



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

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Targets	What I have done in this assignment?
Include further criticality throughout your assignment, you do this well but continue to address the barriers and limitations throughout.	I have addressed barriers and limitations as well as being critical.
Synthesise multiple sources to strengthen your main points.	I have used multiple sources to strengthen points.

This report aims to identify and critically reflect on how school A develops an aspect of its school development plan (SDP). An SDP is a strategic plan for improvement which brings together school priorities, the measures it aims to take to raise standards, the resources required to achieve this and the outcomes and targets it intends to meet. School A is a Church in Wales Primary School with 224 pupils currently on roll, 1.2% of those pupils being eligible for free school meals (FSM) and 7.5% of pupils being identified as having additional learning needs (ALN). This report will reflect on the actions that school A takes to improve standards of literacy, specifically looking at the effect of guided reading as Reading for Pleasure (RfP) and how this can be used to improve literacy skills in primary aged children. The report will also look into how pupil's attainment in literacy may be affected by linguistic or socio-economic factors such as deprivation or ALN. Estyn (2022) reported that school A notably seeks to consistently develop pupil's literacy skills and this target remains to be a high priority across the school.

An SDP is a plan for school improvement that outlines the specific actions they aim to take to enhance learning outcomes. It is based on the school's ongoing self-evaluation and analysis of student data and includes both short and long-term targets, often prioritising raising the standards of education in literacy and numeracy as well as looking at reducing the impact of poverty on attainment. Those involved in the process include parents, governors and pupils along with teaching staff; this involvement is crucial as it can lead to a more comprehensive understanding of the school's needs and can improve decision making as it allows for the consideration of multiple viewpoints and potential challenges from differing perspectives (Davies and Ellison, 2003).

From September 2015 it was a requirement that all school's SDPs adhered to the relevant regulations as set out by acts such as The School Performance and Absence Targets (Wales) Regulations 2011, The School Teacher Appraisal (Wales) Regulations 2011 and The Education (School Development Plans) (Wales) Regulations 2014. These regulations ensured that schools placed a duty on governing bodies to set and submit specified targets to the local authority; had performance management policies in place to identify individual development needs that align with the schools priorities and lastly that the SDP spanned over three years (Welsh Government, 2014).

Schools will typically use their self-evaluation to identify and address the development needs of the school. Data shows that self-evaluations focused on impact and outcomes strongly contribute to enhancing the educational experiences for children (Vanhoof and Petegem, 2011).

Targets that are quantifiable and suitably challenging provide clear and demonstrable evidence of how the school can succeed which allows teachers to understand what they are working towards and how to efficiently use resources and strategies. It allows for regular monitoring and evaluation of progress as well as promoting accountability and motivating both teachers and pupils to strive for goals that are clear (Chapman et al, 2012).

The responsibility of the school lies in ensuring that teachers receive high-quality training (dependent on funding and prioritisation) to equip them with the skills and experience needed for effective instruction (Belsito, 2016). The regional consortia play a significant role in this aspect as they work together to ensure that there is consistent provision across Wales that supports teaching. Where schools work collaboratively to enhance teacher training, they are able to support every learner to make progress, contributing to the four purposes taken from the curriculum for Wales (HWB, 2023).

The SDP should be regularly reviewed and monitored as part of the development cycle which is then reviewed and revised yearly. It is the role of the governing body to monitor, review and update the SDP yearly or following and ESTYN inspection. This is to ensure that the planning and strategies used for improvement reflect the current context of the school. An essential part of evaluating the impact of a school's SDP plans involves the critical voices from external and internal members of the school. In inviting critical perspectives into the evaluation the school is then gaining feedback that is impartial as well as evidence of good practice from elsewhere (BERA, 2022).

Although an essential aspect of raising Literacy, Language and Communication (LLC) standards involve testing and following the curriculum, The Reading Agency (2015) states that RfP can also boost academic achievement as well as build cognitive function in pupils, developing empathy and knowledge and empowering pupils to become active citizens. In 2021, the Welsh Government responded to ESTYN reports and recommendations on English Language and Literacy in settings and primary schools. One of these recommendations was for schools to 'develop a culture of reading that encourages and enthuses all learners, including boys and those from disadvantaged backgrounds, to read for pleasure and provide opportunities to listen to adults reading aloud' (Welsh Government, 2021). The Welsh Government's (2021) response to this was depicted from the Languages, Literacy and Communication area of learning which states that all children should be provided with opportunities to gain a range of skills and use different strategies for reading to immerse them in literature and ignite their enthusiasm.

Frank Smith emphasised the need for 'meaning making' and using whole language approaches for reading instruction. His point was that children will learn to read naturally by being exposed to a wide variety of written materials. The idea of RfP was at the forefront of his theory; he suggested that it provided intrinsic motivation that allowed children to explore and experiment with language (Smith, 2012). Stephen Krashen is known for his acquisition hypothesis, a theory based on comprehensible input which emphasises the need for exposure to language that is just beyond the child's current understanding. Krashen specifically championed RfP which he deemed as a crucial means of providing comprehensible input and of utmost importance for developing reading fluency and vocabulary (Krashen, 2008).

Smith and Krashen both support RfP, highlighting its role in motivating children to engage with literature, being exposed to a wide range of language and developing skills through extensive reading. While both theorists support RfP, they also identify the need for structured literacy instructions for some pupils, specifically looking at those with reading difficulties (Krashen, 2009). A structured literacy approach would prioritise instruction in phonics, decoding and word recognition, Beasley (2011) stated that whilst RfP is beneficial it cannot be the sole focus for pupils who struggle in their reading and need more systemic support. Ehri's (2001) work corroborates Beasley's findings, agreeing that phonics was found to improve reading and comprehension in children, particularly those from low and middle socio-economic backgrounds and children with reading difficulties.

School A has been identified as a school that seeks to develop pupil's literacy skills (ESTYN, 2022), in accordance with the Curriculum for Wales (CfW) one of school A's targets in Literacy was to raise standards of LLC by continuing to focus on 'RfP'. The target was to develop RfP and to develop 'Giglets' as a resource. Giglet's is an online resource used to develop literacy and language skills, it offers an engaging and differentiated learning experience and challenges pupils to improve their comprehension and language acquisition (Giglets, 2024).

To determine this as an area for development, school A considered the quantitative data for groups of learners in reading/writing and oracy, the data measured their reading ages and levels at the beginning of term and compared them at the end. When looking at progression step three as an example, school A acknowledged that with RfP and the use of Giglets as a resource all children made 'good progress' from their starting positions. Two of these pupils were on the Additional Learning Needs (ALN) register. It would be important to note here that it is unclear how 'good progress' was measured in school A and whether any other factors played a part in contributing to the increased Literacy levels: other factors including alternative intervention such as structured literacy instruction. Holzhuetter (ND) focused their research on reading interventions, including RfP, for boys with ALN. It was concluded that all four boys who had taken part had increased their reading ages and comprehension levels once the intervention was complete. Although this study does acknowledge that RfP may be beneficial for pupils with ALN, its narrow focus on boys calls into question whether the benefits would extend to all pupils with diverse needs. Alkhawaldeh and Khasawneh (2023) would support the idea of Holzhuetter as well as provide further evidence to support their theory in that they include all learners. It was identified in this study that children with dyslexia were more likely to interact and engage with reading materials when they are a part of online book 'clubs', Giglets being an example of this: the limitation here is that Alkhawaldeh and Khasawneh (2023) focus solely on dyslexia rather than a broader range of ALN.

As set out in school A's SDP, all stakeholders should be provided with opportunities to have a voice in evaluation and participate in the review and monitoring of targets. Brighouse and Woods (1999) defined stakeholders as those who have an interest in the stake of the school's success. They listed pupils, parents, support staff, headteachers, teaching staff, governors, neighbours of the school, local MPs and councillors, the local education authority (LEA), ministers and the government as these stakeholders. Bruns,

Filmer and Patrinos (2011) claimed that with multiple stakeholder engagement, school management was more effective. Santibanez (2006) similarly stated that the involvement of stakeholders in the form of a school council led to positive outcomes for pupils. Guzman (2022) concluded that effective planning stemmed from mutual decision making from all stakeholders. School A actively encourages the participation of stakeholders, involving them in suggesting targets for the action plan.

The Welsh Government (2014) suggested that a school's SDP could include information gathered from consultations with pupils, parents and staff as well as external organisations that the school works with as part of their wider community engagement. In school A's case, this could involve the church who regularly visit the school and conduct worship. They also provide an extensive amount of visits for the children to the church as well as introduce new guest speakers into assemblies. As school A is a church in Wales primary school, the church also carries out Section 50 reports and beforehand will join the headteacher in learning walks to liaise with teaching staff, pupils and governors. Fidler (2002) discussed the advantages of wide involvement in a SDP including having a broader perspective from diverse stakeholders, increased ownership and improved decision-making. However, it was also considered who would be essential at each stage of the plan as the logistics of a complex and time-consuming process with the involvement of such a large number of people at all stages could be questioned. To determine the level of involvement from stakeholders in each area of the SDP it could be ideal to identify expertise, relevance and acceptance of each stakeholder (Nokali, et al, 2010).

Once the targets have been set in each area of learning, the next steps would be to strategically plan and begin to make the improvements. Firstly looking at the target that has been set and then moving on to create a success criteria to achieve this as well as stating what will need to be implemented in what timescale and with what cost. School A's SDP initially looks at their termly targets before then considering if this needs to span over the course of the three year SDP.

For consistency this report will continue to look at the targets of progression step three in school A. To reiterate, the target was to develop RfP to raise standards of LLC in line with the curriculum. The success criteria to do so included assigning reading buddies, encouraging year six pupils to read to Foundation Phase pupils, and to develop and use Giglets for whole class teaching as well as for interventions. In order to implement this across the school, it was first imperative that training was provided to staff on the use of Giglets as a guided reading resource for year groups two to six. The aim was for the LLC

lead to receive the training from a Giglets provider to then be able to train other members of staff. The goal was to begin this in the Autumn term and for the LLC lead to review it termly. As specified in school A's SDP the training provided was free and therefore no cost to the school.

School A's SDP did not stipulate how impact would be measured for this target although Clark and Terveinen (2017) states that whilst measuring pupil's pleasure in reading may be difficult, it is the responsibility of the teacher to understand their journeys as readers rather than simply focusing on their decoding and comprehension skills. This would be supported by the Welsh Government (2020) who placed an emphasis on learner's progression and the importance of what matters as they journey through the 'continuum of learning'.

School A evidently follow ESTYN's (2024) 'How we inspect' guidance that sets out how a school should look to develop it's SDP; school A identify the different development approaches that they can take to meet targets however it could be argued that they do not have a primary focus on evaluating the actual impact of these targets. Evaluating the impact of targets will ensure effectiveness by allowing the school to identify whether the implemented strategies are truly effective (Engelhardt, 2018).

There is a multitude of evidence that suggests that RfP is effective in raising literacy standards; it increases motivation, allowing children to foster intrinsic motivation, it improved vocabulary and comprehension and encourages children to also foster a positive association with reading materials (Martin-Chang, et al, 2021). School A's decision to implement this throughout the school is a positive one however, it could be argued that there are limitations to their practice. School A set a large focus on providing resources such as Giglets to support RfP, but in observing this practice it was evident that it lacked differentiation for pupils who were at more of a disadvantage due to ALN. Although Giglets itself does provide options for differentiation, the pupils accessed this independently and therefore were reading material that was not appropriate for their abilities or did not consider their digital abilities as well as their reading abilities. School A may have looked to encourage RfP in other ways, such as using physical books, to increase pupil enjoyment.

The area in which school A resides is considered by the Office of National Statistics (2024) as one that is 'economically active' with the percentage of household deprivation in only one dimension at 27.2%, a lower percentage than that of similar areas in the

same county. Although the majority of the pupils in school A were not socio-economically challenged in any way, there was a small percentage who may not have been considered when providing resources for RfP. For example, the pupils were encouraged to access Giglets from home but there was a lack of support for those who may not have that access. Hacking (2023) recognised the gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers in reading enjoyment and aimed to narrow it. She discussed how pupils should be given a broad range of choices for their independent reading and books should be shared within the classroom to capture the pupils interests and introduce them to texts they may not be able to access independently. Hempel-Jorgensen (2018) would support this idea further as their research identified the need for teachers to challenge pupils who lacked engagement in reading and support them whilst they are in school with resources being readily available.

This report identifies how school A aims to improve literacy standards through promoting a culture of RfP; it analyses the school's approach, highlighting the strengths and identifying areas for improvement. School A's SDP emphasises the need to develop pupil's literacy skills and sets targets to raise these standards. The school focuses on utilising online resources such as Giglets as well as ensuring that teaching staff have the appropriate training so that pupils engagement and learning is enhanced.

The research evidences the strong connection between RfP and improved literacy outcomes and briefly discusses the opportunities that Giglets offer such as differentiated learning and a way of digitally engaging with reading material.

School A's approach to the SDP holds a focus on the Curriculum for Wales and ESTYN recommendations as well as ensuring that they encourage stakeholder involvement in developing their action plans.

While school A outlines their targets and strategies they plan to implement, their SDP did lack details on how the impact of implemented initiatives are going to be measured continually. Observations carried out at school A would note the need for the consideration of differentiation for ALN pupils as well as socio-economic considerations. Although the area has low deprivation, it could be important for the school to address the needs of pupils facing challenges at home by exploring alternative reading materials or accessibility options for online resources.

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