

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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ECAD7003 Assignment 2023/24

	Targed/Target	Yr hyn yr wyf wedi'i wneud yn yr aseiniad hwn.... What I have done in this assignment....
Targed/Target 1	Make your personal thoughts more explicit.	This report has allowed me to share my personal thoughts for improvement with reference to literature
Targed/Target 2	Ensure you are referencing accurately - some minor errors include 'et al.' and 'p. 25'	All uses of 'et al' are now in italics

Introduction

The School Development Plan (SDP) serves as a strategic plan of action for educational institutions, detailing the primary goals, techniques, and instruments they may utilise to enhance standards and achieve their goals. The SDP is a continually evolving framework that schools utilise to support them in their search for growth and achievement. It is built on self-assessment, strategic planning, execution, and continuous evaluation. The SDP, developed collaboratively by governors, staff, and school leadership, aims to improve academic achievement and promote the development of students, staff, and families. With an emphasis on increasing staff, student, and family well-being via trauma-informed practices, this report evaluates the SDP's methods and discusses its triumphs, disadvantages, and recommendations for future enhancement.

SDP processes

A School Development Plan (SDP) is a strategic plan to strengthen a school. It should succinctly and clearly summarise the school's top objectives, the primary steps it will take to increase standards, the resources allocated to these steps, and the major goals and results it hopes to accomplish (Department of Education, 2015). While there are many components to an SDP, the main four include Self-evaluation, strategic planning, making improvements/actions and reviewing impact. The school is then required to revise and update their SDP every 3 years or up to 6 months after a school inspection (Gov.UK, 2010). To achieve this, the headteacher will create the SDP in collaboration with the staff and governors, and will then be in charge of carrying it out (Welsh Government, 2014).

Educators must discuss the school's mission, values, and vision to support such a plan. Through this approach, educators may evaluate their professional practices and competencies in light of the school's objectives (Korkko *et al.*, 2022). Teachers and schools must function as reflective practitioners. This aids in identifying areas for improvement and implementing evidence-based techniques. In turn, this provides a school with the flexibility to adjust to changing student requirements, educational trends, and outside influences. Ultimately, fostering a culture of reflection helps educators and educational institutions fulfil their mandate to support each student's holistic growth and to deliver high-quality experiences (Çimer, Çimer and Vekli, 2013).

By reflecting as a school to identify key areas for improvement, it is important to then set goals and visions for what staff and governors would like to see the school develop in the next 3 years, for example, this could be the use of the Welsh language, outdoor learning, parental engagement etc. Schools must then select targets and action plans to guide them as they work towards improvement (Gov.UK, 2010). Action for Happiness (2021) suggests that multiple smaller goals help each one go more smoothly and provide us with a sense of accomplishment along the way, which increases the likelihood that we will stick to our course and reach our larger goal. However, Golembiewski (2000, p.50) says that this approach is “too slow and too gradual”.

Following setting these goals, it is then important that schools monitor and evaluate their progress consistently. From the beginning to the end of the implementation process, schools

should closely assess how effective their initiatives are, ensuring a continuous focus on the outcomes attained for and by pupils. This means measuring the impact of the initiatives on student learning, well-being, and overall school improvement efforts (Gov.UK, 2010). It also involves monitoring progress, identifying potential challenges or barriers, conducting thorough assessments at each stage of the intervention, and making timely adjustments as needed. To achieve their educational objectives, schools may make well-informed decisions, allocate resources as efficiently as possible, and foster an environment of excellence and accountability by using an all-encompassing evaluation strategy (Rea-Dickins and Germaine, 1992).

Trauma-informed

In schools, a trauma-informed approach acknowledges the effects of trauma on students' lives and places a strong emphasis on establishing safe, encouraging environments. Strong connections are prioritised, resilience is fostered, and appropriate support services are provided. It also entails recognising how traumatic events impact behaviour and learning. Schools that use this strategy want to lessen the impact of trauma, encourage healing, and help all students achieve their goals (Gov.uk, 2022).

The need for trauma-informed programmes in schools is becoming more widely acknowledged as a result of the elevated rate of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and their significant effects on children's lives. The high rate of ACEs in the general community highlights how urgently schools must address the harm done to kids throughout their lives (Herrenkohl *et al.*, 2019). Relationship-building and trauma-informed service delivery must be given top priority in any comprehensive strategy aimed at reducing the consequences of ACEs (Lisa Weed Phifer & Hull, 2016) and other community stressors like violence (Herrenkohl *et al.*, 2019).

Students who have experienced trauma may display disobedience and acting out behaviours as a result of their inability to control their emotions and trust other people. Regrettably, these activities frequently result in disciplinary measures in school settings, which can worsen trauma and negatively affect children's sense of self-worth and relationships with others (Lisa Weed Phifer & Hull, 2016). Understanding the underlying reasons for students' behaviour and putting solutions in place to promote their emotional well-being and academic progress are key components of trauma-informed approaches (Herrenkohl *et al.*, 2019).

Although trauma-informed practices are becoming more popular in school districts and child-serving organisations, discretion is advised. More research is required to ascertain the effectiveness of trauma-informed programmes in schools because the data supporting their usefulness is continuously developing. Furthermore, if these strategies are not applied properly and attentively, there is a chance that traumatised adolescents and school communities may experience unanticipated negative effects (Maynard *et al.*, 2019, Avery *et al.*, 2020).

Leaders and educators must consider how trauma affects learning and student behaviour to shift from being trauma-affected to trauma-aware. To promote students' holistic development and provide a secure and supportive learning environment, it is necessary to integrate whole-school practices (Stokes & Brunzell, 2020). Moreover, teachers may experience severe

stress when helping traumatised kids, increasing the possibility of burnout and demoralisation. Therefore, to guarantee the success of trauma-informed methods in the years to come, governments must give priority to funding social, emotional, and behavioural resources to schools. By doing this, educational institutions may better serve the needs of traumatised children and foster an inclusive and supportive learning environment for all students (Luthar & Mendes, 2020).

Action point - Trauma-informed schools approach

Within our educational institution, the School Development Plan (SDP) is a key component in promoting revolutionary change and ongoing development (Gov.Wales, 2016). To advance the school community towards improved results and long-term growth, the following action point is one of five which have been carefully developed in light of the needs, goals, and aspirations that have been identified.

Self-evaluation

The SDP's foundation is self-evaluation, which offers the school a contemplative lens through which to examine its areas of strength, weakness, and development. Maintaining impartiality and openness is essential to ensuring effective self-evaluation, as it allows for the impartial acknowledgement of successes and shortcomings (Zwozdiak-Myers, 2018). To provide a thorough and inclusive approach, the school began by self-evaluating its current state with input from staff, governors, parents, and students. There were student voice meetings and questionnaires used for consultation, so a variety of viewpoints could be heard and taken into consideration. In addition, the strategy took into account student results and comparative data from the school, which was in line with the organisation's processes for self-evaluation and development. This robust monitoring and self-evaluation process identified a need for a boost to staff, pupil and family well-being perfectly in line with the main objective of fostering an inclusive and supportive school atmosphere. This also aligned with Estyn's advice following the Estyn Inspection Report in 2023 (Estyn, 2023) and was further motivated by recent changes, such as new staff, a Family Liaison Manager, and a Community Focused Schools Grant.

Data analysis

Analysing a range of quantitative and qualitative data sources ensures that the school has a deep understanding of their development topic. Furthermore, identifying the common patterns, trends, and discrepancies increases the possibility that well-informed decisions will be made. This makes it easier to identify the actions needed to address the issues or challenges that arise during the research process (Rabiee, 2004). For example, the school used attendance records, staff and student surveys, and well-being evaluations to gain important insights into the possibilities and problems that the school community is facing. From this, the school was able to see that they needed to develop the whole school to become trauma-informed, raise attendance and foster a supportive and engaging environment during school breaks. This became the 3 objectives to support the well-being of staff, pupils and their families.

Strategic planning

In the context of the SDP, strategic planning includes developing goals, plans, and activities that are consistent with the mission and core values of the school. First of all, the school outlines a plan for integrating trauma-informed practices by allocating key dates to train staff and other schools in the cluster to ensure all teaching staff are prepared to support students who have experienced trauma. It is then expected that all staff implement these strategies with pupils to ensure the whole school is trauma-informed.

Furthermore, they planned to increase attendance by meeting weekly with the education welfare officers to assess attendance levels and meeting with the cluster schools and the local authority to support attendance raising. They then planned to introduce a range of attendance awards for pupils in class and assembly. It was also important to communicate with parents regarding the situation, and this will be done through parent coffee mornings, workshops, and the school app (Sheppard, 2007).

Finally, they aim to establish and implement a comprehensive Food and Fun School Holiday Enrichment Programme (SHEP) to foster a supportive and engaging environment during school breaks. This will include a mix of age-appropriate educational, recreational, and cultural activities for children and parents to engage in together. To achieve this, the school must recruit qualified and experienced staff and provide them with proper training and the necessary equipment, materials, and supplies.

Involving stakeholders

SDP is one of three school reform approaches that has been proven to improve stakeholder relationships and student outcomes (Lunenburg, 2011). This is significant because stakeholder involvement in evaluations like this provides several advantages. These include developing trust, anticipating conflict, ensuring accountability and transparency, increasing relevance, improving quality, and broadening the reach and acceptance of research findings (Cottrell *et al.*, 2015). According to this SDP, parental and school governor engagement is crucial to the school's success in raising well-being. Additionally, it also says that to enhance the priority, the wider community is required. This involves working with local companies, organisations, or community groups; it also includes the health and wellness subcommittee, PC Hadley, the community liaison officer, and local businesses. Specifically speaking, the Food and Fun programme will only be able to access the resources and knowledge it requires—such as outside educators, artists, or experts who can improve the enrichment experience—if the community comes together (McAlister, 2013).

Measuring impact

To determine the efficacy, significance, and worth of SDP activities in accomplishing certain goals, its impact must be measured. Alongside every objective and action point, there is a section stating how this will be monitored and evaluated. This column includes data collection systems such as questionnaires, target reviews, meetings, charts and reflections. This shows that the school has not only analysed their initial data collection but aims to continuously do so throughout its development project. This will enable the school to pinpoint its accomplishments, areas in need of development, and lessons learnt to guide future efforts and SDP iterations in

line with its mission and core values (Elgart, 2017). Regular termly evaluations also ensure that the priority remains relevant and effective.

Reflection and Evaluation

Although the school year is still ongoing, it is clear that the implementation of the SDP has already seen its successes and challenges. Firstly, there has been positive feedback from staff who attended the three-week training on trauma-informed practices in the classroom. They believe they now have a better grasp of the complexities of trauma and how it impacts behaviour and education. This has resulted in an emphasis on creating caring and supportive settings that promote healing and growth, as well as establishing meaningful connections based on understanding. Furthermore, the adoption of intervention approaches such as mindfulness exercises, stress management techniques, and mental health conversations has equipped students with critical coping skills and tools to effectively navigate these difficulties (Semple & Burke, 2018). As a result, students' self-regulation, resilience, and overall well-being have increased, contributing to a more positive school culture and climate. Furthermore, monthly attendance has increased gradually as a result of funding for attendance rewards for high-attended classes. This has improved the children's well-being as they are more likely to achieve academic success and maintain good physical and mental health (Allison & Attisha, 2019).

However, there are challenges and limitations to this SDP. Firstly, it is difficult to accurately measure the effectiveness of trauma-informed practices. While it seems that students are maturing and developing beneficial techniques, it is difficult to assess the long-term impact on their overall well-being and behaviour. Although attempts have been made to collect quantitative data on well-being indicators and attendance rates, more work needs to be done to improve the accuracy and depth of data collection to fully capture the range of outcomes and experiences associated with trauma-informed approaches. This is supported by Hae Ra Han *et al.* (2021) and Herrenkohl *et al.* (2019) who state that there is insufficient data to conclude that trauma-informed therapies are a successful strategy and that there are gaps in research and evaluation. However, it should be remembered that trauma and mental health are complex concepts. Likely, the school will not notice any immediate benefits from employing this approach, but it may have long-term positive impacts on student well-being and academic performance (Berger *et al.*, 2022).

Several suggestions can be taken into consideration to improve the efficacy of the School Development Plan (SDP) in promoting staff, student, and family well-being through trauma-informed practices. Firstly, parent participation is essential when exploring ways to enhance their child's well-being (Cripps & Zyromski, 2009). McConnell and Kubina Jr (2014) have found that parental involvement is key in increasing attendance and allows parents to provide support at home. Teachers must take steps to encourage consistency between the home and school environments (Epstein, 2019). This might entail inviting parents to therapy sessions or providing techniques and support that are comparable to those employed in the classroom. Establishing parental involvement, however, might be challenging if the trauma or mental health issues are related to the parent or family (Santiago *et al.*, 2013). Nonetheless,

getting beyond this barrier is essential to the child receiving full support. The ESTYN study also highlighted the need for more specialised instruction for students who achieve very well (Estyn, 2023). To ensure the entire growth and well-being of these children, the SDP may incorporate strategies such as mentorship opportunities, individualised teaching, and enrichment activities to further support them.

Conclusion

To conclude, the School Development Plan (SDP) functions as an adaptable framework that encourages well-being and continuous advancement in educational settings. Schools can identify areas for improvement, set specific goals, and utilise resources to achieve desired outcomes through self-evaluation, strategic planning, implementation, and evaluation. Establishing secure, encouraging settings that put the well-being of the whole school community first is made even more crucial by the SDP's integration of trauma-informed methods. Although encouraging the well-being of teachers and pupils has shown some progress, issues like measuring long-term success, providing support for the more able and utilising parental engagement where possible still need to be addressed. This would enable the school to fully realise the potential benefits of trauma-informed educational methods.

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