

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

Target 1	Greater critical engagement with more recent, relevant research.
Target 2	Endeavour to synthesise wider background research into your writing to aid the support of your key points.
Target 3	Ensure elaboration and engagement with the opposing view/ aspects to be cautious with and limitations whenever possible

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

The purpose of this assignment is to show how a school develops one aspect of its School Development Plan (SDP). The process of development will be critically evaluated to reflect on the impact it has had on the school. The chosen aspect for this evaluation is in line with the school's aim "to raise standards across the school in core subjects" (School X, 2021). The school has outlined many actions in order to achieve this priority, but the chosen one for this assignment is "Target ambitious progress of all pupils" (School X, 2021). This chosen action will be evaluated throughout to show the effectiveness of the strategies that are in place to target the school's priority.

School X is a village school in the heart of the countryside. There are 127 pupils aged three to eleven years at the school, including 18 in the part-time nursery provision. There are six mainstream classes including three mixed age classes. Currently no pupils are eligible for free school meals. Estyn 2018 found that "A very few pupils come from ethnic backgrounds and have English as an additional language. The school has identified just below 13% of pupils as having additional

learning needs". This is considerably lower than the Welsh average of 22.2% (Welsh Government, 2019). The budget per pupil for School X is £3,658. The maximum per pupil in the area is £5,232 and the minimum is £2,703. School X is "21st out of the 79 primary schools in terms of its school budget per pupil" (Estyn, 2018).

The SDP of School X will be evaluated to examine its effectiveness. "The school development plan is the school's strategic plan for improvement. It sets out the actions a school will take to improve learner outcomes" (Welsh Government, 2014, p.3). It is a three-year document where schools outline a list of targets and priorities in order to promote improvement. The priorities outlined by the school include how they are addressing the national targets of:

- "raising the standards of education in relation to literacy
- raising the standards of education in relation to numeracy
- reducing the impact of poverty on educational attainment"

- Welsh Government (2014, p.3)

The SDP is a live and working document which "should be easily accessible and used as a common reference point by all staff and governors in reflecting upon and improving their work" (Welsh Government, 2014, p.3). The strategy undertaken by schools to create their SDP is split into four stages:

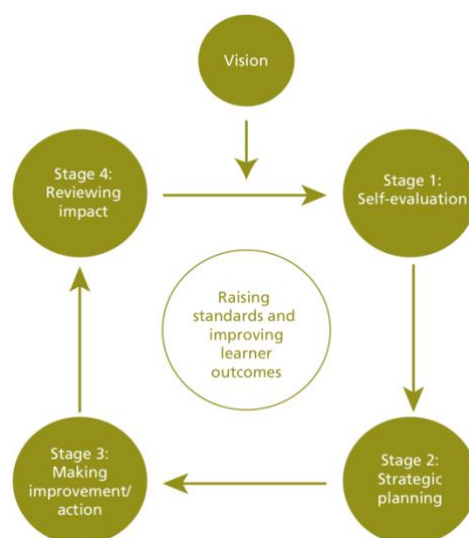


Figure 1- School development planning cycle (Welsh Government, 2014)

Figure 1 shows the process in which schools construct their SDP. The first stage is centred around self-evaluation. At the start of the cycle the school reflects on their performance and uses the findings as a foundation for the planning. Welsh Government (2014, p.8) state that the “process of self-evaluation and improvement planning is central to supporting advances in school improvement, professional learning and learner outcomes”. This supports Meuret & Morlaix (2003) who found that School Evaluation is a way in which to improve the responsiveness of schools to their individual needs, as well as providing opportunities for improvement. The importance of self-evaluation is highly thought of by a number of sources: “Estyn has highlighted the importance of schools carrying out self-evaluation to identify their strengths and areas for development” (Welsh Government, 2014, p.8). As mentioned in Figure 1, the second phase focuses on strategic planning. In order for planning to be effective “it should involve all partners and stakeholders; this is essential in ensuring that everyone has a commitment to the school’s improvement agenda” (Welsh Government, 2014, p.10). Including all stakeholders in the planning process is crucial to help “promote a sense of ownership and collaborative working towards improvement” (Welsh Government, 2014, p.10). The third stage of the SDP is to put the actions and strategies into practice. During this phase the teachers will be made aware of their responsibilities and the targets that the school has set out. The final stage of the development cycle concentrates on reviewing the impact of the implementations. As mentioned, it is a live document which is regularly monitored: “this will ensure that the school’s improvement planning and strategies reflect the up-to-date context of the school” (Welsh Government, 2014, p.17).

The chosen aspect from the SDP of School X is “Target ambitious progress of all pupils” (School X, 2020). This specific action was chosen by the school to work towards the overall priority of “raising standards across the school in core subjects” (School X, 2020). Ensuring the progression of all pupils is an effective way of targeting an overall growth in raising standards across the school and it is crucial that children are given the opportunity to progress. Progression in learning refers to “more sophisticated ways of thinking about an idea that might reasonably follow one another as students learn” (Nichols, 2010). Progression in learning is imperative in order to help children improve and develop. This is due to the fact that “much learning tends to follow an expected path - or progression - where more complex

skills are built on foundational skills” (Kim & Care, 2018). Therefore, in order to improve and develop, there needs to be a sense of progression in learning to provide children with a greater range of skills. The way in which the contemporary Welsh education system is evolving is heavily influenced by progression. One of the main aims of the new curriculum is to “promote progression in children and young people’s learning” (Donaldson, 2015, p.35). There is an emphasis on designing “learning which supports an increasingly sophisticated understanding application of the statements of what matter” (Welsh Government, 2020). This again emphasises that progression in learning is heavily sought after as part of the Welsh curriculum. Welsh Government (2020) state that “progression must be embedded in learning and teaching and should form the basis of thinking in schools when designing and planning the school curriculum”.

Developing this aspect of children’s progression will allow them to gain a greater insight of the world around them and develop as more rounded individuals. It is crucial that progression is ambitious in order to promote resilience. Children must challenge themselves and set higher standards that encourage deeper learning. They should be given the opportunity to develop as “ambitious and capable learners, ready to learn throughout their lives” (Donaldson, 2015, p.29) and progression in learning is highly valuable when working to incorporate those particular skills.

Overall, the need for progression in learning is evident as it “allows space for a variety of diversion, repetition, reflection as learners’ thinking develops over time to new levels of sophistication” (Welsh Government, 2020).

As already explained, the School Development cycle (Figure 1) is an important way in which schools outline targets. In this section the development cycle of School X will be critically analysed. It will outline the strategies undertaken in order to achieve an effective development system in relation to the action “target ambitious progress for all pupils” (School X, 2021).

Self-evaluation within a school is critical as will be seen in School X. There is an emphasis placed on ensuring that there are continuous self-evaluation strategies in

place in order to help the school's progress. As part of the 2019/2020 SDP the school identified the need to improve their self-evaluation strategies: "improve the engagement of all stakeholders to improve self-evaluation strategies" (School X, 2020). To obtain their target, they established a 'Stakeholder day' where all parties involved with the school were invited to discuss areas where improvement was needed. As this process of self-evaluation incorporates all of the parties (children, staff, parents, governors, etc) there is a sense of ownership for everyone involved. It is important that everyone involved with the school is given the opportunity to outline any possible improvements they feel would be of benefit. This particular form of self-evaluation is supported by Welsh Government (2014, p.9) who state that self-evaluation can be "obtained from consultation with learners, parents/carers, staff, and outside organisations and agencies that the school may be working with as part of the wider community engagement". This has helped with pupil progress as the children have been given the opportunity to engage with a wider range of people from the community. After discussions with the Senior Mentor from School X it is clear that it has had a positive impact on the children: "Through discussions with the members of the wider community the children received a greater learning experience and it opened their eyes to the world around them". Also, as part of an internal evaluation, the school was able to use data analysis to inform decisions and set targets. In relation to setting targets for progression, the school identified whether the children were on track to achieve their intended targets. Through the evaluation process they were able to identify children who needed extra assistance, and this proved beneficial when planning.

The second phase of the School development cycle is planning strategically for improvement. Using the information gained from the self-evaluation process, the school was able to outline collaboratively a list of strategies that could be undertaken to promote progression for the pupils. This supports Welsh Government (2014, p.11) who state that "the governing body, headteacher and school staff should work together to determine how the areas for development identified through self-evaluation should be prioritised". This meant that the staff understood the targets and the expectations for progress. One of the main aims to ensure ambitious progress in all pupils was to remove all barriers from learning. It is imperative that schools work towards this to ensure that all children are given the opportunity to

succeed. This supports Department for Education and Skills (2004, p.6) who believed that “all children have the right to a good education and the opportunity to fulfil their potential”. To ensure that the barriers of learning were removed, the school introduced the ‘Nessy programme’ with the hope to raise the literacy standards of pupils with dyslexia. In addition, the school worked collaboratively with another school in the area to share ideas for development. This supports Welsh Government (2014, p.12) who believe that when planning for improvement, schools should “both consider how they can build on their existing strengths and learn from those of other schools. Schools should be alert to opportunities to work collaboratively and share best practice”.

As Figure 1 shows, stage three is centred around the implementation of the strategies of strategic planning. The school introduced a programme to assist learners with dyslexia, with the hope of breaking down their barriers to learning. The programme has proved a success and “Nessy has been introduced as an individual intervention programme with a selected group of children to target their LLC needs. Also, it has been purchased as an app to support all pupils during weekly literacy carousel” (School X, 2021). Through collaboration with the additional school, the staff were able to implement a range of additional strategies to aid in the progress of the pupils. For example, the school introduced a Self-assessment worksheet which incorporated the four purposes. This allowed the children to assess their own work and recognise areas that could be improved.

The final stage of the cycle focuses on how the school evaluated the impact of the implementations. To ensure the progress of the new strategies, the school implemented a range of strategies to monitor development. For example, monthly pupil progress meetings were undertaken to discuss how the children were developing. In addition, the school used discussions with pupils to determine the effectiveness of the strategies. The head teacher met with the School Council and the Rights Respecting group to critically analyse these strategies. This heavily targets pupil voice and shows that the pupils’ views are respected. This is supported by Estyn (2018) who conducted research in School A and found that “each pupil has a significant voice in shaping the curriculum and their contributions. This has had a significant impact on pupil wellbeing and standards of teaching and learning”.

The process of development in School X is centred around the 'Monitor, Evaluate, Review' model which means that they are always looking at ways in which the school can develop. This is supported by Welsh Government (2014, p. 17) who state that the SDP should be "regularly monitored during the development cycle and formally reviewed and revised at least annually".

On reflection School X has conducted a thorough process of development using a systematic approach. However, due to extenuating circumstances the development has not been as effective as they would have hoped. The Covid 19 pandemic has had an understandable effect on all of the schools in Wales. Shifting from face to face learning to online teaching was always going to affect the progress of the pupils. School X (2021) found that "the disruption has had considerable effects on pupil progress". During the online learning format, the school continued to provide effective learning opportunities for the children with the aim of promoting progress, but their expectations had to be managed. It was a worrying time for children and the school had to ensure that their well-being was paramount. YoungMinds (2020) found that "74% of teachers and school staff agreed that schools being closed to most students over the period of lockdown has had a negative impact on the mental health of young people". The school tried to ensure that the pupils' mental health was strong and held drop-in sessions twice a week for the children to communicate with their peers. In terms of educational progress, it is unrealistic to expect huge developments due to the children learning online. This supports the University of Oxford (2021) who found that "despite high-quality remote provision, primary age students lost a fifth of the progress they would usually make in a year". However, according to the statistics of the number of pupils achieving expected targets for School X, pupil progress has been stable. The percentage of Year 5 pupils working at Level 4 before the pandemic was 89% and the percentage after online learning was 90%. This shows that strategies the school had in place were effective in ensuring the progress of pupils, even during online learning. Overall, School X has a thorough planning structure in place to outline targets for pupil progress. However, to further develop pupil progress, the school could further develop their assessment strategies. Estyn (2018) conducted research in School B regarding their ability to raise attainment through examining pupil progress. The school introduced a "Raising

Attainment Group (RAG)” to ensure that more pupils achieved a higher level. “Individual pupils and the percentage of cohorts achieving at the expected level and the higher-than-expected level are identified, as are those pupils who require targeted support”. The following of pupils’ achievement half-termly “ensures that the high expectations set by the school are met” (Estyn, 2018). School X could undertake a similar strategy in order to “target ambitious progress of all pupils”.

To conclude, I have gained throughout this assignment a greater understanding of the process a school undertakes in order to promote development. I am now aware of the need for schools to complete such a process and I feel that School X has introduced a systematic process which is effective in improving the school. It is imperative that schools undertake a similar procedure which incorporates all of the stakeholders to aid in its development. I have gained a greater insight in terms of the need for progression in learning and challenging pupils to exceed their own expectations. I will ensure to use this information during future practice to progress attainment in pupils. This will provide the children with the opportunity to become “ambitious and capable learners through encouraging them to explore new and challenging areas of experience and to strive to improve their performance” Donaldson (2015, p.44). I was very impressed with the manner in which School X adapted quickly and effectively to the changing nature of school life due to the Covid 19 pandemic. I feel that it was important to target well-being, and I will continue to develop links with well-being in future practice to ensure that the children are happy and self-assured individuals.

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