enable school development by assessing strengths, pupil

achievement and performance levels, areas for improvement and actions required to create the school improvement targets to develop both professional and pupil learning (Welsh Government, 2014; Goldstone, 2022). Furthermore, when developing the SDP, data-analysis is conducted by evaluating both qualitative and quantitative data collected during self-evaluation, such as feedback from pupils, teachers and parents, lesson observations, reflections and pupil performance scores, and then utilising the findings to identify school improvement points (Goldstone, 2022).

Involving stakeholders, such as those who are involved in the school, for instance, pupils, teachers, parents, local organisations and community, are an important part of developing the SDP as it allows the stakeholders to perceive a sense of appreciation from the school due to participating in school improvement, and thus results in an SDP with stakeholder cooperation, effective behaviour management, enhanced teaching goals, learning, motivation and communication skill considerations (Khadija, 2022; Goldstone, 2022).

Incorporating stakeholder viewpoints when developing the SDP is key as it allows for diverse impacts on targets and action points to focus on for school improvement (Snell-Rood et al., 2020).

A strategic plan is developed with consideration to the self-evaluation and data analysis findings and it outlines targets and actions addressing concerns and performance to ensure school improvement and development by adopting the action points and targets (Chukwumah, 2015). Measuring the impact of the SDP is a key aspect of school improvement as the progress of the school in relation to its targets and action points must be consistently reviewed to ensure adequate improvement and reviewed annually to ensure continuous development (Welsh Government, 2014).

After analysing School A's SDP, I have chosen to focus on their target to "ensure that More Able and Talented (MAT) pupils are identified and appropriately challenged" to fulfil their second strategic priority to "ensure teaching is effective in all classes to enable pupils to progressively develop their skills over time".

MAT pupils are pupils who are performing beyond the standards of pupils their age in one-or-more areas of learning experience (Welsh Government, 2015). This is arguably an inadequate definition of MAT learners as the Curriculum for Wales has introduced progression steps for a continuum of learning from three to sixteen without phases (Donaldson, 2015) and therefore learning is not measured in relation to age in Wales.

Challenging learners allows them to demonstrate ambition to build refined self-regulation, social and cognitive abilities by utilizing their top ability skills (Miller, 2003). Although this demonstrates the importance of challenging pupils, including MAT learners, Miller's (2003) findings are arguably outdated as there have been changes to the Curriculum for Wales since 2003 with new stresses on developing technological and digital skills (Ng'ambi et al., 2016) therefore findings from 2003 lack validity and are not applicable to learners in 2024. Nevertheless, more recent findings suggest that indeed exploring and working on challenging activities regardless of difficulties experienced are fundamental to pupil performance (Porter et al., 2020). However, Porter et al., (2020) findings are contradicted by research suggesting that work which is too challenging may be unmanageable for pupils (Martin, 2020). Therefore, teachers must ensure that all pupils in the class are appropriately challenged at the correct level to avoid stressing pupils and instead facilitating their performance, thus must focus on the pedagogical teaching standard 'differentiation' (Welsh Government, 2019). However, some teachers may often struggle to differentiate curriculum activities to MAT pupil abilities to make activities challenging (Letina, 2021), thus resulting in lower achievement potential among MAT pupils, which highlights the importance of ensuring MAT pupils are challenged appropriately.

Ensuring that MAT pupils are appropriately challenged may result in them experiencing increased positive emotional wellbeing as a lack of challenge causes a plateau of learning which results in discontentment during tasks (Scager et al., 2014). This is supported by Estyn (2018) who state that a lack of challenge acts as a barrier to MAT pupils' achievement levels and results in them appearing 'too clever' to their peers which may result in isolation

from their peers. However, a lack of disparity was established between MAT pupils and their peers when their wellbeing levels were assessed in relation to their self-concept and social acceptance (Košir et al., 2016), which counters the notion that MAT pupils may experience increased isolation compared to their peers. MAT pupils have increased opportunities to help their peers during tasks (Klimecká, 2023), thus, combating the negative influences of being regarded as 'too clever' and allowing them to increasingly interact with peers in school. Additionally, excellent pastoral assistance and career advice guarantee that MAT pupils make ambitious decisions, thereby supporting their emotional wellbeing (Welsh Government, 2008), thus highlighting that appropriate guidance and challenge to MAT pupils supports their wellbeing.

Developing an Action Plan

Estyn (2023) identified that School A must 'ensure teaching is effective in all classes to enable pupils to progressively develop their skills over time' as their second strategic priority. Therefore, to develop an action point, the senior leadership team (SLT) in School A, conducted self-evaluation. The school identified the target 'ensuring MAT pupils are identified and appropriately challenged' as an area for development through interviews with teachers and pupils. The SLT conducted book looks of lower, average and higher ability pupils from every class in the school, this is key as it allowed the teachers to assess within their classrooms the proficiency of the learning which is occurring (Chapman & Sammons, 2013).

The school conducted data analysis of quantitative data, such as the school's Estyn report and Curriculum for Wales guidance documents to understand how to support pupils effectively. The school analysed qualitative data, such as attendance scores and pupil achievement levels during class to identify MAT pupils, this would have allowed the standard of pupils' personal performance to be assessed in terms of their written and non-written

work, alongside monitoring each pupils' learning development outcomes and achievements (Chapman & Sammons, 2013). Therefore, pupils who were performing beyond expectations were identified as MAT learners because of the data analysis. Hulme et al., (2020) suggest that local assessments should be undertaken to accurately identify MAT pupils, however, School A did not analyse data from local assessments to identify MAT pupils and thus the MAT pupils who were identified may not meet the criteria of performance expectations for MAT pupils.

A stakeholder involved in developing their target was the SLT member who was assigned as the lead for MAT pupils who will lead the target to ensure progress is being made. Every class teacher was stakeholders responsible for operating the target daily by ensuring that MAT pupils in their classrooms are being appropriately challenged. Furthermore, the school pupils were stakeholders who were involved in developing the target which is an excellent approach to expanding pupil engagement and vocalisation to propose and create purposeful inputs to school improvement and therefore making them partners in developing the SDP (Weiss, 2018). Thus, we can see that teachers and pupils were the stakeholders who were involved in developing the SDP but there was a lack of parental involvement as stakeholders in the development of School A's SDP despite worries about their child's education, as well as their physical and mental experiences (Janmaat, McCowan & Rao, 2016).

The strategic planning included implementation of the National Association for Able Children in Education (NACE) approaches to raise expectations of MAT pupils during learning by integrating extension tasks and extra-curricular activities to further enrich MAT pupils' learning experiences in school (NACE, n.d.). This will allow teachers to plan for extension tasks using NACE guidelines to ensure MAT pupils understand what is expected of them. School A has implemented the 'Must, Should, Could' (MSC) differentiation strategy into tasks as part of their strategic planning which encourages scaffolding of MAT pupils' knowledge before giving them a task which would challenge their understanding (Cooper, 2021).

However, implementation of the MSC differentiation strategy results increased time required

for planning (Noon, 2024) which may result in teachers becoming inconsistent in their planning and therefore the MSC strategy may be an ineffective strategic planning method in ensuring MAT pupils are identified and appropriately challenged.

The school will measure the impact for their target by reviewing progress every month by the SLT through conducting book looks, lesson observations, observing planning and learning walks. This is advantageous in ensuring school improvement as there is evidence of precise examination of each pupils' development (Chapman & Sammons, 2013). Therefore, this will allow the SLT to observe whether School A are on track to achieving their target following a year of developing their current SDP. School A will know they have been effective in achieving their target once they observe the MAT pupils working independently across both foundation and Key Stage 2 phases and that they are engaging in a higher level of work than that which is expected for their age. Despite School A planning to measure the impact of their action plan regularly, they counter the statements of Ronksley-Pavia and Neumann (2020), within their SDP as there is a lack of information pertaining to setting MAT pupils individual targets and the expectation of where they should be in terms of their performance following a year of implementing the strategic planning, this may result in a lack of clear goals for MAT pupils and therefore reducing their performance expectations.

Reflections and Evaluation

To build upon SDP development in the future, when involving stakeholders, School A should seek to involve parents and thus provide a voice in addressing pupils' requirements and their wants (Odhiambo & Hill, 2012). This will allow stakeholder contributions for actions which may be most effective in addressing MAT needs and actions which may be needed to address MAT pupils' wellbeing and behavioural expectations in school. Parental stakeholder engagement is further supported by findings suggesting that it is positively correlated to pupils' school accomplishments (Kocayörük, 2016). This may be explained by

Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory which suggests that relationships within a child's microsystem, such as their immediate relationships with parents, teachers or siblings, can help to develop resilience when exploring beyond their microsystem (Antony, 2022). This suggests that strong parental relationships may encourage MAT pupils to become confident and independent learners.

The strategic planning of School A integrates NACE practices into learning for MAT pupils following the completion of their classwork to challenge their knowledge and understanding (NACE, n.d.), however, this may be overwhelming for pupils as there is too much work expected for them to complete during one lesson. NACE practices do not consider how non-MAT pupils can be challenged and therefore excludes average and lower ability pupils by enriching the learning experiences for MAT pupils only, therefore resulting in MAT pupils having and developing contrasting thoughts and perceptions to their peers (Silverman, 2011). Therefore, School A should integrate tasks which allow MAT pupils to support their peers so that they may collaborate and develop strong relationships by allowing the pupils to connect and reduce the likelihood of loneliness among pupils (Casino-García et al., 2021).

The MSC strategy gives pupils the choice to complete tasks which are aimed at lower, average or higher ability learning (Cooper, 2021), this is arguably a disadvantage to School A's strategic planning as it may result in MAT pupils failing to engage in the higher ability tasks which would ensure that they are being suitably challenged. Nevertheless, MSC encourages pupils of all learning ability levels in a class to follow instructions, work at their own pace and challenge themselves appropriately (Freelands Foundation, 2020). This will allow all pupils an opportunity to become MAT pupils by preventing them from being 'stuck' in their suggested ability group (McGillicuddy & Divine, 2020). Indeed, all pupils, including MAT pupils performed beyond expectations when removed from ability groups and empowered pupils to work independently, explore, and challenge their own understanding instead (Steenbergen-Hu, Makel & Olszewski-Kubilius, 2016).

Learning is enhanced due to cognitive development as cognitive skills are used to develop knowledge and abilities, nevertheless, motivation to learn is the greatest key for pupils during education and this motivation can be encouraged by setting goals for pupils (Filgona et al., 2020). Therefore, to practically improve how School A measures the impact of their target, they should set learning goals to challenge MAT pupils so they can work through their goals progressively while developing their cognitive abilities through learning (Filgona et al., 2020). This is supported by Piaget's theory of cognitive development which suggests that pupils engaging in suitable approaches enabling problem solving and reasoning at the correct level causes effective cognitive development (Kazi & Galanaki, 2020). However, Piaget's theory fails to consider the individual learning abilities of each pupil, therefore, teachers must set high quality learning goals which appropriately challenge every individual MAT pupil appropriately, thus allowing them to build their rational thinking, creativity and intellectuality by integrating lower-level cognitive skills to more complex ones which they may be familiar with as a MAT pupil (Piske et al., 2017).

Conclusion

I have explored the SDP process, observed how School A developed their SDP. I have established that SDPs are fundamental in guiding schools to improve the quality of learning by addressing existing issues or areas for development (Körkkö et al., 2022). I have explored School A's SDP and selected the target 'ensuring MAT pupils are identified and appropriately challenged', to analyse in further detail as an area for development.

I have identified professional standards for teaching and leadership (Welsh Government, 2019), which I will reflect upon to improve my future practice. For instance, I will seek to build upon the leadership strand regarding 'taking responsibility for self' as I will aim to build positive and professional relationships with school stakeholders, such as colleagues, parents, and pupils to support in creating a learning environment where all needs are being

met, thus enhancing all pupils', including MAT pupils' school accomplishments (Kocayörük, 2016). Additionally, it will be critical to build upon my understanding of the refining teaching strand 'differentiation' as I must understand how MAT learners must be supported to become independent learners with high expectations to drive aspirational career goals while ensuring that MAT pupils are appropriately challenged during their learning experiences, therefore I must enhance my understanding of the influencing learners strand 'challenge and expectations' to ensure that pupils are motivated to learn and perform to their full potential, thereby enabling cognitive developmental progression (Kazi & Galanaki, 2020; Piske et al., 2017).

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