

Gallwch ychwanegu'ch targedau o'ch aseiniad diwethaf (Ond yn berthnasol os yr ydych wedi cwblhau aseiniad) / Please add your targets from the previous assignment (Only relevant if you have completed an assignment)

	Targed/target	Yr hyn yr wyf wedi'i wneud yn yr aseiniad hwn What I have done in this assignment...
Targed/Target 1	Try to engage with a wider range of literature and synthesise arguments as opposed to simply presenting different views	A range of literature including books, articles and websites was used and different views were critically assessed.
Targed/Target 2	Be mindful of statements to make ensuring they are supported by evidence and or literature	Efforts were made to ensure that all statements were backed up my literature, other than when discussing the placement school.
Targed/Target 3		

This is the Header (Ariel 18, Bold Underline, 1.5 line spacing) (AssignHeader: Styles)

This is the sub header (Ariel 14, Bold, 1.5 line Spacing) (AssignSubHeader: Styles)

This is the main font (Ariel 11, 1.5 line spacing) To use quotation style select AssignQuote from Home. (AssignBody: Styles)

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Once you type the enter key from the quotation it will automatically switch to the main body text.

Introduction

A School Development Plan (SDP) allows a school to effectively prepare how to improve on aspects of its practice over a given time period. The focusses included in a School Development Plan, in many cases, are decided up through a joint decision between the Senior Leadership Team and the school's Governing Body. Whilst these focusses can be wide ranging and potentially include any aspect of work that the school is involved in, they are often originally formulated in response to or preparation for an Estyn inspection, as is the case with the school discussed here in.

The school discussed in the report is an English medium Secondary School (11-19) based in West Wales with 16.6% of pupils in receipt of Free School Meals (My Local School, 2019). During the most recent Estyn Inspection, one of the recommendations raised was to "Improve attendance" (Estyn, 2014). Due to this, in October 2019 a School Evaluation Report was carried out to evaluate progress towards all of the recommendations, including the aforementioned, and create recommendations for inclusion in the School Development Plan on how to continue improving this.

Literature review

For the vast majority of young people School is one of their primary influences during the initial developmental stages of their lives. Before all other aspects of teaching and learning can be considered, of fundamental importance to the learner is whether they attend school and to what extent that they do this. Even considering an isolated age bracket from 12 to 14, it has been shown that truancy can have effects that linger far beyond the time that the learner spends in formal education (Rocque, 2017). For instance, the significance of attendance at school has been linked directly to the likelihood of participation of criminal activity in the future (Sykes et al, 2015) though there are a number of competing theories that argue over 'cause and effect' as well as the extent to which their background has an effect on this. Sweeton et al (2009) presents the opinion it is the factors which affect the attendance of an individual at school that increases the correlation of negative life outcomes as opposed to the lack of attendance at school. This is supported in this study conducted on freshmen whom attended US state high school as once methods to control for selection effects were implemented, it is less clear whether an effect is present. A randomized field trial conducted by Mazerolle et al (2019) in Australia does however show that incidences of anti-social behaviour lessened when interventions were put in place, through frequent contact with a school or youth worker. Though, it must be considered that the incidents reported were done so by the individuals themselves and may therefore be biased towards the willingness of individuals to report themselves. A concern towards this bias is dealt with by Carter (2019) who considers that the willingness to report itself may be as a consequence of the interventions put in place and may then be used as a qualitative judgement towards its effectiveness when combined with other factors.

In addition to the aforementioned points regarding the importance of attendance and its potential impact, Palmer and Greytak (2017) how students who identify as LGBTQ may present an additional risk to themselves due to lack of attendance. This is due to their attendance often being directly linked to victimisation that they may experience whilst at school and the personal repercussions of this. Furthermore, Ramberg et al (2019) even go so far as to directly link school attendance as direct measure of the effectiveness of the school. In the study involving 46 secondary schools in Stockholm, it was found that the teacher rated effectiveness of the school could be linked to attendance even once sociodemographic factors were adjusted for. This is generally supported by a meta-analytic review conducted by Gubbels et al (2019) where it is linked back to a dozen risk domains including, but not limited to, substance abuse and list low levels of parent/school interaction as a key factor.

Within education, development planning is now taking place at a variety of levels from individual development plans for staff members (Sparks and Hirsh, 1997) through to County or even Country based development plans that focus on education as a whole. The importance of a School Development Plan has become increasingly apparent (Glover, 1990) as accountability of actions within the education sector has increased. One of the primary reasons that formal SDP's are now commonplace is their inclusion within inspection frameworks (Earley et al, 2017) where they are used to prioritise actions that need to be completed prior to an upcoming inspection and show evidence of how a school has been working towards them over the entire period between inspections. Approached such as this may be seen as tokenistic however due to their questionable effectiveness; this is highlighted by Bennet et al (2000) who note an apparent lack of awareness between strategic and developmental planning by SLT and those others involved in its creation. This is often due to lack of appropriately high-quality reflective analysis (Meyers and Hitt, 2018) during the creation of the plan, thereby tainting the possible quality of the outcomes or enabling a lack of progress in response to bureaucratic processes that had failed to be considered.

In summary, the need for an effective School Development Plan that takes into account a range of factors including inspection recommendations, the effects on the students involved, the reflection and evaluation of the current situation and the implementation of the plan is essential.

Developing an action point

As aforementioned, a primary stimulus for the inclusion of improving attendance in the School Development Plan was the inspection report (Estyn, 2014) released in 2014 highlighting that since the previous inspection, whilst some improvement has been made, the overall attendance at the school was significantly below expected values for comparable schools. In particular, it was highlighted that approximately 30% of absenteeism on record could be attributed to a small group of pupils with those in year 11 being of particular significance. The presentation of this data within a formal inspection report highlighted importance of the recommendation in addition to ensuring that it is included on the School Evaluation Report carried out in October 2019.

The School Evaluation Report emphasised that in fact overall attendance had declined to 90% in the previous academic year with persistent absenteeism (judged to be those with an attendance rate of less than 80%) having increased. In addition to this, a prior target focussing on the attendance of Free School Meal students revealed that this had also dropped over the previous academic year to 91.43%. The analysis of the data revealed in the School Evaluation Report shows that whilst attendance has continued to be monitored, it has also continued to fall therefore calling for an evaluation of previous strategies that were in place and presents a key focus for how this can be developed.

In response, "Improve whole school attendance" was presented as a subsection of priority 2, thereby demonstrating the importance of this. Within the School Development Plan it was also firmly connected to student wellbeing and attitude to learning. This may have been due to the generally accepted link with life outcomes as well as its immediate impact on more vulnerable students, though with the accountability of the programme of work resting with the Governing Body's 'Student Experiences Committee' it could be seen to serve a more superficial purpose of bolstering promotable activities.

Once the importance of this priority has been established, it is important to consider how the impact of any potential strategies employed will be measured. In the case of the school this was through the

establishment of SMART targets (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Timely) that were linked to attendance. These included ensuring that the school was legally compliant with its attendance requirements, providing support to engage vulnerable pupils such as an alternative curriculum where appropriate increasing the percentage attendance in each year improving communication between school and home and external agencies and decreasing persistent absenteeism through targeting specific students. These targets culminate with the overall aim to increase the whole school attendance to 93.5%. Whilst these endeavoured to adhere to the requirements of SMART targets, in many cases there is the opportunity to increase the specificity to ensure that they are appropriately measurable. This is to ensure that they can be reflected on during the implementation of the School Development Plan to determine whether progress is being made (Lacey, 2010) and where possible provide a quantitative basis for this.

Due to the fundamental significance of attendance, it was decided that an additional strategic plan would be put in place entitled the 'Attendance Action Plan' which was to be drawn up specifically in line with new Welsh Assembly Government guidelines. In addition to targeting the success criteria, it also was to lay out specific actions to be taken with a particular emphasis of decreasing persistent absenteeism. One of the key ways in which this was done through the promotion of improved communication with stakeholders (students, parents and staff) on the effects that absences may have on the long term opportunities for the student. The proposal included the provision that once triggers were met, letters would be sent out to parents in the first instance and should the trend of attendance continue a meeting would be arranged with the parents. This approach is, however, heavily reliant on parental involvement for its success. Therefore, this not only limits the effectiveness with parents who are unable to appropriately interact with the student to encourage their attendance, but also presents a time heavy requirement from the parents whilst largely releasing the school from direct responsibility and ability to assist at this stage of the process.

Reflection and evaluation

Whilst the strategies outlined in the School Development Plan, and supplemental Attendance Action plan, form the basis of the response presented by the school it is important to acknowledge that further information and availability of resources may become apparent once the SDP has been finalised, therefore changing the provision that is able to be provided. Furthermore, as the SDP was finalised in November, only a few months were available in which to assess the progress that has been made. Therefore, it must be considered that the Plan has not had its full length of time to run and it is not possible to present comparable attendance figures for this academic year at this stage.

One of the key measures of the success criteria that has been completed is the creation of the Attendance Action Plan with input from a variety of stakeholders including staff, governors and student council members. This range of inputs allowed for a considerate plan to be drafted through a collaborative effort (Brazer et al, 2010). However, whilst this allows for the creation of a Plan that includes a wider range of ideas, it is possible that an evidence-based approach may be less utilised (Eacott, 2012) therefore leading to a less effective Plan with lower outcomes.

Communication within the school also became a key element of how the new approach was implemented. Specifically, line management meetings were scheduled biweekly to ensure that relevant heads of key stage were able to present the analysis of attendance figures from students within their key stage. This had a positive outcome by ensuring that the plan was implemented consistently across age ranges within the school as well as providing essential support feature for the heads of key stage dealing directly with students. It was during these meetings that students with persistent absences on their records were identified and following these meetings that the

appropriate letters were sent out to parents in the first instance. Whilst the effectiveness of these meeting in triggering the sending of letters is apparent, Goodall (2016) presents that for communication between school and parents to be most effective a good line of previous communications must be apparent. Due to the lack of general communication between the school and parents, the effect of the letters is likely to be lower than it potentially could have been.

Whilst not included in the School Development Plan, it was decided that for the Plan to be effective as an ongoing measure, Continued Professional Development (CPD) was necessary to ensure that teaching staff has sufficient knowledge and skill to appropriately interact and assist students with low attendance. CPD has been shown to have a positive effect on teaching effectiveness of staff (Day and Moore, 2018) and thus it may have been considered that a similar effect could be had on attendance. Furthermore, this led to the development of a new Key Stage 3 programme of study that could be used during morning registration to emphasise the importance of education and the wide range of opportunities it unlocks. Whilst this programme was newly developed, Glover (2017) shows that the effectiveness of such programmes is highly variable both between school as well as within a school. This could limit the potential usefulness of this approach.

Conclusion

To conclude, an inspection report is often a useful starting point to identify the current areas of improvement required by a school. When this is coupled with an up-to-date School Evaluation Report, both areas of strength and areas of weakness can be identified, as well as any progress that has been made towards these areas. Through the identification of these weaknesses the School Development Plan can be created to scaffold a framework allowing for a strategic approach to dealing with any issues that have arisen.

Within this report, the primary focus has been on the improvement of whole school attendance through the delivery of a number of identified focus points. These include better interaction with stakeholders, ensuring consist analysis of attendance data and the development of a specific Attendance Action Plan. Whilst the time elapsed since implementation does not allow for comment on the achievements of the plan, it has been shown that a number of steps have been taken so far to satisfy the success criteria highlighted within the SDP.

For improvements to students' futures to be made, the needs of students must be constantly reviewed and reflected upon. But, fundamental to any possible improvement that a student may make is their attendance within school. Beyond all else, this is what provides the opportunity.

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