

Target 1	Check your referencing technique as, at times, you are not placing them correctly.
Target 2	Ensure that you analyse your proposal to identify any shortfalls or issues schools may face - including a little more depth and analysis of the issues and successes.
Target 3	Proofread your work to avoid simple errors and spellings

How a school develops one aspect of its SDP: a report that critically reflects on the actions, impact and evidence base – ECAD6009 – Part B

This report will critically reflect on the actions, impact, and evidence of one selected aspect of School X's Development Plan (SDP).

According to school X's 2018/19 SDP, they had four main priorities. This report will concentrate on "Priority 2 – To continue to support the positive well-being of all stakeholders" (School X, 2019, p. 18). Specifically, this report will concentrate on how mindfulness can support and improve learning across the school. The central aspect within the SDP will be priority 2.9, "To introduce the present curriculum to incorporate mindfulness techniques across the school" (Estyn, 2014, p. 22).

School X is a school-based in a deprived area of South Wales. The school reports an attendance of 94.3%, which is just below the Welsh average of 94.5% reported, in the 2018/2019 academic year (Welsh Government, 2019). The school has under four hundred and fifty pupils and approximately fifty staff. In their last Estyn report, the school reported that 35% of pupils were eligible for free school meals; this is much higher than the national average of 21% (Estyn, 2014). The last Estyn report also states that "16% of its pupils have additional learning needs, of whom a very few have a statement of special educational needs. Around 18% of pupils come from ethnic minority backgrounds, and about 16% speak English as an additional language." (Estyn, 2014).

According to The Welsh Governments document 'School development plans' (Welsh Government, School improvement plans, 2014), a school uses an SDP to "set out the actions a school will take to improve learner outcomes" (Welsh Government, 2014, p. 3). SDP's are created by the school and look at addressing priorities to improve the school and aspects of the pupil's education. The plans are designed to address three main government objectives; how they will assist in raising standards of literacy, numeracy and lowering the

effect of poverty on a pupils education (Welsh Government, 2014). Although SDP's are mandatory, how a school approaches its SDP varies. The Welsh Government created the document 'School development plans' (Welsh Government, School improvement plans, 2014) as guidance to schools to enable the creation of effective SDP's; they state that the document is there as guidance and should not be "unduly prescriptive" (Welsh Government, 2014, p. 5). This is because the Welsh Government realises that not all schools are the same. Each school will differ in its demographic and pupil cohort. This recognition of each school's individuality is essential as Wales moves closer to introducing the Curriculum for Wales. Each school has a unique SDP; the Curriculum for Wales requires every school to design its curriculum. There will also be a "national approach that ensures a level of consistency" (Welsh Government, HWB, 2020) to curriculum design.

As previously mentioned, the school's main aim was "to introduce the present curriculum to incorporate mindfulness techniques across the school" (School X, 2019, p. 22). The school aimed to do this with two main points. The first was to "Incorporate Mindfulness techniques into the daily teaching in order to focus children on the present and improve their sense of being" (School X, 2019, p. 22), the second was "Children feel the Mindfulness approaches in the present curriculum help them to be in the present and focus of their learning" (School X, 2019, p. 22). School X does not currently use the New Curriculum for Wales but are using the previous curriculum. Although they are using the older curriculum, they are starting to incorporate new techniques into their daily practice.

The National Health Service (NHS) defines mindfulness as "Paying more attention to the present moment – to your own thoughts and feelings, and to the world around you" (Mindfulness, 2018). Over the last ten years, mindfulness has been on the rise in schools, and the Welsh Government has embedded well-being into the new curriculum. A 2012 study looking into the Impact of Mindfulness on Children and Young People found that mindfulness has a vast array of benefits, including "improve their well-being, reduce worries, anxiety, distress, reactivity and bad behaviour, improve sleep, self-esteem, and bring about greater calmness, relaxation, and self-regulation and awareness" (Weare, 2012, p. 4). Mindfulness appears to have a wide-ranging positive impact on children's well-being, and it is clear why the Welsh Government would want to put it at the forefront of education.

One of the Four Purposes that underpin the new curriculum is "healthy, confident individuals" (Addysg Cymru, 2020). Within the purpose, it mentions how a pupil will learn the skill of "building their mental and emotional well-being by developing confidence, resilience and empathy" (Addysg Cymru, 2020). The emotional well-being here can be directly linked with mindfulness.

To ensure that a school is developing an SDP in the most efficient way for the school, it needs to look at some vital areas. Schools need to ensure that they self-evaluate,

analyse data, plan strategically, measure the impact of the SDP on the school and pupils, and involve all stakeholders in creating the SDP.

Self-evaluation is an essential aspect of developing an effective SDP. Self-evaluation “is how schools reflect upon their performance and use it as a basis for sustainable improvement planning” (Welsh Government, School improvement plans, 2014, p. 8). Schools are encouraged to analyse their performance annually and base their progress against various data that includes its self-evaluation. The data the school assess itself against could be milestones they set themselves in previous SDP’s. Data can also come in two forms quantitative or qualitative. “Qualitative data describes qualities or characteristics” (Quantitative vs. Qualitative Data, 2021), whereas quantitative data “It is data that can either be counted or compared on a numeric scale” (Quantitative vs. Qualitative Data, 2021). Although these are very different types of data, they both serve a purpose in self-evaluation. If school X aimed to introduce mindfulness into the current curriculum, it would be essential to understand how to measure mindfulness and understand the impact. Measuring mindfulness could be done using a questionnaire or survey. Competing for a questionnaire could give either “closed-ended or multiple choice” (School of education, 2020) questions that would allow a pupil to say how they feel after a specific amount of time.

It is important to ask the pupils their opinions on developing the SDP and activities within the school. Pupils are important stakeholders within a school, as important as the teachers and parent/guardians. Estyn discusses involving stakeholders in their work and mentions how schools should “invite stakeholders to shape the future” (Rowlands, 2020, p. 3). School X reports in their SDP how looking after each stakeholder is important, looking after the adults to ensure that “children can thrive” (School X, 2019, p. 17), and therefore looking after the pupils. “Children’s well-being needs to be nurtured as without wellness and a positive attitude they will struggle to learn.” (School X, 2019, p. 17). Stakeholders should also be involved in strategic planning. This is important to “ensuring that everyone has a commitment to the school’s improvement agenda” (Welsh Government, School improvement plans, 2014, p. 10). School may have multiple plans ready to include in the strategic planning. These could involve several agendas and also a number of agencies. In the case of the priority, there are no outside agencies involved. All teachers within the school will be involved in incorporating mindfulness into the curriculum using various techniques. Unfortunately, COVID-19 put a hold on the implementation of mindfulness into lessons but there.

When the school would have measured the impact mindfulness has on concentration, they have mentioned how they would involve each group of stakeholders, involving the teachers in observing how mindfulness was incorporated. They would also

consult the pupils in how they found mindfulness helped them with their education and concentration.

As the schools SDP was written with the academic years of 2019-2022 in mind, there was a significant disruption to their plan's long-term effects. The Covid-19 epidemic put the plans of the SDP on hold as it would have been difficult for the school to track the emotional well-being of their students. The lockdowns affected pupils in different ways, but some pupils felt that it affected them by making them feel lonely and made them worry about school and the future. (Millar, Quinn, Cameron, & Coleson, 2020). One of the main concerns from the report was how to support the mental health and well-being of younger children; it stated that "children's lack of communication with others outside the household (Millar, Quinn, Cameron, & Coleson, 2020, p. 7). School X, during the lockdown, put many strategies to support the continuation of looking after their pupil's mental health. The school had daily lessons via Teams, and the teacher aimed to speak to every pupil on the call. If a pupil was missing, it would be tracked, and a message would be sent home using DOJO. Due to the school being in a deprived area, the school were also aware of the fact that some pupils may not have access to the Internet or Teams. Therefore, they used the school tablets and laptops and sent them to the homes of pupils without the correct devices. This ensured that the school were able to ensure all pupils were able to attend lessons. Teachers were then required to make phone calls to parents/guardians if a pupil did not attend during a single week.

With the school's persistence in ensuring pupils attending lessons, they were able to speak to pupils. Therefore, helping to ensure checking of their emotional well-being. The school also put on Yoga and mindfulness sessions that were separate from the lessons. They invited pupils from across the school but also invited teaching staff and guardians to the sessions. In 2018 Ysgol Cymraeg Brynsierfel placed a strong emphasis on emotional well-being. They used Yoga sessions to help pupils to relax, calm down, socialise and to also "improved concentration skills, foster resilience and encourage pupils to engage with learning" (Estyn, 2018). The outcome for the school was that "Pupils calm down after yoga sessions, focus better during lessons and are aware of how to relax" (Estyn, 2018). School X also found a similar response to the use of yoga. Although they were doing their Yoga sessions through Teams, Pupils, guardians, and teachers were attending, and they received feedback that pupils felt connected to the school. This helped to encourage engagement within live lessons.

On return to the school, there was an emphasis placed on re-building connections. Although pupils had lost a significant amount of learning time due to covid, an emphasis was placed on the emotional connections of the pupils. The school aimed to help pupils transition back into the classroom and build on the social connections lost during lockdowns. This was

done while also blending traditional lessons in place. The NAHT have the advice to support teachers in supporting a pupils well-being. They encouraged teaching staff to “Listen to pupils and use your school council to seek feedback and opinions from children and young people” and to also “Ensure academic needs are met but don’t put too much academic pressure on pupils” (NAHT, 2020, p. 10).

A 2012 research document looking at mindfulness in school found that some pupils “described a number of issues preventing their engagement in mindfulness practice outside the classroom” (Kempson, 2012, p. ii). Some difficulties included “difficulty of technique, problems concentrating and the presence of environmental distractions” (Kempson, 2012, p. ii). However, mindfulness may support pupil concentration within the classroom. There may be an issue if it is not implemented and used on a daily basis. It could not get used to its full potential outside of the normal environment. This should not discourage the use of mindfulness as there is still evidence mindfulness does still “have beneficial results on the emotional well-being, mental health, ability to learn and even the physical health of their students” (Weare, 2012, p. 10)

Although School X had placed emphasis mindfulness and the emotional well-being of its students, Covid-19 and the subsequent lockdown, unfortunately, places the school in a difficult situation. The school found that embedding mindfulness into each lesson that took place online would be difficult. Although difficult, they did improvise and found ways of attempting to look after their pupil's well-being. The use of online yoga lesson for the pupils and guardians and contacting each pupil to ensure that they were safe. These actions resulted in a high number of attendees to live lessons. During live lessons they would introduce the weekly planners; these planners had a variety of academic lessons and also lessons designed to support the well-being of the pupils. Some lessons included phoning a friend or family member that they had not spoken to since lockdown. By doing this it was encouraging the pupil to speak to someone outside of their own home while also looking at the well-being of the person on the other side of the phone.

Although these techniques were used during online lessons, they have helped me to understand how I could better look after the well-being of pupils in my future employment. I have learned techniques of looking after pupils that I may be experiencing long term sickness or pupils who do not attend school regularly. Not only this, but I have been able to look into the best techniques to support pupils within the classroom. I have seen that there can be limitations to mindfulness if it is not implemented correctly, but these are outweighing by the positive impact on pupil engagement.

Looking into the details of the planning of an SDP has also helped me widen my knowledge of how best to “Involve partners in learning” (APLP, 2019, p. 5). Not only how to involve partners but the importance of evaluating their needs. The needs of partners are

different for each school, and how SDP's are developed does depend on those needs. What is important in a school-based in a deprived area could be different from a school in an affluent area. Looking at the creation of SDP's has also helped me to understand how I could meet another qualified teacher status (QTS) standards such as "Supporting formal leadership roles" (APLP, 2019, p. 8). I have seen the importance of each person within an SDP and how each person serves a role in the school and the development of the curriculum.

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