

*How a School Develops One Aspect of
its SDP A Report That Critically
Reflects on the Actions, Impact and
Evidence Base*

*A Report That Critically Reflects on the Actions,
Impact and Evidence Base*

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	Targed/target	Yr hyn yr wyf wedi'i wneud yn yr aseiniad hwn What I have done in this assignment...
Targed/Target 1	Focusing on the assignment brief.	I steered away from my own opinion and out of context information. I stayed on brief brought each section back to the main point.
Targed/Target 2	Referencing inaccuracies.	I put full stops put at the end of the citation instead of the sentence. No opinion has been added without a corresponding reference. I used more recent and appropriate sources.
Targed/Target 3	Further engagement with literature.	I added references to a number of theories and theorists that share views. I also added contrasting views where I could.

Introduction:

The purpose of this assignment is to critically evaluate the actions a school takes in the development of the School Development Plan (SDP) and the identification of its priorities. Using theoretical knowledge, with reference to the curriculum for Wales (Welsh Government, 2020), I will be discussing the school development process and pinpointing one aspect that my first Professional Teaching Experience (PTE1) school has identified as a priority. Furthermore, I will be demonstrating my understanding of the approaches a school engages in during the self-evaluation process; considering the actions taken, and suggesting alternative strategies based on a wide range of literature.

The priority I will be discussing is 'To improve standards of extended writing and ensure the consistency of these standards across all AoLEs,' which is altered for foundation phase to be, 'To ensure that children in the lower school are able to correctly form letters.'

Over the course of this piece of writing, I will be referring to my PTE1 school as School X in order to maintain its anonymity. The school in question is a small community school in the South of Powys. There is a high rate of poverty and deprivation in the area, and it has been found to be among the 10% of lowest income areas in the UK. The Owen Davies Consultation report, written in 2023, states that the area has a higher percentage of inhabitants with no qualifications compared to the Powys average. Within the school itself, 32% of pupils are eligible for free school meals, and 45% of pupils have been identified as having some form of Additional Learning Need (ALN) (Estyn, 2020; Owen Davies Consulting, 2023).

Literature Review:

What is a School Development Plan?

The Welsh Government (2022) characterises the SDP as a document with the purpose of firstly supporting teachers in the progression of their pedagogy, and more importantly, advancing the pupils in their learning (Welsh Government, 2022).

An effective SDP must begin with self-evaluation, and to perform constructive self-evaluation, the need for change must first be understood; for example, in response to the

most recent Welsh Curriculum changes, which were finalised in 2020 and began implementation in 2022 (Welsh Government, 2022).

The Curriculum for Wales (2020) emphasises that the primary focus for all schools should be the way in which their pupils progress towards the four core purposes. Taking this into account, there should be both short and long-term priorities that place the learners at the centre, with an emphasis on raising standards for all with attentiveness to access, equity, participation, and human rights (Soken-Huberty). With these values in place, the school should therefore be enabling the learners to progress towards the four core purposes (Welsh Government, 2020).

Which Priority have I chosen?

The priority I have chosen to explore is 'To improve standards of extended writing and ensure the consistency of these standards across all AoLEs,' which is differentiated for foundation phase as 'To ensure that children in the lower school are able to correctly form letters.' It relates to the core purpose, 'ambitious, capable learners,' which is School X's principle vision for the SDP. Additionally, this priority links directly to a third of the 12 pedagogical principles, most importantly – 'regularly reinforces the cross-curricular skills of literacy, numeracy and digital competence, and provides opportunities to practice them' (Welsh Government, 2023).

This priority was identified due to a lack of length and sufficient detail in work completed by key stage 2 (KS2) pupils in School X. It was also found that pupils in the reception class had underdeveloped fine motor skills and were unable to accurately form letters.

Literacy in Wales

According to UNESCO (2024), literacy is a tool for liberation. It has the capabilities to impact health and development, while also decreasing poverty and unemployment. Huw Lewis (2014), on behalf of the Welsh Government, affirms the above by stating that the improvement of future prospects for children may be secured by good education.

Donaldson in 2015 revealed that concerns about children lacking skills in literacy as well as the subjects of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) were blaring (Donaldson, 2015). In 2023 there appeared to be little change, with Jeremy Miles stressing the need to keep literacy and numeracy at the forefront of primary and secondary education,

especially after the negative impacts of the Covid19 pandemic (Miles, 2023). The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) revealed Wales to be below average in both literacy and numeracy, with a considerable drop in performance in post 2018 PISA results (Welsh Government, 2023).

Literacy has been identified by the Welsh Government (2022) as an avenue for further learning and central for raising standards across all the Areas of Learning Experience (AoLE). It is a cross curricular skill appropriate in all aspects of the AoLEs, and better proficiency in literacy leads to refined articulation of pupil thoughts – which contributes to the core purpose ‘ambitious, capable learners.’ In addition to this, improved literacy is essential for well-being as it has the power to enhance an individual’s employability, and therefore aids in the increase of attainment (Welsh Government, 2022).

Literacy in Theory

According to Piaget’s (1957) stages of cognitive development, children begin to develop their basic senses in the sensorimotor phase, and the ability to communicate through spoken language begins to occur in the preoperational phase. In this theory, language skills only continue to develop when a child passes into the concrete operational phase and the formal operational phase (Schull, 2021; Piaget, 1957). However, this theory is only applicable to children with an archetypal upbringing; with involved parents secure in their own cognitive development, not taking into consideration cultural and social determinants (Babakr, 2019). In the context of School X, cognitive development theory is often not an accurate gauge for language and literacy development. There is a high rate of intellectual disability within the school, which in the majority of cases, has been brought on by poor emotional intelligence (Estyn, 2020).

Emotional intelligence (EI) refers to the ability to identify, express, and regulate emotions, and as noted above, is heavily reliant on social factors. It is suggested in reference to Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Model (1979) that language development is greatly dependent on the microsystem – which is characterised by direct influences from family, friends and school. If the literacy and language skills are underdeveloped in the microsystem of a child, which is very much the case among School X children, they will not develop at the rate in which Piaget suggests being standard (Schull, 2021).

Developing an Action Point:

In the development of an SDP, the Welsh Government (2014) recommends a four-stage cycle with the school's dominant vision at the centre. These four stages are self-evaluation, strategic planning, making improvement/action, and reviewing impact.

Stage 1: Self-Evaluation

Self-evaluation in the context of an SDP is defined as a reflection of performance, and it becomes the rationale for improvement planning, which according to the Welsh Government (2014) is key for school development.

It has been identified by Estyn (2019) that the true purpose of 'self-evaluation' has been neglected over the years and has been replaced with a false documentation of the school's performance, written purely for external eyes. A true self-evaluation should be to critically reflect upon the school's strengths - what is going well, and the school's weaknesses – what needs to be improved; based on observation and honesty, and always with the learners at the heart (Lloyd, 2019).

Schön (1991) put forward a reflective technique for teachers involving two methods for evaluation - 'reflecting-on-action' and 'reflecting-in-action.' The first includes evaluation upon completion of an event or task, relying on hindsight for identifying improvement. The latter embraces real time examination and requires immediate response to an event or task. In collaboration with Schön, and in relation to evaluation, Argyris (1974) developed the single loop and double loop theory. Single loop asks the question, are we doing things right? and double loop asks the question, are we doing the right things? (Bates, 2016; Schön and Argyris, 1974).

School X began their self-evaluation with the single loop method by asking themselves if they were doing things correctly based on guidance from Estyn (2015). They found themselves to be efficiently following the advice given to them in the latest inspection report. They then proceeded to consider the double loop method, asking themselves if they were doing the right things for the ultimate benefit of their children. This evaluation was influenced by Schön's (1991) reflecting-on-action proposition, for they were primarily focused on how the lessons were impacting the pupils in relation the Curriculum for Wales (2022).

In an SDP, evaluations based on teaching, impacts on learning, and observations are categorised as qualitative data, whereas evaluations based on statistics, results and contextual factors are categorised as quantitative data. An effective self-evaluation is informed by both of these data types, in addition to a sophisticated understanding of theory and literature (Welsh Government, 2014).

School X's use of self-evaluation led them to the identification of their top priorities, including an all-encompassing vision for the school.

Stage 2: Strategic Planning

It is crucial for all collaborators of the school – stakeholders and any others effected by school development – to be involved in the process of the SDP. Tummons (2016) confirms the importance of involving the stakeholders by describing the educational setting as one entity that should always be working together.

School X has been recognised by Estyn (2020) as a school with commendable interaction with stakeholders. It is written that regular staff meetings are held in the school, with plenty of encouragement for equal participation. Observations show that the governing body are equally included in school planning and decisions (Estyn, 2015).

Freire (1972) was cognisant of the value of dialogue as opposed to monologue in the educational setting, encouraging educators to bring their learners into the evaluation and research process (Bates, 2016). In response to this philosophy, School X follows the Grassroots Model to include the learners in planning. This model emphasises 'learners leading the learning' by meeting with learners to find out what they would like to see in the curriculum. This approach closely relates to the pedagogical principle – 'Encourages learners to take increasing responsibility for their own learning,' and links to School X's priority 3 – 'To embed independent learning opportunities for pupils in order to develop motivation, resilience and aspiration' (Welsh Government, 2023).

Stage 3: Making Improvement/Action

It is important to add that the SDP is a working document, covering a three-year period, which is everchanging to adapt to the school's environment. The first year of the SDP is dedicated to the broad priorities and strategies, whereas the second and third years are devoted to the carrying out of high-level priorities (Welsh Government, 2014). For each priority, the school has written a success criteria as well as an action plan containing the

steps for success. This information is accessible to all, and all are encouraged to familiarise themselves with the action plan.

The school's vision sets the tone for the entire the SDP, and a clear vision allows for the construction of well-founded strategies that are understood by all. Research completed by Edling (2023) promotes this approach by confirming the effectiveness of a clear vision in comparison to the ineffectiveness of a lacking vision (Edling, 2023). Hoorue and Shlowiy (2020) also consolidate this truth with the agreement that a vision, in order to be an effective guideline, needs to have specificity (Hoorue and Shlowiy, 2020).

In School X's SDP, four priorities have been identified, however, they were established in 2023 primarily in response to monitoring and self-evaluation. The last Estyn inspection was completed in 2015, with the next one scheduled for 2024 instead of 2021 - due to a delay caused by the Covid19 pandemic. The school took inspiration from the Rational Objective Model, which is a model containing five steps for action planning: formulating objectives, selecting content, selecting teaching methods, delivering teaching, and measuring outcomes. Formulating objectives involved the school meeting with the school's stakeholders to gather information on what needed to be done. Selecting content demanded a critical review of past Estyn reports as well as the Curriculum for Wales (2022) in order to determine the direction the school should be heading in. Selecting teaching methods required the senior leadership team (SLT) to review teaching approaches that would best aid in the enhancement of pupil learning. Delivering teaching is based on the outcomes of the first three steps, and measuring outcomes takes us onto the last stage of the Welsh Government's (2014) suggestion for the school development process (Bates, 2016).

Stage 4: Reviewing Impact

The monitoring plan for School X contains termly dates for reviewing the impact of changes made in relation to the SDP priorities. The 'Monitoring, Review and Evaluation Timetable' begins with the Autumn term; during which the school will undertake half termly work scrutiny's and classroom observations to assess whether the action plans are having the desired effect – this may also be referred to as formative assessment. At the end of each term, the SLT will review the outcomes against the targets and adjust the SDP accordingly – which may be referred to as summative assessment (Bates, 2016). In the Spring and Summer terms, this cycle of review will be undertaken again.

Reflection and Evaluation:

In accordance with the guidance from the Welsh Government (2014, 2022), School X has written an SDP that encapsulates improvement for the school through four priorities. Priority 1 focuses on the AoLE, Literacy, Language and Communication (LLC), priority 2 is in accordance with the AoLE, Mathematics and Numeracy, priority 3 takes into account the core purpose 'ambitious, capable learners,' and priority 4 relates to the pedagogical principle, 'means employing assessment for learning principles.'

School X may be commended for the way it has thrown itself into the Curriculum for Wales (2022), creating an SDP for the school that touches on all areas of the curriculum, all the while keeping learners at the centre.

An area for improvement in the SDP of School X can be found in the lack of specificity in the vision. Research by Edling (2023), and confirmations from Hoorue and Shlowiy (2020), give weight to the significance of a clear vision in producing successful outcomes. School X's main vision is centred around the core purposes: ambitious, capable learners; and although this is a vital aspiration, it lacks a clear-cut trajectory to follow. Piaget (1957) was criticised for his lack of consideration for socio-economic background in his stages of cognitive development theory, and that criticism is also applicable here (Babakr, 2019). In the area where School X is located, there is a substantial need for a vision that takes into account differentiation and inclusivity.

A useful model for this would be Stenhouse's Interactive Model and the forms of situational analysis that are – SWOT: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats, and PEST: Political, Economic, Social, Technological (Stenhouse, 1975; Bates, 2016). A closer review of the surrounding community using these forms of analysis would help to distinguish a less ambiguous vision for the SDP.

Conclusion:

To conclude, the purpose of this assignment was to critically evaluate the actions a school takes in the development of the SDP; how it goes about self-evaluating, including stakeholders, creating an action plan, and reviewing impacts in relation to guidance from Estyn and the Curriculum for Wales (2022).

Conversations with the SLT at School X have informed me about the importance of teaching and learning theories in the self-evaluation and action planning process – especially theories that put learners at the centre and coincide with the four core purposes in the Curriculum for Wales (2022).

A sentiment that greatly stood out to me during the writing of this assignment was Freire's (1974) belief in dialogue over monologue between teachers and pupils. Despite the fact that this phrase was expressed 50 years ago, it is very much applicable in today's Welsh classrooms. When considering the strive towards the four core purposes, the main aim is to empower children as equal citizens of the world; to give them a voice and guide them to become ambitious capable learners, enterprising creative contributors, ethical informed citizens, and healthy confident individuals (Welsh Government, 2022). Into my future practice I will take with me this belief and positive attitude towards growth and progress in schools.

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