

How a school develops one aspect of its School Development Plan: A report that critically reflects on the actions, impact and evidence base.

Introduction

This essay will aim to address and analyse one particular aspect of a School's Development Plan (SDP). This is the document kept and revised throughout an academic year at a school, which sets out clear aims and targets to be achieved across the year. The particular school, 'School X' for the purposes of this essay, is an 11-18 comprehensive school in South Wales, with approximately 1,250 pupils on roll. During the last Estyn inspection in 2016, there were around 13.6% of pupils who were eligible for free school meals and around 12% of pupils living in the 20% most deprived areas in Wales. Since then, both of these figures have increased.

The particular section that will be focused on throughout this essay is the school's overarching aim regarding Curriculum and Learning Experiences, in particular the sub-section focusing on additional learning needs and the school's 'ALN Reform' (Additional Learning Needs). At the time of the most recent Estyn report, there were approximately 19% of pupils who had additional learning needs attending the school. The school has an ALN Communication Resource Base (CRB) with 12 pupils on roll. The local council are responsible for administering all admissions for the CRB in partnership with the school.

Literature Review

The aim of this review of literature is to examine the purposes and importance of school development plans, in particular mainstream secondary schools. It will focus towards how the information in the development plan is critically examined and evaluated to make visible progression within the school. The research will also take particular concentration into the provisions implemented for learners with additional learning needs (ALN), as this is the area being focused on throughout this essay.

According to the Welsh Government, the overall aim of implementing SDPs is to ensure schools are giving learners the best possible experience in their education, regardless of their background or circumstances, so that they can be successful and achieve in school

and in life. This has been related to the Curriculum for Wales and the ongoing importance of the four purposes (Welsh Government, 2022). They outline the cyclical process a school should undertake: gathering evidence; investigating; evaluating; and considering priorities, as well as the five key principles that underpin progression against the four purposes (Appendix 1).

The overall importance in the personal development and wellbeing of the learners is also highlighted throughout these aims (Curriculum for Wales, 2022), reflecting the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 (Appendix 2). Jeremy Miles has stated that this is key to ensuring learner progression and wellbeing as well as high standards, which Estyn have stated they are also aligned to moving forward (Welsh Government [2], 2022).

The provisions that are needed to be implemented for learners with ALN is increasingly important when considering the progression and success of each individual. The Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018 encompasses all children and young people aged 0-25, resulting in smoother transitions between stages of education. This Act states that ALN learners should have an individual development plan (IDP) in place that outlines the support required in school for that particular learner. By using IDPs that encompass all previous statutory and non-statutory plans and documents for ALN learners in school, further continuity can be ensured as well as an ability to take a holistic approach to the progression of the learner (ALN Act, 2022).

There is an increasing focus through the Curriculum for Wales towards the quality of learning and teaching in the classroom, which according to Jeremy Miles is where the most success is, particularly for learners with ALN (Miles, 2022). Research shows that learners with ALN are more likely to experience inequalities in school such as bullying, absence from school and refusal to attend, in higher rates than their peers who do not have ALN (Lamb Inquiry into Special Educational Needs and Parental Confidence, 2009; Cited by Smith, 2012). This is particularly important when considering social justice, which goes beyond ensuring equality for all learners but ensures that every individual is receiving an equitable, just education that allows them to be successful in life as lifelong learners. It is essential to ensure that all teaching staff are equipped and well-informed to support individual needs in their classrooms, and able to appropriately differentiate their teaching to do so (Choudry et al., 2021). There is an increasing importance in teachers engaging with social justice as a means of providing a more rigorous, well-rounded and inclusive education (Arshad et al., 2019). Arshad discusses a study whereby numerous themes and influences that affect views and approaches towards social justice, such as the influence of family and home, personal experiences of discrimination, religion and being part of the 'other' (Arshad et al., 2019).

These types of influences and experiences are also apparent among learners and can influence their ability or inability to access their education. This relates to Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1977) which suggests that there are various systems that surround a learner and their development, highlighting the importance in a supportive network of people around them (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) cite Bronfenbrenner (Appendix 3), to highlight that ensuring that every individual achieves and is successful, including those with ALN, is everyone's responsibility, not just that of the ALNCo within a school (EEF, 2020). This theory echoes the words of Jeremy Miles, who talks about the importance of evidence informed pupil development grants going forward, family engagement officers to help support and increase attendance, as well as emphasis on the wider communities supporting learners (Miles, 2022).

This also relates to Vygotsky's Social Constructivist Theory. Vygotsky uses the concept of the 'Zone of Proximal Development' to show the optimum condition in which a learner is able to be appropriately supported and challenged in their learning. This 'zone' must contain technology and tools, as well as knowledgeable others to support the development of the learning (Vygotsky, 1978). In order to ensure these support networks are in place for all learners, emphasis must be put on parental engagement and involvement in their child's educational journey. This entails supporting parents themselves as learners and equipping them with the necessary materials and provisions to support their children's learning. This is particularly important when considering secondary schools as many parents can feel disconnected and often intimidated by the concept (Harris and Goodall, 2008).

Whilst this research has emphasised the importance of creating a supportive learning environment for all learners, it is essential to ensure that this encompasses ALN learners in everyday classroom culture. The Universal Design for Learning (UDL) suggests key principles in facilitating multiple means of representation, action, expression and executive functions, one of which is to provide options for self-regulation, showing inclusion of all learners including those with ALN (Dalton, 2017).

Research has shown that the most important thing when considering ALN learners is to celebrate strengths and successes rather than focusing on needs and barriers to learning (Choudry et al., 2021). Jeremy Miles states that the most effective way to do this is to ensure that all approaches are focused on positive impacts, therefore getting rid of any deficit approaches which might deter learners from achieving their potential (Miles, 2022).

Developing an Action Point

There are numerous ways in which School X seeks to implement and evaluate the elements of their SDP, which includes their 'ALN Reform' action point which states the ways the school aim to develop the progress of pupils with an ALN, both personally and academically (School Development Plan, 2023). Their Inclusivity policy aims to allow all staff to self-evaluate and question the correct information as well as where to find desired support for ALN learners, including Classcharts and the ALN Channel on the School's Teams, along with a wealth of resources. Information such as one-page profiles, individual development plans (IDPs), exam access arrangements and other important documentation is crucial to ensuring the appropriate support is in place for all ALN learners across the school and that staff are well-informed and equipped to do so.

School X's SDP is constantly live and is officially reviewed by the key leads of each section at least once every term. One of the assistant Headteachers and the Lead ALNCo are responsible for overseeing the 'ALN Reform' action point, however it is recognised across the school that it is everyone's responsibility through their strong ethos that 'all teachers are teachers of ALN' (School Development Plan, 2023). The School track the progress of individual pupils, particularly ALN learners, through the ALN Channel on their Teams and individual profiles on Classcharts. This could be taken further with regard to communication between the ALN 'base' in the school and the teaching staff within each department, for example having debriefs perhaps every half term or termly. The school also need to ensure that they collect and implement any feedback from stakeholders.

Arguably the most important stakeholders in a school establishment are the pupils. School X hold very high merit in the feedback they receive from their learners, facilitating 'Pupil Voice' focus groups and seminars in order to obtain feedback regarding any particular action they might take and after any new activity is trialled. These focus groups could be expanded and utilised across various groups within the school, such as gathering feedback from ALN pupils within the school about their everyday experiences as well as overall feelings towards school and their individual progress. This could also give the opportunity to find out more about what pupils' future aspirations might be, which would allow the school to offer more opportunities to facilitate these goals.

The school also has a huge focus on ensuring parental engagement in the ongoings of the school and, in particular, the progress of the individual pupils, especially those with an additional learning need. School X need to work even more closely with parents and carers of pupils with ALN to ensure that every parent or carer is efficiently equipped in supporting their child through their education (Harris and Goodall, 2008). In addition, there is an

increasing involvement and growing partnership between the school and its surrounding local community, which is essential in ensuring the pupils of the school become 'ethical, informed citizens of Wales and the world' (Curriculum for Wales [2], 2015).

When planning strategically to develop and achieve these action points within School X's SDP, they seek to utilise the resources available in order to ensure all individual needs are met across the whole school, with each and every pupil. They state they will achieve success by employing strategies such as modelled examples, one-page guidance, professional discussions and the universal statement across the school stating that 'all teachers are teachers of ALN'. They will also use provision mapping to understand how best to support each individual pupil with ALN (School Development Plan, 2023).

Measuring the impact of pupils with additional learning needs is not straight forward, as it is always personal to the individual pupil and can be measured on a vast scale. Impact could be shown in many aspects; for some pupils it might be achieving a target grade in a particular subject's exam or assessment, whereas for other individuals it could simply be an increase in attendance. School X need to ensure they have an awareness of what this impact might look like for each individual within the school that has ALN, so that they can effectively evaluate their development and the success of their pupils with ALN. The overall aim set out by the school is to ensure 'learning experiences for pupils with an ALN that are fully inclusive, interesting and engaging – and do not underestimate what pupils can achieve' (School Development Plan, 2023).

Reflection and Evaluation

School X have set out a clear goal with achievable aims with regard to their 'ALN Reform' and the provisions available for learners with ALN within the school. The ALN Community Resource Base (CRB) is full of spaces and resources for learners with ALN and provides a safe place for these learners to go if anything gets overwhelming at any time during the school day, whether this be during lessons or at break and lunch times. The school also have a designated class in KS3 for learners who find it particularly difficult to integrate with other pupils and have significant barriers to their learning and the general curriculum. This allows teachers to focus on core key skills and develop the abilities of the learners so that they can achieve when they move further up the school and look to their GCSEs in the near future.

In order to improve the development of their action points in the future, specifically their provisions for ALN learners, School X need to strengthen their communication between the

ALNCo and LSOs and the rest of the school, particularly teaching staff, across all departments and areas of the school. As mentioned, this could include debriefs at regular intervals between key staff members as well as focused conversations when needed between teaching staff and LSOs to ensure the necessary support is in place at all times, as well as continuity for the learners, which in turn will lead to a more consistent education and further progression and achievement for ALN learners. As mentioned, this could also include more focused groups when collecting 'Pupil Voice' data which will give a more well-informed planning and development process going forward, and could also be held with other stakeholders surrounding the school, for example parents and carers, particularly those of ALN learners.

School X should continue to ensure that they provide the most inclusive educational experience possible for their learners with ALN, so that they can achieve both in school and in their lives in the future, being able to successfully integrate into society and become lifelong learners alongside their classmates and peers that don't have ALN. This needs to be done in the most equitable way to ensure social justice for every individual learner.

Conclusion

This experience has shown the importance in creating a supportive and inclusive environment in the classroom, especially when considering children and young people with additional learning needs. Through careful consideration of School X's development plan alongside extensive research, the importance in having an awareness of social justice and how this needs to be implemented into classroom culture has been highlighted. Each individual learner in any classroom needs to be effectively supported, nurtured and challenged whilst they are equipped with the key skills necessary to succeed in life and become lifelong learners who value their educational journey.

This essay has shown the importance of a school's development plan and related improvement processes, as well as the key roles and responsibilities involved in its upkeep across an academic year as well as long-term. With regard to personal teaching practice going forward, it has highlighted the necessity in the awareness of a school's development plan, as well as the awareness of key leads within the school that are responsible for each element of it, so that support can be found in the right places and implemented effectively into the classroom. Furthermore, it will be ensured that every lesson planned is effectively scaffolded, differentiated and regulated for the success and achievement of every learner, both academically and in their own personal development.

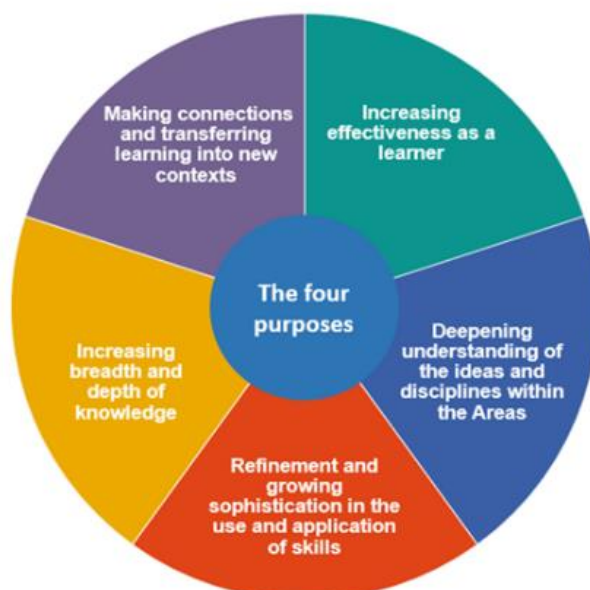
Appendices

Appendix 1:

Welsh Government (2022) Evaluating learner progress, Gov.wales. Available at: <https://hwb.gov.wales/evaluation-improvement-and-accountability/the-national-resource-evaluation-and-improvement/evaluation-and-improvement-principles/evaluating-learner-progress/> (Accessed: 19 February 2024).

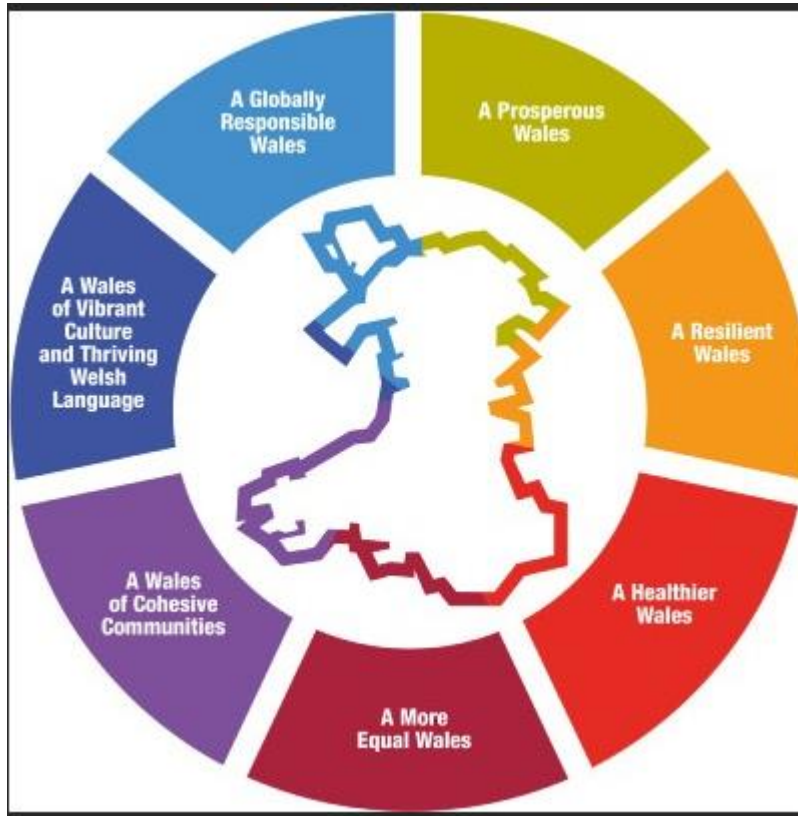


Five principles of progression underpin progression across all Areas.



Appendix 2:

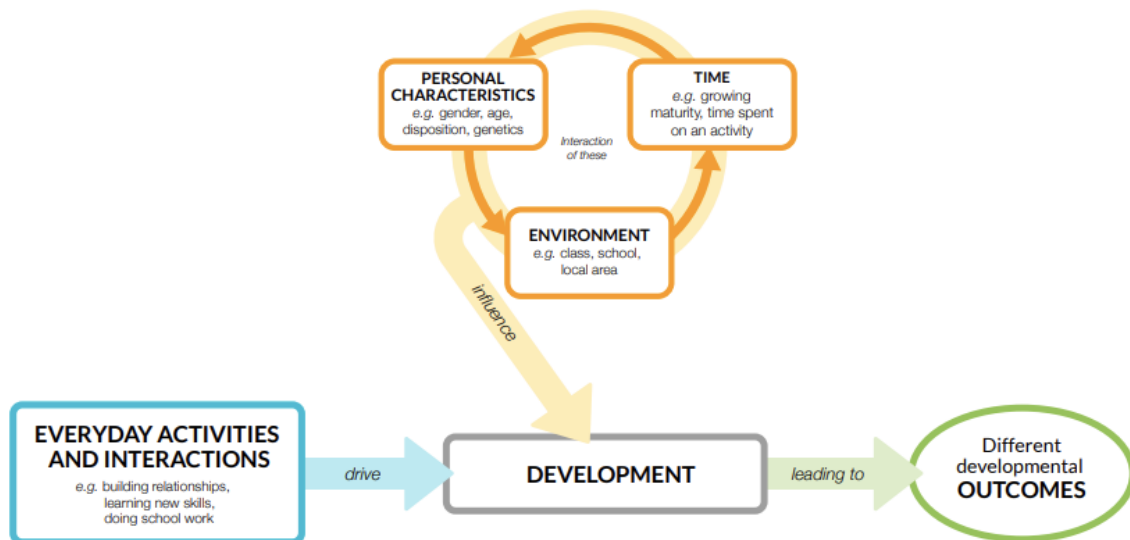
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Appendix 3:

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Figure 2: Bronfenbrenner diagram



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Estyn Report 2016: Anonymous School

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