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ECAD 7003
Component 2:
How a school develops one aspect of its SDP:
a report that critically reflects on the actions, impact
and evidence base.

Word Count: 2591

My targets from Assignment ECAD 6008

	Targed/target	Yr hyn yr wyf wedi'i wneud yn yr aseiniad hwn What I have done in this assignment...
Targed/Target 1	More frequent references to a wider range of literature would provide greater opportunities for critical engagement. This is the key to academic writing, as you can develop skills in using the ideas of authors to create debates or to summarise theories from different perspectives. Also, you would show that your knowledge and understanding is informed by scholarly writings.	I have used a wider range of literature to inform and demonstrate my knowledge and understanding.
Targed/Target 2	Ensure that you introduce key terms. You have assumed the reader is familiar with these in your writing, instead of explaining the context fully.	I have clarified terms used.

Introduction

The purpose of this assignment is to reflect critically upon how a school moves forward with an objective towards meeting one of the priorities outlined in its School Development Plan (SDP). This will include considering what actions have been taken, what impact there has been, how it is measured and the evidence base for it.

The school in question will be referred to throughout this assignment as School X for reasons of anonymity for the school, according to British Educational Research Association (BERA) ethical guidelines (2018). School X is a mixed-gender English medium primary school in south Wales, with 145 pupils aged 3-11, including 17 part-time nursery pupils, and also seven pupils in a local authority funded Special Teaching Facility (STF). 6% of pupils are eligible for free school meals (eFSM), well below the 18% local and national average. Around 20% have additional learning needs, around the national average. These figures were sourced from School X's last Estyn Inspection report from 2019 (Estyn).

The new school improvement framework published by the Welsh government (2022) has wellbeing at its centre, with learner progression. Indeed, in the Curriculum for Wales, Health and Wellbeing is embedded as one of the six Areas of Learning and Experience. One of the headline priorities listed in School X's current Development Plan (2023) is to '*sustain high standards with regards to wellbeing and home/school link*'. The focus chosen for this assignment will be the action point related to this on '*further developing outdoor learning provision*'.

Literature Review

Prior to planned new statutory guidance being issued in September 2024, schools are currently required to '*plan for and deliver sustainable improvement, working within a framework for self-evaluation, accountability and transparency*' (Welsh government, 2022). Schools must produce an annual SDP, also known as a school improvement plan (Welsh government, 2022), which is a constantly evolving document, with clear priorities, planned action points and intended outcomes with specific timescales and monitoring details. The process of using SDPs stems from the regulations originally introduced by the Welsh government in 2014, which were brought in as a strategic plan to improve learner outcomes in schools (2014). This followed years of Wales underperforming compared to the rest of the United Kingdom and below the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) average (Mo, 2016), in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)

scores, which also was a factor in leading to the complete review of education in Wales by the Welsh government in 2015 (Donaldson).

There is a shift towards schools developing as learning organisations (SLO), with less emphasis on documentation, but more weight given to the importance of the ongoing process of self-evaluation (Welsh government, 2021). Its purpose is to ensure each learner makes meaningful progress, in the four purposes of the Curriculum for Wales (Welsh government, 2022). Estyn's report on Effective Practice (2020) exemplifies the clear benefits of including all staff in the process of self-evaluation, notably as it not only empowers them to collaborate, gaining understanding as well as shared ownership, but also to develop professionally, as required by the Professional Teaching Standards (Welsh government, 2020). This is further supported by Goldstone (2022), who details how effective self-evaluation occurs in those schools where stakeholders are engaged rather than merely involved. Gareth Evans (2015) stresses the importance of '*critical friends*', who contribute constructively to the school's self-evaluation process, noting that the critical friends can include internal stakeholders. The adherence to transparency and honesty is paramount remembering that self-evaluation is for the purpose of improving learner outcomes with their progression rather than focusing on external factors such as school league table results (Welsh government, 2022). The negative consequences of the previous national categorisation system have been recognised, and it has therefore now been replaced by the new school improvement guidance, with its self-evaluation, improvement and accountability guidelines, enabling schools to be more open and honest (Welsh government, 2022).

The Wellbeing of Future Generations Act (Wales) 2015, (Welsh government), sets out seven 'wellbeing goals', including '*a healthier Wales: a society in which people's physical and mental wellbeing is maximised and in which choices and behaviours that benefit future health are understood*'. The national wellbeing indicators framework within the Act includes measuring data for the '*healthy lifestyle of children*'.

Research undertaken by the Welsh government (2022) regarding the impact of COVID-19 on wellbeing showed that wellbeing is fundamental to effective learning and engagement. This served to evidence the government's existing views, and recognising its importance, the government had just introduced the requirement for a whole-school approach (2021) for emotional and mental wellbeing, in order to meet the wellbeing needs of learners as well as other members of the school community.

The Outdoor Education Advisors Panel Wales (2018) showcases in their report the many benefits of providing high quality outdoor learning, including enhanced wellbeing and self-reliance, raising of aspirations, and '*increased motivation and appetite for self-directed learning*'. This directly correlates with two of Donaldson's (2015) 12 pedagogical principles, namely '*supported social and emotional development*', and '*increased responsibility for their own learning*'. With one of the four purposes of the Curriculum for Wales being to have '*healthy, confident individuals*', there has been much research on the multiple beneficial outcomes from outdoor learning, including improved wellbeing, both physical and mental as well as increased attainment levels. Previous research (Masashi Soga, 2016) relating to the '*extinction of experience*' evidenced this, showing that less time spent in nature caused a reduction in wellbeing, and lessened positive emotions towards the outdoors, leading to a cycle of more time spent indoors.

It is recognised that, particularly during and since the COVID-19 pandemic children spend less time outdoors, especially those from low socioeconomic and minority ethnic groups, and so school-based outdoor learning is even more important for their wellbeing (Sue Waite, 2022).

With the focus on progression steps (Welsh government, 2021) rather than levels of attainment, it is recognised that the way in which young people are more likely to continue with outdoor activities when they are older is directly linked to positive experiences whilst young, giving them lifetime health and wellbeing benefits (Outdoor education advisors panel, 2018), such as keeping fit, positive self-image, confidence, resilience and a healthy lifestyle. Estyn shares effective practice (2023) from an example school which has a whole school approach to outdoor learning, where wasteland has been developed for a range of outdoor classrooms and outdoor provision areas, and they report a huge positive impact on their pupils' physical and mental health, evidenced in attendance, engagement levels and resilience. Furthermore, the Outward Bound Trust recently hosted key politicians from Wales, Scotland and England, for a joint discussion of their draft Outdoor Education Parliamentary Bills, drafted with the intention of making residential outdoor learning part of the curriculum across Great Britain (2022). The politicians were all in agreement about the hugely beneficial impact of outdoor education for all, especially post COVID-19. In addition, the positive long-lasting impact on young people of outdoor adventure residential experiences has been evidenced (Prince, 2021), including in the development their self-confidence, which is closely linked to wellbeing.

Developing an action point

The current Headteacher has been in post for around nine years, and is clearly passionate about the outdoors and its positive relationship with wellbeing (2024). Since he has been in post, School X's SDP has included wellbeing as a priority in some form. School X was rated as outstanding in wellbeing and attitudes to learning in its last Estyn inspection in 2019 (Estyn) – notably prior to COVID-19; and the school's outdoor provision was highlighted by Estyn as *'highly effective, ensuring that pupils were developing into confident learners'*. School X is developing as a Learning Organisation (SLO) in various ways including sharing good practice with others within the school and externally as well as distributing leadership by empowering all staff to grow into leaders (Welsh government, 2018).

School X created a network of Outdoor Learning showcasing their practice and supporting other local schools. Practice and outcomes are reviewed regularly, involving all staff, to ensure progression for their own pupils and growth supporting other schools too. School X also led an Erasmus school exchange project in 2018 which continued in 2020 and 2023, to share good practice and continue with their journey of outdoor learning. School X will continue with these links as the results were very positive for both learners and staff in terms of wellbeing (2024).

A strategic self-evaluation process involving many stakeholders, as advised by the Welsh government (2021), led to the current prioritisation of sustaining those high standards in wellbeing in its SDP (School X, 2023), for the current year 2023-2024. As part of this self-evaluation process, the school gathered and analysed data relevant to attendance, behaviour, stakeholder feedback and academic achievements. It was noted that prior to COVID-19, School X had one of the highest attendance rates of Swansea primary schools (Estyn, 2019), and although attendance levels had dropped due to COVID-19, data already showed a positive improvement to be built upon. There were few behaviour issues in the school and the Headteacher was confident (2024) that this was linked to high levels of wellbeing, enhanced by the outdoor learning provision across the school. Questionnaires regarding outdoor learning and wellbeing had been circulated to pupils and parents, as well as staff to complete regarding their class, and the resulting data analysed, to obtain qualitative data regarding whole school wellbeing. The school governing body also has a wellbeing sub-committee, to address and develop wellbeing initiatives.

In order to establish action points for the SDP, School X undertook a review of existing practices in order to identify strengths and areas for improvement. Stakeholders were intrinsically involved, by using a pupil voice group 'wellbeing warriors' as well as the wellbeing sub-committee of the governing body. Feedback directly resulted in action points in the SDP for the removal of old shipping containers to enlarge playground space and the continuation of the practice of each class having a weekly half-day timetabled slot for a visit to the local woods.

The headteacher acknowledged that it can be difficult to evidence wellbeing levels, however *'smiling faces, sustained positive attitude to learning reported by class teachers and lack of behaviour problems provides great feedback'* (2024). However, with the aim of obtaining evidence of wellbeing improvement, School X took part in the Happen Survey (2022). This provided data giving *'an overall picture of health and wellbeing in the school'*, as well as *'allowing curriculum delivery to be tailored to the needs of learners'*. School X recognised that the Happen Survey provides a snapshot and therefore undertakes the survey regularly as suggested, *'to track change and evaluate practice'*. In this way School X aimed to evidence how their outdoor learning provision had a positive impact on the children and also school staff.

Furthermore, in order to measure impact internally of ongoing outdoor learning and the development of new opportunities, the staff team conducted regular reviews by sharing findings from outdoor lessons and noted regulated behaviour of the children while outdoors. The Headteacher declared the unofficial motto of the school to be *'Happy children make happy learners'* (School X, 2024). The provision of additional extra-curricular outdoor clubs this year included a KS2 lunchtime running club as well as Foundation Phase outdoor games 'fun club', which have been very popular and well-attended.

School X attendance data is reviewed termly, and is *'consistently one of the highest recorded of all primary schools in the local authority'* (School X, 2024). Furthermore, according to the Headteacher (2024), the half-day weekly timetabled session at the woods has had *'no detrimental effect on academic results – the maths scores are amongst the top in the local authority'*.

Reflection and evaluation

As directed by Welsh government school improvement guidance (2022), the intended outcomes in School X's development plan (2023) clearly specify involving stakeholders such

as staff, pupils, parents and governors in the monitoring and evaluation. Each action point is led by a particular member of staff.

Challenges initially faced by the Headteacher (2024) in introducing the whole school approach to outdoor learning, included reservations from staff including inexperience and lack of ideas. The Senior Leadership Team (SLT) listened to their concerns and provided staff training and a full programme of resources that they had sourced from other successful schools and organisations including from Scandinavian countries where outdoor learning is key (Pja Sjoblom, 2023).

It is noted that School X is relatively small, with small class sizes ranging from 17-24. This is noticeably smaller than the average class size in local primary schools (Welsh government, 2024) of around 30, which in terms of staffing and behaviour management for outdoor visits is significant. Also, School X is located in a relatively affluent area where parents are willing and able to provide suitable outdoor clothing needed for all-weather outdoor learning. It is noted that School X supplements parental provision by sourcing spare outdoor weather equipment from donations and school funds where necessary. However, schools can apply for grant funding to support outdoor education which makes it accessible for all (CountryTrust, 2024). With regular monitoring and assessment, during the spring term 2024, School X were delighted that the children in the STF unit were also able to access the outdoor learning at the local woods, as they had settled into the school routine sufficiently to deem it safe for them to attend, making it a truly whole school timetabled event. By making the outdoor learning accessible for the whole school community, School X is addressing one of the issues of ensuring social justice in education (Smith, 2018). It is noted that School X is very fortunate with its rural setting, having access to two different areas of woodland within walking distance, suitable for Foundation Phase and Key Stage 2 activities including orienteering. Where some schools have no suitable accessible local woodland areas this would obviously impact on their ability to provide such experiences. However, *'ensuring children have adequate access to nature is of critical importance for their health and wellbeing'* (Public Health, 2022). Therefore, outdoor learning provision by schools is essential as the children would inevitably have less access outside of school too, and consequently fewer benefits to wellbeing. School X promotes bringing the curriculum outdoors, which it showcases can be done in any outdoor area, such as a yard which most schools would have access to.

Conclusion

The exploration of the reflective and collaborative process a school undertakes together with its stakeholders, to develop its SDP with its priorities and action points and impact monitoring, has provided a deeper understanding which will inform future practice. It has been evident how the SDP action points and priorities can only be achieved if the whole staff team is engaged by effective leadership, giving stakeholders ownership through involvement and understanding the benefits to learners. The impact of outdoor learning on pupils' wellbeing is evident in school X, demonstrating evidence-based practice which has led to the intention to undertake further professional development in this area of teaching in the outdoors. Resources for strategies to move the curriculum outdoors wherever possible will be researched, explored and shared with colleagues, including the outdoor learning activity booklet and the leading the curriculum booklet (with its extensive section on health and wellbeing), both created as an Erasmus project and accessible on School X's website (2024). Opportunities for further training in outdoor learning will also be sought. The advantages of involving stakeholders in the creation and maintenance of outdoor areas are recognised, and future collaboration will be sought in this, both in terms of ideas, advice and assistance with practical tasks.

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