

AI Statement

I confirm that I have not used any AI tools in the research or writing this presentation.

I confirm that I have not presented any AI generated text as my own work. I confirm I have copies of my drafts, notes, and other resources I used before, and after the use of AI tools which I may be asked to provide in evidence.

	Targed/Target	Yr hyn yr wyf wedi'i wneud yn yr aseiniad hwn What I have done in this assignment...
Targed/Target 1	Aim to critically engage with what you are reading and writing about to avoid your writing being overly descriptive.	In this assessment I have critically engaged in more about what I have read, trying not to be overly descriptive in my writing. This has included limiting how many quotes I have used and summing up arguments.
Targed/ Target 2	Try to demonstrate a greater depth of knowledge, specifically when discussing the rationale, limitations and benefits of specific pedagogical approaches.	In this assessment I have found more limitations for my argument which I have able to discuss in depth. This has allowed more to then become more critical with the use of counter arguments.

A Critical Evaluation of the Development of a Strategic Target in a School Development Plan: Actions Impact and Evidence-Based Reflections.

This research report will critically evaluate one target from a School Development Plan (SDP). In line with BERA (2024), when referring to the placement school, the school will be identified as School X. The strategic target that will be evaluated is to further improve and refine literacy skills across the curriculum with a specific focus on reading comprehension and the effectiveness of oracy. As School X did not receive any recommendation from Estyn, focusing on reading and oracy is a target that School X feels that the learners can improve on.

School X is a secondary English-medium 11 to 18 school situated on the outskirts of the town where, along with the surrounding villages, 1,521 learners attend (Estyn, 2019). Around 4% of learners are eligible for free school meals, consistently lower than the national average of 16.4% (Estyn, 2019). Most learners are from a white British background with around 2% speaking English as an additional language (Estyn, 2019). Around 8% of learners have additional learning needs, which is lower than the national average of 19.2% (Estyn, 2019).

Literature Review

The guidance proposed by the Welsh Government for SDPs is to summarise the school's self-evaluation with strengths and areas for development (Welsh Government, 2022b). The Welsh Government (2022b) notes that the progression, attainment, and well-being of all learners should be key in the school evaluation and improvement planning. Through different self-evaluation progresses, the target to improve reading comprehension and oracy skills was created and an action plan was put into place by all stakeholders. Termly, this is monitored, evaluated, and reviewed by the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) checking the progress of the target.

When looking at the attainment for the school, despite literacy being a target, the literacy score for School X from 2024 was 46.3 which is significantly higher compared to the Welsh advantage of 38.5 (Welsh Government, 2025). Despite this, compared to numeracy (47.1) and science (46.4), literacy in School X was the lowest result (Welsh Government, 2025). When reviewing the Welsh Curriculum in 2015, Donaldson (2015) noted how the performance in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) test was a "*significant driver for change*". The PISA results for Wales in 2022 were the lowest since first participating in PISA in 2006 (Dauncey, 2023). For reading, Wales's average score in 2022 was 466, which was significantly below OECS average of 476, and below Wales's score in 2018 which was 483 (Ingram et al, 2023, p. 17). Despite School X having high attainment, this links the school to working towards the national mission of high aspirations for all.

The Welsh Government's framework for school improvement (Welsh Government, 2022a) ensures that learners' progression and well-being are at the heart of all efforts, delivering high standards and aspirations. Jeremy Miles, the Minister of Education and Welsh Language in 2022, stated that *"by putting learner progression at the heart of our reforms, we will be supporting learners to reach their full potential"* (Welsh Government, 2022a). The first objective for the national mission framework is learning for life (Welsh Government, 2023a). The Welsh Government commits to this objective by aiming to improve cross-curricular skills such as literacy, numeracy, and digital competence while delivering an Reading and Oracy Toolkit (2023a). Miles set out in 2021 to place the development of pupils' reading and oracy skills at the heart of the Welsh Government policy (Estyn, 2023).

With School X focusing on high aspirations for their learners, focusing on reading and oracy skills will allow learners to develop important skills for the future. Oakhill, Cain, and Elbro (2015, p. 1) argue that reading comprehension is important for broader learning success in education and employment. Gaunt and Stott (2018, p. 7) argue that oracy skills are highly valuable upon leaving school and entering the world of work. This demonstrates the importance of improving reading and oracy skills for School X to help learners with their future.

As School X has high-performing learners, a challenge to the SDP target could be that learners feel that they do not need to improve these skills if they are already achieving the grades they want. Barton and Woodley (2017, p. 6) argue that literacy activities need to be purposeful for learners in secondary school because if they do not see the point of the task then they will disengage and lose motivation. This indicates how School X needs to get the learners on board with implementing literacy in their lessons, with teachers working out ways that their learners engage with literacy best in their lessons.

Maureen Lewis and David Wray note that very few secondary teachers have substantial training in literacy (2014, XI). This could be a challenge to School X's target. However, the SDP notes how four teachers are enrolled in the Voice 21 course, the UK's oracy education charity which works to transform the learning and life chances of young people through talk (Voice 21, 2024). This allows these teachers to become knowledgeable about oracy, seeing how effective this can be in the school's curriculum. While this allows these teachers to have training in oracy, giving their expertise then to all teachers at various points throughout the year, this still limits how many teachers have literacy training.

Barton and Woodley (2017, p. 10) argue that evidence-based practice means that teachers engage with student data to inform, reflect upon, and then modify their teaching practice. Recent literature that focuses on evidence-based strategies surrounding literacy prioritises the development of reading and oracy strategies in the classrooms.

In the Estyn report, *Developing pupils' English reading skills from 10-14 years of age*, a recommendation for school leaders was to *"provide staff with high-quality professional learning about evidence-based strategies to develop pupils' reading skills across the curriculum"* (Estyn, 2023). The Education Endowment Foundation [hereafter EEF], (2021) provides these evidence-based strategies in their guidance report on improving literacy in

secondary schools. Jean Gross (2018, p. 6) argues that this report by the EEF is influential for teachers. The EEF notes how reading strategies aim to support active engagement with texts that improve comprehension (EEF, 2021). Recommended reading strategies include the reciprocal reading approach (prediction, questioning, clarifying, and summarising) (p. EEF, 2021). Hulya Kucukoglu (2013, p. 710) also recommends these strategies arguing that through these strategies, teachers can help improve reading comprehension. However, for these strategies to be successful, Kucukoglu (2013, p. 710) notes how it is important to teach these strategies by naming them and modelling how they should be used.

For oracy, Millard and Menzies (2016, p.8) argue that there is little relation to how teachers think and engage with oracy. Within the literature, the emerging trend seems to focus more on oracy in primary schools rather than secondary schools. While the EEF provided a report on how literacy can be improved in secondary schools (EEF, 2021), there is still a gap in the literature on secondary school oracy. However, the EEF report does provide evidence-based strategies that can be used by teachers to promote high-quality talk in the classroom (EEF, 2021). Some of these strategies include modelling what effective talk sounds like, deliberately sequencing talk activities, and using open-ended questions. This is something David Didau (2014, p. 75) agrees with stating that the best way to improve talk in the classroom is through questioning.

Developing an Action Point

The SDP target of literacy focusing on reading and oracy aligns with the school's broader goal of high attainment for all learners, aligning with the Welsh Government's national mission of aspirations for all (Welsh Government, 2022a).

With no Estyn recommendations, this target was prioritised through learner outcomes. The need to improve reading and oracy skills was decided upon by the SLT observing lessons and being involved in book scrutinises from different year groups. This was then taken to all stakeholders involved in the school where they decided to focus on reading and oracy as areas that need further development.

Lewis and Wray (2014, p. XI) argue that the move to subject teachers of all disciplines enhancing the literacy achievements of their learners has been positive. While teaching history is already literacy-heavy, finding new ways to incorporate this into lessons was a priority. In my practice, the action plan I took involved observing the existing literacy practices by teachers in School X and then planning how I was going to implement these ideas into my lessons while finding different evidence-based strategies that I could utilise. The timeline to implement reading and oracy strategies was ongoing throughout my lessons during my placement in School X. These practices will be discussed later in this report.

With the SDP target focusing on reading and oracy, measuring the effectiveness of the target was implemented through assessments. With School X having a partnership with Voice 21, using their oracy framework helped assess the learner's progress through four different strands of oracy (Voice 21, 2021). Through assessments of reading and speaking and listening, the teachers and SLT can analyse the results to see whether progress is being made through the strategies that are being implemented. This then allows teachers to

continue using strategies that are working well and removing strategies that are not benefiting the learners.

However, while younger years such as years 7 and 8 may have speaking and listening assessments in English, this is not the case for all subject areas. Within history, speaking and listening assessments are done from GCSE onwards, which means that while assessments might be able to assess reading skills, learners are not always assessed on their oracy skills.

When Jeremy Miles set out to improve standards of reading and oracy in schools, he wanted this done through a whole-school approach (Welsh Government, 2023b). Miles noted the importance of the whole school community working together in a “coordinated, consistent, and sustained way where these skills were part of all aspects of school life” (Welsh Government, 2023b). This idea of a whole-school approach to reading and oracy can be seen as a strength of School X. In oracy, members of staff are trained by Voice 21 and then work with all staff members to provide consistency to develop a whole-school approach to oracy. This is a strength to the target as this provides consistency to using oracy throughout the school and what strategies are used.

While the school uses whole-school approaches to oracy, the only whole-school approach to reading was silent reading for Years 7 and 8 during registration at least once a week. In the SDP, the focus on reading is from a department approach instead of the whole school. While this can cause inconsistencies for learners in different subjects, this approach is supported by the EEF. The EEF notes how approaches to literacy in some areas should be balanced with more subject-specific support (EEF, 2021). This demonstrates the strength of the school to use department approaches to reading which focuses more on the specific strategies in that subject.

A weakness of the SDP target was that there is no mention of teaching reading and oracy skills first before implementing them in practice. When implementing reading strategies into classroom practice, the EEF notes how these strategies should be modelled and practiced so learners develop as strategic readers (EEF, 2021). Within the classroom, as School X has mixed ability classes, this means that there is no set reading strategies as learners are on different levels and experiences when it comes to reading. However, this is something teachers could do by differentiating how they model for different learners within their classes.

The idea of modelling first can also be effective in oracy with Gaunt and Stott (2018, pp. 27-28) arguing that to ensure that classroom discussions are productive, learners must be taught how to have a good discussion. Gaunt and Stott (2018, p. 28) note the importance of this as we cannot assume learners know what is needed in an effective discussion if they have not had the chance to practice these skills at home. Despite School X being in an affluent area, narrowing the attainment gap between learners should be a key priority for all schools (EEF, 2021). The EEF (2021) notes how language skills are critical factors in social disadvantage with learners who are eligible for free school meals and living in areas of disadvantage having a greater chance of developing speech, language, and communication needs. Allowing a chance before discussions to give examples of what an effective discussion looks like, then allows everyone in the classroom to develop their oracy skills at a similar rate.

Overall, teaching effective reading and oracy skills by modelling examples first can be seen as an area of improvement for School X. This could be done at the start of Year 7, allowing all learners an equal start in developing these skills which can evolve throughout their school journey.

Reflection and Evaluation

Reflecting upon my practices, the use of reading and oracy strategies throughout my lessons, and using evidence-based recommendation meant that I was able to trial some strategies during my placement at School X.

One approach to supporting the reading target in my lesson was implemented through questioning and summarising to develop learners' reading comprehension. Through questioning, Joan Sedita (2018) argues that when learners generate questioning while reading, this improves memory, integration, and identification of main ideas. Summarising helps learners construct an overall understanding of what they are reading allowing further development of reading comprehension (Oczkus, 2018, p. 29). However, reading strategies in the classroom could be further improved by using more reciprocal reading approaches such as predicting and clarifying. Lori Oczkus (2018, p. 22) notes that reciprocal reading is a multiple-strategy approach where all strategies need to be included to have the best results. As reciprocal reading scaffolds learners with strategies to comprehend text (Oczkus, 2018, p. 14), Oczkus argues that it works for all learners, no matter their ability (Oczkus, 2018, p. 19.). This is something I propose to implement in both my teaching and in School X as this method allows all learners to develop their reading comprehension through scaffolding techniques, allowing all learners, even those with ALN or EAL, to have these skills for life.

One approach to supporting the oracy target in my lesson was implemented through the use of 'Think, Pair, Share' which was already in place in School X. While the activity gets learners using their oracy skills, Aprianti and Ayu (2020, p.15) note how 'Think, Pair, Share' promotes higher-order thinking and increased self-confidence through learners discussing their ideas. However, while discussions are a powerful tool for learning (Gaunt and Stott, 2018, p. 27), learners can often become disengaged with the task once they feel they have had their discussion or if they are unsure how to describe their ideas verbally. Through research, a way to improve 'Think, Pair, Share' is by providing scaffolding for learners. The EEF report notes how the use of sentence starters will allow learners to have a structure to their responses (EEF, 2021). This is something I recommend implementing during oracy tasks within the school as using sentence starters will help guide learners through their discussion, assisting learners who may not be confident with expressing their ideas verbally.

Conclusion

To conclude, this report evaluates School X's SDP target of literacy with a specific focus on reading comprehension and exploring the effectiveness of oracy.

Through this research report the lessons I have learned are the importance of a SDP and how this plan can be implemented in different ways, through department or whole-school approaches, putting the learners as the centre focus and how these targets will

benefit them. This links to the Welsh Government's national mission of high aspirations for all (Welsh Government, 2022a).

This experience will influence my future teaching practices with the evidence-based recommendations I have made throughout the report being areas I can develop in my teaching career.

This research supports professional standards, linking to advancing learning in pedagogy with the cross-curricular themes of literacy (Welsh Government, 2019). This research also links to professional learning of wider reading and research findings as all strategies used have been through evidence-based findings (Welsh Government, 2019).

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