

Please add your targets from the previous assignment (Only relevant if you have completed an assignment)

	Target	What I have done in this assignment...
Target 1	Improve referencing structure - consider how arguments are present as to not over reference.	I have carefully considered my arguments and the literature supporting them
Target 2	Be critical in your analysis of arguments and own approaches	I have tried to be more critical
Target 3		

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

A school development plan (SDP) is vital for any school to improve itself; it combines self-reflection with advice from the government school inspection (Department of Education, 2010; Welsh Government 2014), in the case of Wales this is Estyn. The SDP usually contains priorities which the school focuses on over three years and these are constantly monitored, allowing progress to be updated in respect as to how they can be continually worked on (Department of Education, 2010; Welsh Government 2014). This report will highlight one particular priority of one school's SDP. As recommended by the British Educational Research Association (BERA) guidelines, 2018, the school which is the focus of this report will be referred to as School X. School X is an English language, Welsh secondary school which had 1112 pupils of mixed gender aged 11-19 in 2018 (Welsh Government, 2018). In 2019, School X developed 4 main priorities, for the sake of this report, only one of these will be examined in detail; "Focus on challenge, differentiation and skills progression". This priority was raised in 2019 and is part of a three-year plan for improvement in School X's SDP.

It is an important strategy for a school to develop a plan of improvement carefully alongside all stakeholders in order to enhance practice (O'hara & McNamara, 2001). There can, however, be potential issues and problems that arise as a result of this. Tensions can result from collaboration, as well as accountability issues (O'hara & McNamara, 2001). Also, the process involves honesty in the reporting of self-shortcomings and the shortcomings of the school (Welsh Government, 2014). Data, both qualitative and quantitative from these methods of assessment is used to highlight shortcomings, and reports from Estyn suggest that this process is successful in Wales, with only a quarter of schools not self-evaluating effectively to produce a workable SDP (Welsh Government, 2014).

An SDP consist of several components to support the reaching of identified targets; how the school will achieve these targets, how it will assign resources and how it will manage staff in order to achieve the targets (Welsh Government, 2014). Furthermore, the SDP should be accessible to all stakeholders, and be continuously referred to when making any changes or decisions in order to make progress with the priorities (Welsh Government, 2014).

The SDP involves a significant amount of self-reflection from stakeholders at the school and this data forms the essential base of the SDP. However, external influences such as government legislation and the national curriculum are also essential to a balanced and informed plan. Currently, the Welsh curriculum is undergoing its greatest change as the conclusions from Donaldson's (2015) report on education in Wales are introduced. The overall aim of this change is to produce a generation of learners who are ready and willing to take their part in our world by fulfilling four key purposes; to create ambitious, capable learners: to create ethical, informed citizens: to create enterprising, creative contributors and to create healthy, confident learners.

The priority of School X's to focus on challenge, differentiation and skills progression is extremely important. It could arguably be the key to effective teaching, which at the end of the day, is the main goal of every school. In one classroom, the skills and abilities of each pupil can vary greatly, especially in younger school years where the classes tend not to be banded by attainment. If each of these pupils is not taught in different ways according to their level then this poor practice leads to school failure (Konstantinou-Katzi *et al.*, 2013). Differentiation of teaching and learning is the solution to this problem, ensuring that the needs of each individual learner is met, and the learning is accessible for everyone (Konstantinou-Katzi *et al.*, 2013).

It is also important to develop learners' skills. If this is achieved, then the different levels of ability in a class could potentially reduce as learners become more advanced and thus the teaching practice could be made more effective (Căprioară and Frunză, 2013). It can be argued that in the twenty first century basic skills such as reading, writing and arithmetic are no longer satisfactory on their own, and if learners leave school with just these that it is a failure of the school, as they will not have everything they require to succeed in life after education (Wagner, 2014). This therefore provides a problem for educators, who must adapt to equip their students with these skills which they will require; skills such as communication, problem solving, teamwork and critical thinking (Wagner, 2014). It is essential that teachers create differentiated tasks which are appropriate levels for all learners and that require problem solving skills and effectively develop these to be used in learners' later life (Karatas & Baki, 2017).

Critical thinking is also a vital skill for both higher education and life after education, however, this skill can be overlooked by the education industry as an important one to develop and can be something which is assumed and thus taken for granted (Aizikovitsh - Udi & Cheng, 2015). Not only is it vital that the skills are taught, but the necessary teaching of these skills can also help learners learn more effectively in the future. Communication is vital and if learners can perfect this skill, they can interact more with their peers, the teacher and learning, helping them learn (Kurtz *et al.*, 2017). The fundamental point of the new curriculum in Wales is to ensure that pupils are ready for life after education, so any skills they would require must be taught in school. Therefore, it is vital to encourage learners to critically think and analyse situations in a range of activities and subjects. Thereby, if school X can improve learners' skills such as communication, problem solving, teamwork and critical thinking they will effectively be fulfilling the overall aim of the curriculum reform in Wales (Donaldson, 2015).

The SDP designed by School X demonstrates self-evaluation and data analysis to measure the impact of any changes made and strategic planning involving stakeholders both of which are essential to create and successfully undertake an SDP. Self-evaluation can be used to improve schools and the learning within; however, it is something that is often overlooked and done poorly (Antoniou *et al.*, 2016). The self-evaluation process employed by School X was created to be a continuous cycle over a year, which would then be repeated in each of the following years three years over which the particular SDP is valid. The idea of this cycle is a common theme within self-evaluation in schools (Kurum and Cinkir, 2019). The beginning of the academic year, starting from September, is the time for reviewing standards and setting specific targets for that year. During November, the whole school is examined on a general basis and this is linked into the SDP. Then in the new year, individual departments are more closely examined alongside the school as a whole. More scrutiny is placed on departments to assess their work as a team and highlight any flaws and areas of improvement rather than the senior management team. These areas are then worked on until the end of the academic year, when the progress can be reviewed, and new targets can be developed in the new year. This is also the period where budgets and staffing are assessed. This cycle of self-evaluation is effective as it clearly flows and theoretically the school should continuously improve if the SDP is adhered to and the targets and actions are efficiently implemented. The concept of the school as a whole being scrutinised first, followed by the individual departments allows every member of staff to input ideas which should ideally stand the school at a greater chance of improvement. However, there could be the issue of too many voices over complicating the situation and also creating friction between colleagues who need to work as a team if to be successful (Connolly *et al.*, 2019).

Data is crucial to allow a school to assess their progress. Both quantitative and qualitative are essential (Wyse & Anders, 2019), as quantitative data can show pupils grades and progress in subjects as well as attendance and behaviour, however cannot accurately measure pupil's wellbeing and happiness which is just as essential to their learning and the schools progress (Donaldson, 2015). This is why qualitative methods of data are necessary in the form of the voice of the pupil plus feedback from questionnaires. Pupil voice is a form of school council, whereby pupils volunteer and are nominated by their peers to form a panel which can voice concerns and suggestions to staff. Suggestions are made to rectify concerns, often as the result of negotiation and compromise. The combination of these two approaches employed by School X means that they are kept as up to date as possible with the progress of their action points on their SDP.

Throughout the entire SDP, there is a common theme which reoccurs. That is that all stakeholders are aware of the SDP and that it is fully understood by them. The stakeholders referred to include staff, pupils, parents, and governors. This shared responsibility aids the accomplishment of the individual points which make up the SDP. Stakeholders are essential to the management and the improvement of the school (Connolly *et al.*, 2019).

The SDP developed by School X has four main focus points to be improved upon from 2018 to 2021. The focus of this report is the point "Focus on challenge, differentiation and skills progression". This is essential for an effective learning environment, thus perhaps why School X has highlighted it as an area to improve upon. Furthermore, this point links directly to one of the new four purposes of the new curriculum in Wales, which is to be implemented in 2021; To create ambitious, capable learners are ready to learn throughout their lives (Donaldson, 2015).

School X has gone about working on this point in a variety of ways. Every department has concentrated on this while lesson planning. Making sure there is always extension tasks available for learners if they complete work quicker than anticipated. These are designed to challenge learners, often requiring a combination of skills such as problem solving and creative thinking. However, it is not just the learners who are exceeding expectations in attainment who are the focus of this action point. Those learners who might be struggling with a task need to develop their skills in order to improve. Therefore, teachers in School X provide scaffolding to assist those learners who may need more help. This can consist of sentence starters, hints and tips of how to go about a task or examples of work done well. Furthermore, key skills are developed in every lesson across the subject areas. These include, but are not limited to, numeracy, literacy, and digital skills. These skills need to be understood in all areas to facilitate pupils in their work later in life and not just their respective lessons (Donaldson, 2015). The

use of cross curricular literacy and numeracy tasks has been found to mutually benefit all subject areas (McClune, 2012), thus making it beneficial for every teacher to participate in the attempt to improve these skills in learners. Moreover, this is essential as without every teacher and department being completely on board with this goal, the skills may not be reinforced enough for learners to excel. The activities which develop these skills also need to be differentiated as learner's attainment in different areas differ greatly.

In conclusion, every school must have an SDP based around both recommendations from the government inspection body and points from self-evaluation from all stakeholders in the school. The SDP is also designed with the national curriculum in mind, and in Wales currently the curriculum is being dramatically transformed due to the recent findings by Donaldson (2015). Over the course of three years there are usually three to five main priorities that the school chooses to work on, however, the SDP consists of many smaller components. Data is used to track the progress of the action points of the SDP and is gathered by a range of methods including surveys, feedback from pupils, recorded marks and attendance and behaviour records. This continuous tracking of progress combined with a cycle of self-evaluation means that the school can constantly improve and if something is not working as well as planned, it can be caught immediately before becoming a major problem. This report focused on one particular point from School X's SDP; "Focus on challenge, differentiation and skills progression". School X is doing this in a variety of ways, mainly by concentrating particularly on differentiation in lessons, through extension tasks and scaffolding. Cross curricular skills are also reinforced, ensuring that learners get to practice numeracy, literacy, and digital competency in every subject area. The ways in which teachers at School X incorporate the development of these skills and ensure that every learner makes progress linked to their ability is an important skill which anyone in the educational sector must develop effectively to be a successful teacher. And the ability to incorporate these things in lesson planning is something every student teacher should aim to do and something I myself will prioritise in the future.

References

1. Aizikovitsh-Udi, E. and Cheng, D., 2015. Developing critical thinking skills from dispositions to abilities: mathematics education from early childhood to high school. *Creative Education*, 6(04), p.455.
2. Antoniou, P., Myburgh-Louw, J. and Gronn, P., 2016. School self-evaluation for school improvement: Examining the measuring properties of the LEAD surveys. *Australian Journal of Education*, 60(3), pp.191-210.
3. British Educational Research Association. 2018. *Ethical Guidelines For Educational Research*. [ONLINE] Available at <https://www.bera.ac.uk/publication/ethical-guidelines-for-educational-research-2018-online> [Accessed on 1st April 2020].
4. Căprioară, D. and Frunză, V., 2013. Differentiation and Individualization in the Organization of the Teaching-Learning Activities in Mathematics. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 93, pp.2063-2067.
5. Carter, C. and Bray, J., 2019. Developing Critical Reflection and Critical Thinking Skills—Exercises to Encourage Student Engagement.
6. Connolly, M., Farrell, C. and James, C., 2019. The Participation and Influence of Stakeholders in School Leadership and Management. *Principles of Educational Leadership & Management*, p.239.
7. Department of Education. 2010. *School Development Planning* [ONLINE] [Accessed on 1st April 2020] Available at <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/de/every-school-a-good-school-school-development-planning-guidance-2010-english-version.pdf>
8. Donaldson, G (2015) *Successful Futures: Independent Review of Curriculum and Assessment Arrangements in Wales*: Welsh Government
9. Karatas, I. and Baki, A., 2017. The effect of learning environments based on problem solving on students' achievements of problem solving. *International Electronic Journal of Elementary Education*, 5(3), pp.249-268.
10. Konstantinou-Katzi, P., Tsolaki, E., Meletiou-Mavrotheris, M. and Koutselini, M., 2013. Differentiation of teaching and learning mathematics: An action research study in tertiary education. *International Journal of Mathematical Education in Science and Technology*, 44(3), pp.332-349.
11. Kurum, G. and Cinkir, S., 2019. An Authentic Look at Evaluation in Education: A School Self-Evaluation Model Supporting School Development. *Eurasian Journal of Educational Research*, 19(83), pp.253-286.
12. Kurtz, S., Draper, J. and Silverman, J., 2017. *Teaching and learning communication skills in medicine*. CRC press.

13. McClune, B., Alexander, J. and Jarman, R., 2012. Unexpected allies: Advancing literacy in a 'Science–English' cross-curricular context. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 55, pp.66-78.
14. O'hara, J. and McNamara, G., 2001. Process and product issues in the evaluation of school development planning. *Evaluation*, 7(1), pp.99-109.
15. Wagner, T., 2014. *The global achievement gap: Why even our best schools don't teach the new survival skills our children need-and what we can do about it*. Hachette UK.
16. Welsh Government. 2014. *School Development Plans* [ONLINE] [Accessed on 1st April 2020] Available at <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-03/school-development-plans.pdf>
17. Welsh Government, 2018. *My Local School* [ONLINE] Available at <http://mylocalschool.wales.gov.uk/School/> [Accessed on 1st April 2020]
18. Wyse, D. and Anders, J., 2019. Primary Education Curricula across the World: Qualitative and Quantitative Methodology in International Comparison. *The SAGE Handbook of Comparative Studies in Education*, p.342.