

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

	Targed/target	Yr hyn yr wyf wedi'i wneud yn yr aseiniad hwn What I have done in this assignment...
Targed/Target 1	"Write critically rather than descriptively wherever possible"	In the 'literature review' section I briefly explore response to criticism surrounding Carol Dweck's (2018) work on "Growth Mindsets". After outlining research highlighting the importance of well-being provision in schools and the Welsh Government's commitment to ensuring this in the new Curriculum for Wales, I critically explore how and why the current education system still places a disproportionate focus on academic provision. In the 'developing an action point' section I critique the strategies the school plans to employ to improve well-being provision – arguing that a whole-school approach would be more beneficial. In the 'reflection and evaluation' section I also explore that while

		schools have responsibility to deliver effective well-being provision, that placing pressure and sole responsibility for pupil well-being levels on schools and teachers could be counter-intuitive.
Targed/Target 2	“Ensure that you include two sides in order to critically argue your case”	Where possible, throughout the report I include two sides of arguments. For example, criticism and support of “Growth Mindsets”; criticism and support of schools’ largely dominating focus on academic provision; support of the action points the school has devised and criticism that they do not centre around a whole-school approach to well-being; and arguments for and against responsibility of pupil well-being placed on teachers.
Targed/Target 3	“Make corrections to your referencing in terms of the order of publications – both in the text and in the reference list”	I have ensured that all in text citations from multiple sources are in chronological order. I have also ensured that publications of the same author, from different years, are in chronological order in the main reference list. I have also attempted to thoroughly check my writing for ‘typos’, including wrong spellings of names in the reference list.

University of Wales Trinity Saint David

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LOWRI ALYS POWELL

Introduction

This report will focus on the critical reflection of a specific area of a school's development plan (SDP), evaluating the planned actions to be taken and the measurement of their resulting impacts. This will take place with deep consideration of a relevant body of pedagogical literature, in order to ensure that reflections are well informed and promote the investigation of multiple perspectives. In turn, a deeper understanding of relevant pedagogies in the selected area of the SDP will better inform alternative suggestions, helping to develop professional practice and expertise.

The school will be referred to as School X for the purposes of this report, in line with anonymity guidelines (BERA, 2018). School X is a mixed gender comprehensive school in South Wales (Welsh Government, 2019). School X is in a relatively affluent catchment area with only 6.8% of pupils eligible for free school meals, well below 17% which is the national average (Estyn, 2017). The aspect of School X's SDP chosen for evaluation in this report is its 'focus for improvement' to further develop health and well-being provision (School X, 2019).

Literature review

The health and well-being of pupils is of great importance in terms of providing a safe, inclusive and engaging learning environment which allows all pupils to thrive and reach their individual potential, during school and throughout their lives (Cowburn and Blow, 2017; Education Endowment Fund, 2017; Al-Ghabban, 2018; Zandvliet *et al.*, 2019). This is a large focus of the new Curriculum for Wales (Welsh Government, 2020) and was identified as being of great importance by Professor Donaldson in *Successful Futures* (2015). *Successful Futures* highlighted that drastic improvement in the provision of personal, social and health education across Wales is required and identified consistent evidence of the importance of well-being (Donaldson, 2015). A report published by the National Children's Bureau detailed evidence demonstrating that emotional well-being is a determining factor of academic attainment, as well as fulfillment later in life (Cowburn and Blow, 2017). It is argued that when pupils have greater levels of well-being they are better able to actively participate in classroom activities and are more receptive to consolidating new concepts and interacting with others. Evidence supporting this includes studies demonstrating that learners with lower levels of well-being have been shown to have lower confidence, reducing their capacity to fully engage and take measured risks, thus inhibiting the learning process (Dubiel, 2014). These findings are well supported by current educational theorists including Ferre Laevers and Carol Dweck. Laevers' (2005) body of research has shown that in order for successful

learning to take place learners need to have high levels of well-being and involvement. Meanwhile, Dweck's work has focused on the importance of cultivating growth mindsets. The wealth of evidence collated is indicative of the notion that improved mindsets, not only improve motivation, but in turn, promote the use of effective strategies which can influence the neural networks of the brain resulting in improvements in academic ability (MindsetWorks, 2017). These findings are backed up with what are now widely established conclusions amongst the scientific community, relating to the plasticity of the brain (Chodzko-Zajko, Kramer and Poon, 2009; Rees, Booth and Jones, 2016). However, Dweck's work has received a relatively large amount of criticism, mainly pertaining to misconceptions which have wrongly encouraged teachers to consistently praise learners (Dentworth, 2019), reducing their ambition to improve. In an article written partly in response to such criticism, Dweck (2018) outlined that mere effort should not simply be praised. Instead, praise, given by teachers relating to learner effort, should be accompanied by constructive criticism which advises learners as to how their efforts can be channeled towards making appropriate next steps which allow for progress (Dweck, 2018).

The Four Purposes underpinning the new curriculum have been devised in consideration of a vast range of literature, including; the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (UN General Assembly, 1989), *Qualified for Life* (Welsh Government, 2014a) and the *Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act* (2015). In light of this literature *Successful Futures* (Donaldson, 2015) argues that schools have a responsibility in meeting the physical and emotional needs of their learners, helping to develop healthy attitudes towards self-care, self-respect, personal effectiveness and respect for others. The Four Purposes of the curriculum intend to develop, "ambitious, capable learners", "enterprising, creative contributors", "ethical, informed citizens" and "healthy, confident individuals" (Donaldson, 2015, p. 29) and aim to ensure that the curriculum allows for a more holistic education, enhancing the well-being of all learners.

A major aspect of the new *Curriculum for Wales Guidance* (Welsh Government, 2020) is the inclusion of the 'Health and Well-being Area of Learning and Experience' which encompasses a range of foci including physical health, mental health and emotional well-being and social and cultural awareness within its six 'what matters' statements. While the new curriculum outlines that some of these foci may be taught discretely, in specific timetabled lessons, it also emphasises the need for a "whole-school approach" to effectively allow learners to better understand and adopt good health and well-being attitudes and practices, consistently and authentically, with lasting effect on the individual, and ultimately, on society as a whole. This whole-school approach to well-being has also been

recommended in reports published by the National Children's Bureau (Cownburn and Blow, 2017), the Department for Education (2016) and the Partnership for Well-being and Mental Health in Schools (Weare, 2015).

However, even in acknowledgment of the established importance of well-being, the current education system often still places a disproportionately large focus on academic attainment and exam results. Findings have pointed to academic ability and a sense of success relating to attainment resulting in long-term sustained motivation and consequentially, further improvements in academic ability (Welsh Government, 2014a; 2014b; 2015; Boxer, 2019). Findings such as this seem to indicate that significant emphasis upon improving academic competence is worthwhile in terms of improving learner well-being and academic outcomes. However, to assume that learner well-being is only influenced by the learner's sense of academic success is too simplistic a model and ignores the intricacies of an individual's experiences and emotions which may be affected by a plethora of other intrinsic and extrinsic factors (Weare, 2015; Department for Education, 2016). Therefore, while good teaching which focuses on enabling and facilitating academic progress remains important, greater emphasis on learner well-being needs to be realised in order to ensure that learners are equipped with the necessary aptitudes and strategies to be as receptive to learning as possible.

Developing an action point

School X's SDP is broken down into five different Inspection Areas, each of which is made up of various priorities that have been identified as areas of focus for improvement. The school's progress in relation to these priorities has been appraised by the school and the Governing Body and is assessed using criteria set against recommendations from School X's last Estyn inspection in December 2017 (School X, 2019). The priority selected for reflection upon in this report is within the 'Wellbeing and Attitudes to Learning Inspection Area', described as further developing health and well-being provision for pupils, and has been identified as having made 'strong progress' (School X, 2019). The SDP priority to develop health and well-being provision for pupils includes ten points of action which have been devised by the school, some of which will now be evaluated in greater detail.

One of the main action points within the health and well-being priority of School X's SDP which has recently been fulfilled was to develop a 'Pastoral Hwb' (School X, 2019). The SDP outlines that measurable evidence of the development of this can be seen simply through its completed construction. However, this clearly is not enough to determine its efficacy. School X also recognises that the expected impacts of the 'Pastoral Hwb' mainly concern improved

pupil well-being and resultantly, improved attendance, especially of more vulnerable pupils (Durlak *et al.*, 2011; School X, 2019). Working tangentially with the 'Pastoral Hwb', but as a separate action point on the SDP, School X has also now employed two Pastoral Support Assistants with the aim that they provide targeted mentoring sessions to groups of pupils. Pupils who would like to receive extra pastoral support, are able to attend the 'Pastoral Hwb' on a "drop in" basis as it has an "open door" policy (School X, 2019). Other pupils who require additional pastoral support, but who may not be comfortable to come forward independently may be identified by Form Tutors. As detailed in another action point, Form Tutors are to provide mentoring, mainly relating to attendance and individual performance, to small groups of pupils in their form groups. If the Form Tutor gleans any information from a particular pupil which suggests they may benefit from additional pastoral support this can be passed on to the team at the 'Pastoral Hwb' (as well as the registered safeguarding officers) who can then cater for any necessary, individualised provision, focusing on improving emotional well-being. The SDP outlines that the success of these measures can be assessed through the tracking of pupil attendance and academic progress, using data compiled by 'ClassCharts', the software used by School X to register pupils, award behaviour points, record sanctions and log minutes from mentoring sessions (School X, 2019). As well as this, School X's SDP states that the success of these measures on improving well-being can be assessed through pupil voice and the online, anonymous school health and well-being survey which is completed by all pupils at the school each year. The measureable outcomes and impacts of the action points are then to be analysed, evaluated and reviewed at defined time points, by the Senior Leadership Team and the Governing Body, to ascertain whether they have been effective and how best to progress (School X, 2019).

The action points just discussed are likely to improve levels of pupil well-being as they incorporate well evidenced strategies which relate to increased pastoral provision to improve levels of emotional resilience, empathy and mental health (Isdoe, 2016; Cowburn and Blow, 2017; Al-Ghabban, 2018; Zandvliet, Stanton and Dhaliwal, 2019). Although, these aforementioned action points do not incorporate a whole-school approach, which has been established in the pedagogical literature as being one of the most effective ways of bringing about large scale and consistent long-term improvements to health and well-being, rather than only focusing efforts on a relatively small, targeted group of pupils (Weare, 2015; Department for Education, 2016; Cowburn and Blow, 2017; National Assembly for Wales, 2018). The SDP does, however, detail an action point in which staff are to receive "training on mindfulness and resilience to support mental health and well-being" which could help staff to better promote good well-being across all areas of school life (School X, 2019). But

when looked at in greater detail, the action point prescribes that this training should help to inform the pastoral curriculum and pupil mentoring. Similarly to another action point, which involves “liaison with external agencies to develop the PSE curriculum”, the main focus is on developing the PSE curriculum, rather than extending health and well-being provision to ensure it’s effectively incorporated across the whole curriculum (School X, 2019). Instead, research findings in pedagogical literature suggest that it may be more beneficial to actively encourage staff who have received this training, and staff who have liaised with external agencies, to apply what they have learnt into *all* of their lessons and interactions with pupils to help to ensure that all learners are being consistently exposed to a range of good well-being principles and practices, better enabling learners to adopt these into their everyday routines (Cowburn and Blow, 2017; National Assembly for Wales, 2018). In turn, pupils would be better equipped with self-care, emotional and social skills which may more deeply permeate all aspects of their lives, leading to greater levels of fulfillment in school and later life (Department of Health, 2012; Public Health England, 2014; Weare, 2015).

Reflection and evaluation

The priority in School X’s SDP for further developing health and well-being provision to all learners has been developed into a number of action points, which, in consideration of the pedagogical literature, are likely to be successful if delivered effectively. As previously discussed, the action points involving staff training to support well-being, liaison with external agencies, the development of a ‘Pastoral Hwb’, the employment of two Pastoral Support Assistants and mentoring by Form Tutors are all interventions which are likely to successfully improve levels of pupil well-being (Durlak *et al.*, 2011; Department of Education, 2016), especially of groups of pupils who have been identified as being more likely to be vulnerable, such as those on free school meals and ‘looked after children’ (Melzer *et al.*, 2003; Baars *et al.*, 2018). These measures are likely to help improve the well-being of those pupils targeted as they incorporate strategies helping the learners to improve their mindsets, emotional resilience and personal effectiveness (Department for Education, 2016; Al-Ghabban, 2018; Dweck, 2018). However, the action points mentioned are unlikely to bring about significant change to the well-being of all other pupils within the school. Instead, a whole-school approach to health and well-being, on top of the action points already devised, would better reach and improve the well-being of all pupils within the school. With mental health problems at an all time high, with an average of over one in ten school aged children suffering from a mental health problem (Cownburn and Blow, 2017), it is important to provide good emotional well-being support to all pupils, as is it not only pupils who have been identified as more likely to be vulnerable who will be affected. Additionally, a whole-school

approach would better reinforce healthy well-being principles and practices to those who may already be receiving targeted and individualised support. A whole-school approach which helps pupils to consistently apply growth mindsets, good self-care and positive social interaction into their everyday lives, is also likely to have resulting positive impacts upon attendance and attainment outcomes (Green *et al.*, 2005; National Assembly for Wales, 2018). Further improvements to well-being may then be made as a result of improved self-esteem resulting from improving academic attainment (Boxer, 2019). A whole-school approach to improving well-being may include measures such as training from external agencies to inform staff on how to promote good well-being practices in their day-to-day lessons in an authentic and consistent manner. Other measures may include regular, dedicated time in form periods or assemblies to focus on the promotion and exploring understanding of particular well-being practices. However, it is important to recognise that equipping teachers with the skills and understanding to incorporate the promotion of good well-being into their lessons, should act as a tool to aid learning environment management, rather than impose additional pressure on teachers. Strategies to improve well-being should be seen as an opportunity to help pupils and improve outcomes in the long-term (National Assembly for Wales, 2018). To determine teachers solely responsible for levels of pupil well-being would result in undue pressure and would be counter-intuitive as a more highly stressed work force would be less able to effectively promote important well-being principles. Schools cannot be expected to replace a lack of specialist Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (Association of Child Psychotherapists, 2018; National Assembly for Wales, 2018), but should instead take the opportunity to improve well-being levels amongst pupils with realistic and achievable interventions.

Conclusion

In conclusion, focus on improvements to health and well-being provision in schools is important due to the established impacts of good well-being on fulfillment in school and throughout life, physically, academically, emotionally and socially (Department of Health, 2012). Evidence indicates that a whole-school approach, alongside targeted interventions, is best to maximise benefits to health and well-being (National Assembly for Wales, 2018). The importance of an increased focus in the curriculum on health and well-being, is also recognised in *Successful Futures* (Donaldson, 2015) and has helped to shape the new Curriculum for Wales. On a professional level, the pedagogical literature relating to the importance of promoting good health and well-being practices and principles, consistently and authentically, will inform my future teaching practice. Not only this, but better knowledge and understanding of a repertoire successful techniques to improve well-being, including how

to successfully cultivate growth mindsets (MindsetWorks, 2017), has been fostered. Improving levels of health and well-being amongst pupils in schools should not be seen as a burden of additional responsibility, it should be seen as an exciting opportunity to aid effective educational provision, allowing learners to successfully navigate their time at school and beyond.

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