

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

This report will critically reflect on the actions, impact and evidence of the promotion of positive staff wellbeing within the school, which is one of the action points from the school's strategic targets in the School Development Plan (SDP). This report will consider the cultural, linguistic and socio-economic factors that could impact learners progress while demonstrating how this target is being addressed and how the impact of this target is being measured. This school is part of the Bridgend Local Authority and is located on a large housing estate and there are currently approximately 500 pupils on role, which consisted of a Nursery unit and 16 classes for pupils ranging from Reception to Year 6. There are currently twenty two teachers and twenty one support staff. The majority of pupils speak English at home with very few learning English as an additional language. Additionally, there are no pupils that speak Welsh at home and most pupils are from a white British background. The three year rolling average for pupils eligible for free school meals is 6% and the school identifies that 11% of children have additional learning needs. Both considerably lower than the national average.

Welsh Government (2018) state that a School Development Plan (SDP) is a strategic plan for improvement. It should include the schools main priorities and measures to raise standards in a clear and simple way. The Education (School Development Plans) (Wales) Regulations 2014 requires schools to produce an annual SDP. The School Performance and Absence Targets (Wales) Regulations 2011 placed a responsibility on governing bodies to set and submit specified performance targets to the local authority. Additionally, The School Teacher Appraisal (Wales) Regulations 2011 requires a specific performance management policy, the performance management process identifies individual development needs that can align with the schools priorities and targets for improvement. (Welsh Government, 2014)

The process of producing a SDP involves identification of areas for improvement, setting targets and the implementation of strategies to achieve those targets. As well as being bound by existing legislation, this process is also guided by numerous theories and frameworks that provide a structure for identifying and addressing the areas for development within a school. The theory of school improvement, which emphasizes the

importance of continuous improvement in education (Hopkins, 2001) identifies the need to improve student outcomes, with a focus on literacy and numeracy, through the implementation of evidence-based teaching strategies and professional development in teachers. Desimone (2009) recognises the importance of providing teachers with the skills and knowledge needed to implement evidence-based teaching strategies and continued professional development will benefit a SDP as it will allow teachers to improve their practice. Furthermore, Black and William (1998) acknowledge the importance of using data to inform decision-making and monitoring progress towards targets which is also consistent with the theory of school improvement. This approach has been shown to be effective in improving student outcomes in literacy and numeracy. However, such a specific focus on literacy and numeracy can limit overall school improvements because even though literacy and numeracy skills are extremely important, McLean and Connor (2019) argue that a more comprehensive approach to school development may be necessary to address broader issues related to student wellbeing and engagement. Additionally, Gay (2010) states that an SDP would benefit from considering the social and cultural factors that may be contributing to student outcomes.

This report is focusing on the improvement of staff wellbeing within this school. Although staff wellbeing is an extremely important aspect of education, it can sometimes be overlooked but has significant implications for student outcomes, wellbeing and the overall school improvement. School staff are responsible for shaping the lives of children and their physical and mental well-being can significantly impact the quality of education they provide (Williams et al., 2022). Jennings and Greenberg (2009) recognise the importance and impact that staff wellbeing had on student outcomes. From their study, they found that teachers who participated in mindfulness practices and stress reduction reported improved classroom management and an increase in engagement. Furthermore, Noh, Park and Yang (2019) suggests that investing in staff wellbeing could improve the outcomes for children as it was positively associated with academic achievement.

Additionally, Day and Gu (2010) suggest that improving staff wellbeing is essential for retention and recruitment. McLean and Connor (2019) argue that there is a high turnover of staff in education and overlooking the importance of staff wellbeing can contribute to burnout and attrition. Therefore, measures to improve staff wellbeing such as providing a supportive and nurturing environment for staff could increase job satisfaction and reduce

staff turnover. This problem has been increasing over the years as the proportion of teachers leaving the profession has increased between 2010 and 2015. Furthermore, the most recent NEU survey reported that 70% of teachers said that their workload has increased in the past year with 95% of those teachers concerned for the impact it may have on their wellbeing. 66% feel unheard and devalued by the Government with 35% reporting that they would not be working in education in five years time. Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2018) emphasized the impact staff wellbeing has on the culture of the school as well as its overall performance. Harms and Roos (2019) argue that staff wellbeing is an ethical imperative and it is the schools responsibility to provide a safe and healthy work environment for their staff members.

The effectiveness of the SDP is dependent on the quality of the process used to develop it. The first stage of the SDP process is to identify the specific needs of the school which involves completing a comprehensive self-evaluation. The self-evaluation should consider the strengths and weaknesses of the school (Welsh Government, 2014). External evaluations such as ESTYN inspections can provide valuable data on school performance. However, Brighouse and Woods (2007) argue the effectiveness of external evaluations for identifying areas for improvement because research suggests that ESTYN inspections can be overly focussed on measurable outcomes, for example, test results and may not take in to account broader aspects of the school performance such as wellbeing. Pupil and staff wellbeing was an SDP priority for this school before and during the pandemic, however it is still being identified as needing additional support. Even though, behaviour in the school is generally excellent and post pandemic, most pupils resumed school life with positive wellbeing and behaviour.

Following the self-evaluation, the next part of the SDP process is to set targets and goals. According to Bubb (2013), the targets should be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound whilst aligning with the priorities identified in the self-evaluation. Research suggest that setting challenging targets can have a positive impact on student achievement. However, this provides a risk of the target being unrealistic which can cause a decrease in morale for staff and students. This school acknowledge the reason for the target and make it clear that as they have recently made changes to their whole school vision and values, the language of their behaviour strategies and policy needs to be updated to align with the new vision and the behaviour and staff code of conduct policies. Through professional conversations with the deputy head teacher, it was made clear that one of the main factors contributing their

wellbeing target was the pandemic. As this school has approximately forty staff members, it became impossible to have face to face meetings and they were unable to use the staff room when adhering to various restriction that were in place. The senior leadership team noticed a decline in school morale and decided to focus on positive staff wellbeing as one of their action points.

After the targets have been set, actions and strategies needed to achieve these targets are decided. Harris and Chapman (2002) suggest that these should be evidence-based and should acknowledge the resources required and the responsibility of staff. Research suggests that involving all stakeholders in the development if these actions can increase ownership and commitment to the plan (Watkins, 2013). In developing the action point of promoting positive staff well being, there are two realistic and clear actions. Through the professional conversations held with the deputy head, it was confirmed that the first action had been met which was to review suitability and impact of the staff wellbeing toolkit from before the pandemic to which it has been updated and appropriate adjustments have been made. When developing the revised toolkit, it was important to involve the staff as they felt it would increase the impact of the new measures as well as increasing the chances of continued improvement. Even though the senior leadership team are responsible for this action point, there were specific staff meetings included all staff, carried out as well as a staff wellbeing survey which they are hoping to carry out more frequently going forward. The second action point was to revise measures and consider any alternative strategies. So far, the senior leadership team have invested in redesigning the staff room and the planning room, this included new furniture with spaces to relax, more welcoming colours as well as a motivation quotes. This was to bring back more of a peaceful but welcoming space for staff to take a break or work in. Additionally, the school has decided to share a staff bulletin via teams which is accessible for all staff. As well as this, any additional information that needs to be shared, they condense to one page to prevent increasing the workload with excessive paperwork. This was put in place after a common problem that staff were experiencing from the survey seemed to be communication issues and increasing workload. The Headteacher and the Deputy Head Teacher have received positive feedback regarding the new ways of communication and have seen less issues with staff missing important information.

Finally, it is fundamental to the SDP process to monitor and evaluate the progress made towards the targets which should include frequent data collection and analysis. Earl and

Fullan (2003) acknowledge the research that suggests that regular monitoring and evaluation can have a positive impact on school improvement. However, it is important that the data collected is meaningful and used to inform decision making as there is a risk data collection can lack consideration and become a tick box exercise (Watkins, 2013).

Overall, it seemed that there was an effective process in place for creating this SDP and the identified needs and targets were challenging but realistic. For the particular action point that I chose to focus on I was able to see the strategies and actions were being carried out after sufficient evidence was gathered. However, there was limited evidence for the monitoring and evaluation as it is due to be evaluated in the summer term in preparation to make any changes before the end of this academic year. The actions that the school has taken, have received positive feedback and it has shown that the staff responsible for this action point as carefully gathered evidence, and made informed decisions to take action when involving the relevant stakeholders. Even though the changes were having a positive impact on the wellbeing of the staff and tackling some of their main concerns, it was not clear what would be in place to continue to actively improve staff wellbeing. Lester et al. (2020) highlights the importance of a caring school environment and how that can enhance whole-school wellbeing and suggests using a whole-school staff wellbeing tool. This evaluation tool provides a useful screening and self evaluation measure to identify whole school staff wellbeing strengths and areas for improvement. However, the Department for Education (2019) acknowledges the difficulties in measuring wellbeing as it is a cumulative process of balancing the challenges that every individual experiences. Furthermore, Gibson (2019) addresses the complexities of well-being and as there are numerous objective and subjective indicators. It is important to be aware of the stigma associated with poor wellbeing and understand the difficulty of seeking help or recognising behaviours or emotions. Therefore, a suggestion to support the improvement of promoting positive wellbeing could be continued professional development. Fletcher-Wood and Zuccollo (2020) suggested that continued professional development can support people to become more organised and improve proactive to provide higher quality education. In contrast, staff who do not receive effective training are at risk of losing motivation and skills could become stagnant. Which in turn, could impact staff retention, morale, and overall wellbeing. The TES school wellbeing report (2023) found that the underfunding that schools across the UK are experiencing currently, is having a negative impact on how

staff feel about their performance, a quarter of participants found that they don't currently feel confident in their role and their skillset which is having a negative impact on wellbeing and mental health. In addition to improving practice to improve wellbeing, it is important to keep staff wellbeing on the agenda and offer resilience-based workshops for staff. Fonagy (2020) discusses the importance of this to help remove the stigma and create an environment where the process of discussing wellbeing is normal. Other suggestions would be to carry these out during staff meetings or inset days and even include topics in the curriculum to improve the wellbeing of both pupils and staff.

This report has explored in depth the process of an SDP. It has provided evidence to show that an SDP is an important tool to ensure that schools are continuously improving. Furthermore, it has shows that the quality of the improvement can rely on the effectiveness of the process, particularly a school's ability to self evaluate and recognise not only their strengths but their weaknesses too. It was evident that by creating an inclusive environment and involving stakeholders in the development of action points and strategies increases the ownership and commitment to improving. The process has shown that the responsibility for school improvement belongs to the entire school, it requires reflective practitioners to recognise their own strengths and weakness and act to continuously improve which will influence my practice in the future as applying the Gibbs' Reflective Model (1998) emphasizes the importance of reflecting upon experiences to tackle them effectively.

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