

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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Word count: 2724

	Targed/target	Yr hyn yr wyf wedi'i wneud yn yr aseiniad hwn What I have done in this assignment...
Targed/Target 1	Continue reading a wide range of literature and researching the relevant topics discussed in future assignments.	While writing this assignment, I continued using various sources to support my critical analysis.
Targed/Target 2	Consider using more tentative language in places and proofread.	I ensured I used more tentative language while writing this assignment and proofread the contents.

Introduction

This assignment aims to examine school improvement and critically reflect on the process by reviewing one specific target identified by a school. It seeks to comprehensively explore what a school development plan entails, delving into its components, relevance to the evolving educational system, and the subtle considerations required in aligning it with the distinctive features of the Curriculum for Wales. The discussion will highlight the pivotal role of an effective school development plan in enhancing educational outcomes and fostering a dynamic and responsive learning environment. Further discussion will include an analysis of School X and one of its targets within its school development plan (SDP). This report critically examines the target, how it will be implemented, and how it will affect the school and its students. For context, the SDP from which the target has been derived belongs to an English medium community school that caters to pupils from three to eleven years of age. It has approximately five hundred students enrolled, including a large Nursery and fourteen classes for pupils ranging from Reception to Year six, with each year group having two classes. As of the most recent Estyn report in 2018, the percentage of students eligible for free school meals was 6%, below the national average of 19%. The school had also identified 11% of its children as having an additional learning need (ALN), which was again below the national average of 21% (Estyn, 2018). However, according to the latest figures from the Welsh government, the percentage of free school meal eligibility in 2023 is around 9.1%, which highlights

the changes to the demographic of the school learners and their families (StatsWales, 2023).

School Development Planning

A school development plan (SDP), also known as a school improvement plan (SIP), is a strategic and continuous document that serves as a roadmap for an educational institution's overall improvement and advancement (Welsh Government, 2022b). The Education Reform Act of 1988 led to significant development in school development planning, leading the government to pressure schools to engage actively in school development planning (MacGilchrist *et al.*, 1995). The concept of an SDP is to encapsulate the school's vision, mission, and objectives, outlining the specific actions and initiatives to achieve these goals (Twinkl, 2023; Welsh Government, 2014). However, although the word strategic is frequently used within Welsh Government documents when discussing SDP, there is an argument that strategic planning may not be the most effective form of planning when taking the school environment into context. (Bell, 2002) stipulated that implementing change in education through strategic planning is too rigid if there's only one way to achieve improvement. It could potentially remove creativity and enthusiasm from teaching practices and needs to be in keeping with the rapid rate at which educational change can happen.

The SDP is typically developed through a collaborative process involving school leaders, educators, parents, and other stakeholders. Some schools use the *Schools as a Learning Organisation* (SLO) model to facilitate this planning process. The SLO is a collective and inclusive vision designed to elevate every student's educational experience and achievement. The school's vision is dedicated to enhancing cognitive and socio-emotional outcomes, prioritising the well-being of learners in the present and future, and serving as a source of inspiration and motivation. The alignment of learning and teaching methods is geared towards realising this vision, emphasising its significance in guiding educational practices. Notably, the school's vision results from a collaborative process involving various stakeholders (Regional School Improvement Consortia, 2017; OECD, 2018). Involving stakeholders is pivotal in developing an effective school development plan (Guzman, 2022). Such collaboration and input from diverse perspectives contribute to a comprehensive

program that addresses the needs and goals of all involved, with a shared objective to elevate the school to its maximum efficiency. Drawing on the social constructivist theory (which emphasises the importance of shared social interactions in learning), involving stakeholders in developing the SDP ensures a shared understanding of the school's goals (Palincsar, 1998). It fosters a sense of shared collective responsibility (Hopkins, 1994). However, striking a balance in the participation of stakeholders can be challenging. There is potential for a skewed perspective in the planning process when people need equal opportunity to express their thoughts and opinions (MacGilchrist *et al.*, 1995). It must also be remembered that schools are not isolated entities; they exist within a broader societal context (OECD, 2016). When developing the SDP, the school must consider the needs, expectations, and challenges of the community in which it is situated. Societal factors influence educational policies, which also impact the overall direction of a school's development (Welsh Government, 2014).

The SDP provides a structured approach for continuous improvement, fostering a culture of accountability, innovation, and excellence within the academic community (Welsh Government, 2022b). Research suggests that an effective SDP will have no more than five targets; too many targets can lead to inefficiency as the tasks become too tremendous and unachievable within a timeframe (Davies and Ellison, 2003). Developing an effective SDP is paramount in navigating the educational landscape, particularly in the context of the Curriculum for Wales. The SDP reflects the institution's aspirations and is a dynamic tool that aligns with the evolving academic landscape, including the specific nuances of the Curriculum for Wales and the principles of progression (Welsh Government, 2022c). The Curriculum for Wales has ushered in a transformative approach, emphasising the holistic development of students and fostering a deep engagement with learning. Therefore, evaluating and refining the school development plan becomes crucial to ensure its synergy with the innovative curriculum framework (Welsh Government, 2021b). An effective strategy should encapsulate the school's commitment to delivering high-quality education, embracing diversity, and promoting the holistic development of students.

Developing an SDP/SIP involves analysing data collected through comprehensive self-evaluations. (Welsh Government, 2014) These evaluations involve an in-depth examination of various aspects of the school's performance, including academic

achievement, student well-being, the effectiveness of the staff and teaching, and the school's overall efficiency (Welsh Government, 2021b). The data gathered from assessments, staff and student surveys, and performance metrics serve as a basis for identifying the school community's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges (Schildkamp, 2019). This insightful self-evaluation process allows the school to pinpoint areas that require improvement and develop targeted strategies to address and rectify them. This data-driven approach helps schools align their priorities with the needs of their students, staff and stakeholders and ensures a continuous cycle of improvement, fostering a culture of accountability and excellence within the educational institution (Welsh Government, 2022b). However, a potential issue lies in schools that have an overreliance on quantitative data, which can lead to overlooking qualitative aspects that contribute to the desired holistic educational experiences (Schildkamp, 2019).

Research by Hargreaves and Hopkins, *Development Planning for School Improvement* (1994), suggests that there are instances where SDPs may not be as effective as planned. They indicate that plans for school development through an SDP may translate to something other than literal school improvement; this can be due to the pre-disposed organisational and cultural arrangements already embedded in the school (Harris and Busher, 2000). Essentially, having a plan is only helpful if it is actively engaged with and monitored to ensure effectivity, and subsequently altered if initial reflection indicates any issue regardless of any deeply embedded standard the school may have when it comes to its policies and strategies for achieving improvement. However, with the introduction of the Curriculum for Wales and the shift that schools in Wales are currently embarking on in its implementation, Schools are gifted the freedom and actively encouraged to re-think how they have previously approached improvement and make effective changes that align with the curriculum.

School X

A key target in the SDP of School X is 'To further improve quality of provision and support across the school for welfare and the health and well-being Area Of Learning Experience (AOLE). The overall goal is to improve the general well-being of staff and students while proactively managing emerging concerns related to declining mental health and issues with family stability within the local community. When writing his

report 'Successful Futures,' Professor Graham Donaldson stated that a significant challenge faced in education is that various forms of disadvantage frequently negatively impact the educational achievements and well-being of children and young people. He concluded that it's crucial to design the curriculum in ways that capture the interest of all students, enabling them to succeed (Donaldson, 2015). This target represents the school making steps towards creating a nurturing educational environment, prioritising every student's holistic development and well-being. By investing in comprehensive support mechanisms and refining the Health & Wellbeing AoLE delivery, the school aims to create an inclusive and empowering educational atmosphere (Welsh Government, 2020). This strategic focus acknowledges the pivotal role of well-being in the learning process. Within their quest to meet the goals of their SDP, School X has planned to implement specific measures to improve mental health awareness and encourage healthy eating habits. It appears essential to School X that well-being impacts not only the physical aspect of health and well-being but also emphasises the importance of nurturing a child's mental health.

According to the World Health Organization, more than thirty million people globally suffer from a depressive or anxiety disorder, with mental health illnesses predicted to be the most significant cause of disability by 2030 (World Health Organization, 2024). Supporting well-being in school-aged children enhances their emotional and mental resilience, providing them the tools to navigate challenges effectively. By fostering a positive and nurturing environment, educators empower children to develop coping strategies, interpersonal skills, and a strong sense of self, ultimately contributing to their resilience in adversity (Howard *et al.*, 2017). Children spend thirty hours per week in school, which provides a critical opportunity to ensure a consistent setting to equip children to acknowledge their health and support them in developing techniques to promote their positive well-being (Hone and Quinlan, 2020). Schools can cultivate an environment that promotes holistic development by focusing on the student's physical, mental, and emotional health. The curriculum encourages its teachers to move beyond traditional ideas of academic success and develop an understanding that authentic learning is a multifaceted process (Welsh Government, 2023). Prioritising student's welfare also aligns with three of the four purposes of the Curriculum for Wales. Fostering positive well-being enables students

to thrive physically and emotionally, thus ensuring the school is helping to develop 'healthy, confident individuals' (Welsh Government, 2022a) equipped with reliance, empathy, and decision-making skills. Incorporating well-being into the curriculum through the AOLE allows the students to understand well-being while appreciating social influences, equity, and respect, which influence and contribute to well-being issues, creating 'ethical, informed citizens' (Welsh Government, 2022a). Finally, sound well-being positively impacts the students' motivation, concentration, willingness, and learning ability, leading to 'ambitious, capable learners' (Welsh Government, 2022a). To measure the impact of new well-being initiatives, School X has developed a new bespoke student questionnaire with a desire to implement it in the coming weeks. The intended outcome of the survey is to gain feedback and be able to make any adaptations to current policies and practices where needed (Health and Wellbeing Co-ordinator, 2024).

As previously mentioned, time constraints can harm a school's ability to effectively implement its desired target and strategies that have been prioritised in its SDP; for better welfare and well-being of its students, time must be allocated to allow maximum efficiency (Welsh Government, 2021a). However, This issue should be alleviated by introducing the health and wellbeing AOLE and its equal role within the curriculum. School X must prioritise training for all staff in up-to-date wellbeing initiatives to ensure the support offered is conducive to research in its effectiveness and reliability. However, a lack of resources can be a barrier to implementing training promptly, and funding for training and collaboration with external professionals can be challenging. Therefore, accessibility and budget constraints could limit the school's ability to realise its well-being goals fully (Smith, 2023). Application to new funding, such as the *Supporting Service Children in Education in Wales Fund*, is crucial for School X to alleviate funding issues to best to support its students (Grants Online, 2024). Prever (2006) contends that school well-being provisions should undergo continuous monitoring and adaptation to align with the evolving societal landscape. They advocate for enhancements in these provisions to address broader concerns beyond the school environment, such as a heightened emphasis on healthy eating and fitness, which has become increasingly prominent in recent years.

Acknowledging the link between nutrition and academic performance, School X has strived to introduce healthy eating initiatives across the school. These initiatives align

with contemporary education policies promoting healthy eating and well-being, such as Maslow's *hierarchy of needs*. Maslow theorised that people's actions are guided by meeting basic needs before aiming for more complex ones. He organised the needs of humans in a pyramid structure, progressing from simple to intricate (Shah, 2023). He concluded that individuals' most basic needs are physical survival; nurturing and supplementing physiological factors is the key to motivating a person's behaviour. Once our physiological needs are fulfilled, we are equipped and motivated to advance to the next level of the hierarchy, and so on. Maslow considered physiological conditions the most important as all the other needs become secondary until these needs are met (Mcleod, 2024; Burleson and Thoron, 2014).

In its attempt to encourage healthy eating, School X has implemented rules that specifically state that during break time only 'healthy' snacks are permitted, specifically a fruit or vegetable. However, the policing of these rules is not consistent throughout the school, with staff members not actively enforcing the policy and allowing children to eat any snack, making it difficult to reflect on the initiative and measure its success. This policy also relies on active engagement and support from the parents and caregivers of the students, as they are the ones funding and providing the snacks. Securing parental involvement can be challenging due to diverse family situations and commitments (Clelland, Cushman and Hawkins, 2013). Within their SDP, School X does not refer to how they plan to encourage participation from their parent community in implementing this measure to ensure consistency. If they were to implement flexible and inclusive strategies, such as virtual workshops, newsletters, and community events, to explain and demonstrate the benefits of participation in these health-related improvements and strategies, with consideration to accommodate various parental schedules and preferences, they would likely see an increased rate of participation and dedication to supporting the school (Baker *et al.*, 2016).

After critically evaluating School X's approach to well-being, it's clear that they lack a complete understanding of the challenges faced by students in lower socio-economic situations. A conversation with the headteacher revealed that many of the school's teaching staff have limited experience working in areas of deprivation. Consequently, they struggle to grasp these children's circumstances and may not be the most

effective in providing support (Headteacher, 2024). This underscores the urgent need for training for the staff to ensure they are well-equipped to facilitate equitable improvements in the well-being of all students, not just those fortunate enough to have avoided adversity and disadvantage.

Conclusion

In conclusion, there is undoubtedly a role for effective SDPs in supporting continuous improvement and adapting to the ever-evolving educational landscape with changes such as the Curriculum for Wales.

The inclusion of wellbeing in their SDP by School X aligns with the transformative approach of the Curriculum for Wales, emphasising the connection between academic progression and overall student wellbeing. However, some challenges, such as time constraints and resource limitations, must be navigated to ensure success in implementing desired targets. Furthermore, the recognition of the impact of socioeconomic factors on education, as highlighted in the above discussion on diversity, underscored the need for schools such as School X to adapt their targets and consider the ever-evolving socioeconomic state of their local community. School X's SDP reflects a dedication to holistic student development and wellbeing. Still, practically implementing these goals requires a delicate balance of time, resources, and adaptation to societal changes. The continuous reflection, collaboration, and data-driven decision-making emphasised in the prescribed SDP process will be essential for one's practice while striving to create an educational environment within one's classroom that aligns with the targets of one's own school's SDP. This will be achieved while also adhering to the principles of the Curriculum for Wales and meeting its students' and communities' diverse needs.

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