

	Target	What I have done in this assignment
Target 1	Read more literature to support your work and develop your cognitive and intellectual skills while conducting academic discussions from the perspectives of various authors.	I read more recent literature and ensured I found ones that both agreed and argued my case to ensure that I was hitting the asks of the assignment.
Target 2	To offer more practical ideas for modeling in the classroom by referencing and applying theories and making logical connections between the two.	I have ensured that I have applied relevant theories for improving reading skills.
Target 3	Proofread your work thoroughly and use 'Cysill' to check your work and avoid linguistic errors.	I've ensured that I've proofread my work multiple times and have used grammarly to check my linguistic errors.

I acknowledge the use of ChatGPT <https://chatgpt.com/> between 06/02/2025 - 18/02/2025 to help structure my work, to proofread it, and to source relevant academic literature. I used the prompts:

1. I am writing a level 7 university 2500 word essay under the title of "A critical evaluation of the development of a strategic target in a school development plan: actions, impact, and evidence-based reflections" in this essay there is a 1000 word literature review, please could you give me a structure of how to write this part of the essay?
2. Have I met the assignment brief?
3. Can you list five academic literature sources that are relevant for children's reading skills, the decline in children's reading skills, whether covid has affected this. These should include Welsh Government documents and policies and academic theories.

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

Here, I will critically evaluate one action point from my placement school's development plan also known as SDP. The selected SDP target focuses on enhancing each pupil's reading skills, a priority for this school in light of the most recent Programme for International Students Assessment (PISA) results. PISA is run by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development which evaluates the mathematics, reading, and science

knowledge and skills of 15-year-olds across different countries (mediaofficer, 2024). School A (BERA, 2024) is situated in a large town in the county of Vale of Glamorgan. Significant building and reconstruction works were carried out in the year 2021, this allowed for young people in the area, educated through the medium of Welsh, to be taught in a suitable and modern setting. The school is known as a superschool with roughly 1,400 pupils and growing. 4% of the pupils attending the secondary school are on an individual development plan. The majority of the pupils in this school belong to the white ethnic group and 9% from both the primary and secondary are eligible for free school meals which is well below the national average (Estyn, 2019). This paper discusses the literature behind the SDP, developing an action plan, and lastly a reflection and evaluation of the target chosen by discussing relevant theories, research, and or case studies.

This literature review will explore important theories and research that link with improving reading skills while also highlighting the critical impact it has on our schools in Wales today. The Department of Education has stated that a school's development plan should entail an effective self-evaluation, "The SDP is an important vehicle for school improvement, communicating a coherent, shared vision for the development work of a school with all members of its community" (The Department of Education, 2024). The Welsh Government has put a huge focus on literacy which aims to improve education standards, Neagle. L suggests that reading is the highlighted area for improvement in Wales (Neagle. L, 2024). We have seen a significant decline in children's ability to read over the past few years, School A (BERA, 2024) believes that COVID-19 is a huge factor in this decline. "Many pupils' reading skills have suffered as a result of the pandemic" (Estyn B, 2024). In contrast others believe that the pandemic increased reading and states "during the first lockdown of the COVID-19 pandemic in spring 2020, we found that audiobooks were a lifeline for many children and young people"(Best and Clark, 2021). Reading skills could be affected by the pandemic due to lack of motivation or parents not reading with their children. Estyn fears schools aren't taking the appropriate opportunities to further develop the pupils reading skills outside of language lessons (Estyn C, 2024) because of this the new curriculum for Wales states clearly that every lesson that the pupils attend should include some opportunities to better their literacy skills (Welsh Government, 2024a). To further strengthen School A's (BERA, 2024) argument of COVID-19 having part to play for the struggle in reading skills, the Department of Education has

"Previously relaxed requirements around school development planning considering the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Where they have not already, schools are encouraged to return to a three-year school development planning cycle." (The Department of Education 2024).

This indicates that perhaps since the pandemic schools have been given latitude when in fact now is the time to focus on progressing the literacy skills of the generation that's been affected by the pandemic. However, others might think that the decline in reading ability is due to budget cuts and a lack of resources. While the Welsh Government states that core school funding is protected, budgeting in areas like education infrastructure and curriculum and assessment could incidentally impact the resources in our classrooms (Welsh Government, 2024b). We could argue that due to these budget cuts taking place schools and the youngest generation will suffer, and some children don't have the luxury of going home and gaining access to these resources.

This leads me to my next discussion; two of the key challenges that coincide with each other are both the financial and emotional support each child receives at home; this plays a significant part in whether a child will improve on their reading skills or not. An article written by Paakkari. L *et al* argue the role of the home in the development of children's critical reading skills (Paakkari. L *et al*, 2024). The Delphi method is a way of collecting data for a specific domain. By introducing the Delphi method early on, you can visually see the data which is an appropriate strategy for this specific research. Through this method they discovered

“The importance of having a space for the child to be heard and involved in family discussions, having a space for differing viewpoints and critical thinking, parental competencies to support critical reading skills and positive parental attitudes towards schooling and learning” (Paakkari. L *et al*, 2024).

The results of this research were that 13 experts supported the argument and 9 wondered whether home environmental factors affected children's critical reading skills (Paakkari. L *et al*, 2024). School A's (BERA, 2024) way of measuring the success of this target mirrors the Delphi method by allowing the pupils to voice their opinions through verbal feedback and questionnaires, via on-line meetings (Teams), the school is able to refine it's strategies from this. Financial instability at home can be challenging for pupils, It was claimed in the Autumn of 2021, “Secondary pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds were 3.5 months behind expectations in reading, while their non-disadvantaged peers were 2 months behind” (National Literacy, 2024). While this is disheartening to hear the Welsh Government are working tirelessly to mitigate the effects of poverty and to promote equality (Welsh Government 2024). By creating pathways out of poverty the Welsh Government is providing many opportunities for education, training, and employment, this is here to help the families that are in poverty to improve their economic circumstances, effectively bridging the gap between families (Welsh Government, 2024). Education is changing because the world is changing. Digital learning is the current style of teaching which can prove difficult for children in poverty. There isn't enough research on whether we are better off with digital learning or

not, especially in the realm of reading. The University of Valencia has recently done a study that argues against digital reading, "Their findings suggest that print reading over a long period of time could boost comprehension skills by six to eight times more than digital reading does" (Creamer. E, 2023); even with this study it's not enough to indefinitely say that it doesn't have its benefits. On the other hand, others might argue that digital reading helps enhance engagement for reluctant readers. 44.5% of children/young people stated that through listening to audiobooks and podcasts it has increased their interest in reading (Best and Clark, 2021). Due to technology being such a big part of education, organisations are ensuring that everyone has the same opportunities no matter what background they have. "Unicef works to ensure that all children, including those excluded or marginalized, can benefit from digital learning" (Unicef, 2023). Here you can see an evolving change in the lives of children in poverty ensuring equity and accessibility to digital literacy tools. This clearly shows that several factors can influence and impact a child's reading skills.

Developing an action point is fundamental to the progression of schools, by clearly defining what it is that needs improvement they can track their progression more easily. The Welsh Government states that

"The overarching purpose of school improvement is to help schools give learners the best possible learning experiences and outcomes, whatever their background or circumstance, in order to achieve high standards and aspirations for all" (Welsh Government, 2022b).

School A (BERA, 2024) chose this specific target as reading skills is a national problem, one that Estyn brought to light on their last visit to the School in 2019 (Estyn, 2019) where they discussed literacy skills which included reading. It does highlight the strengths in language, literacy, and communication but it unveiled areas for improvement, especially in key stage 4, which School A (BERA, 2024) decided to target. Another reason for this target was the year 7 and 8 cohorts being especially weaker this year than the past years. It becomes clear why the Welsh Government has put a huge emphasis on literacy in Wales, with reading being one of the key focuses (Neagle. L, 2024). Implementing this target into my secondary lessons proved challenging, as careful consideration of all aspects of the curriculum was needed to identify where to integrate it into already planned activities, especially considering the lessons were art-based.

From my perspective, linking artists to this target was the most logical way. By creating worksheets where both reading and understanding played equal parts, the pupils were able to actively learn about important artists in a new and exciting way. In order to ensure that what was prepared for the classes was suitable, the most important part was discussing with

the language teacher at what level the class is achieving, and taking the opportunity to observe a handful of Welsh lessons to see the pupils in action. An evening course based on developing reading skills in our classrooms helped tremendously with developing different strategies to ensure every child made some sort of progression. The pupils reacted in equally positive and negative ways, they argued that art lessons shouldn't be based on reading and writing; whereas others enjoyed the difference in the lessons and being able to learn more about the artists, and the way their artworks were created on a deeper level.

As the Welsh Government states in the cross curricular skill framework "Literacy should be at the heart of this area" (Welsh Government, 2024a). The success of the target is measured multiple times throughout the academic year, in various ways. School A (BERA, 2024) believes that the pupils' voice is one of the most important ways to know whether they have been successful in hitting their target, another is the scrutiny of books being able to assess whether what they believe was successful or not. Having the chance to experience this throughout the time being in School A (BERA, 2024) was a valuable experience, it agrees with Paakari. L' *et al's* findings of the importance of a child having a safe place to discuss their feelings (Paakari. L *et al*, 2024).

Although this research is focused on home life, it is equally important for schools to provide a safe space for children to openly express their opinion. After all, education is ultimately for their benefit and future. One of the biggest strengths School A (BERA, 2024) has with this target is the ability to listen and respond to the pupils' voices, they allow for this multiple times throughout the year to ensure that what they are doing is beneficial to them. Of course, due to the new curriculum and The Welsh Government stating that schools need to put a higher focus on literacy skills (Welsh Government, 2024a) the school has to find ways to implement this through listening to the feedback from the pupils. Aberaeron School has an effective way of improving reading standards through the principle of shared reading where pupils can build confidence, strong relationships, and shared learning (Estyn A, 2023) School A (BERA, 2024) would benefit from allowing pupils to read and host a discussion together, this would not only increase understanding across the board for the pupil's but allow them to feel some sort of accomplishment of not needing continual guidance from the teacher. Although School A (BERA, 2024) implements chosen target effectively in class, one thing they don't do is sit, share and discuss each other's findings and best practices as a whole team. This is something that could strengthen it across the entire school and ensure everyone is consistent.

The primary focus of researching literacy skills, specifically reading skills, was due to the Welsh Government focusing on literacy aiming to improve education in Wales (Neagle. L, 2024). I believe, COVID-19 had a tremendous impact on these children in more ways than we know. This is something that I would like to learn more about as well as how to reverse the damages created by the pandemic. The most shocking discovery for me was how poverty could significantly impact a child's education, particularly due to lacking the same resources as other pupils. As I continue my time as an educator I will hold this close to mind the next time I question why a pupil hasn't got the necessary equipment; Research shows that pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds don't have the same starting point as those from privileged backgrounds (National Literacy, 2024). While reflecting on my practice, I found it hard to incorporate purposeful reading into my art lessons which is something I want to improve. In my practice, I would like to continue to develop my understanding of differentiating the text for pupils that are naturally weaker but ensuring it's done discreetly. This school also does its best to equip the teachers with what they need to achieve these targets, for example, the late-night course on developing reading skills was designed to allow teachers in other curriculum areas to know how to combine literacy into the lesson plans in a way the pupils would enjoy, this was something I was able to experience in my time here. Based on what needs to be achieved by the pupils in the new curriculum (Welsh Government, 2022a), the method School A (BERA, 2024) uses to ensure that every subject has some sort of literacy skills linked in their lessons works well, they ensure that this is set in place by the senior team carrying out an observational trip throughout the school. I learned that the school and home communication is relatively good as a whole in this school, however, they do lack specific communication with regards to how parents could be supporting pupils with their reading skills at home. As per Paakkari. L *et al* states parents play an important role in developing their child's reading skills, having parents with a positive mindset towards education is a hugely supportive help for their child's success (Paakkari. L *et al*, 2024).

To conclude, the target I chose to focus on was improving reading skills, the reason being that the year 7 and 8 cohorts in School A (BERA, 2024) had lower levels of literacy skills this year. It linked well, as not only has The Welsh Government put a focus on literacy (Neagle. L, 2024) Estyn mentioned it in their last report (Estyn, 2019). My main findings were that many things outside of the classroom can directly impact children inside the classroom. Until having to research what a school development plan entailed I was unaware of the impact it can have. Now I feel I'm able to support the pupils in other areas that are needed in my lessons. The research and knowledge I have gained here will support me through my practice. I am now more aware of where to look for targets given by the school, and where I

could be supporting the pupils. Moving forward, I will apply these findings into my daily practice by integrating reading strategies into my art lessons, ensuring that I collaborate with colleagues on what works and what doesn't, to allow myself to become the best teacher I possibly can because as Nelson Mandela once stated "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world" (Ellis.P 2019).

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