

	Targed/target	Yr hyn yr wyf wedi'i wneud yn yr aseiniad hwn What I have done in this assignment...
Targed/Target 1	Structure of essay	Kept to a structured writing plan.
Targed/Target 2	Referencing	Referred to Harvard referencing booklet for guidance.
Targed/Target 3	Clear critical analysis	Provided more critique in writing.

AI Acknowledgement

I can confirm that I have not used AI technology to generate content as my own work.

This assignment will critically evaluate a School Development Plan (SDP) within the context of a specific primary school. In line with the British Educational Research Association (BERA) guidelines, all information related to the school will remain anonymous (BERA, 2024). The school will be referred to as 'School X' where required. The school in question has a total enrolment of 226 pupils and is situated in a semi-rural setting in Wales. The socio-economic profile of the area is considered more affluent, as evidenced by the lower-than-average proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals. Additionally, the school has a smaller-than-average percentage of pupils identified as using English as an Additional Language (EAL) or having additional learning needs (ALN). Arguably, these factors put School X in a financially beneficial position compared to other schools in nearby areas. This is due to there being a minimal demand for extra funding to support additional learning resources and specialist staff. Furthermore, funding can be used in other areas of the school, such as improving learning environments, resources and updating staff training. This demographic context provides an important insight for evaluating the school's development priorities and resources required within the SDP. The strategic target chosen *is improving teaching and provision to ensure that it is appropriate for pupils' stage and age of development, and successfully develops pupils' independence* (School X, 2023).

In primary schools across Wales, School Development Plans (SDP) are put in place to provide a structured approach in helping schools improve their educational achievement. Although the curriculum in Wales has changed drastically in recent years, under The Education (School Development Plans) (Wales) Regulations 2014, schools remain legally obligated to create and

follow an SDP, to guide and evidence their progress and ensure continuous improvement (Welsh Government, 2014).

The school development planning process is designed to help schools evaluate their performance, set realistic goals, and take action to improve their quality of provision. Before a school creates a school development plan, there is a period of self-evaluation. This is where the strengths and areas for growth in the school are identified, pupil performance is reviewed, and teaching methods are observed. School X carried out class observations and collected pupil workbooks from all ages and abilities for scrutiny, to evaluate the standards of provision and learning progress. The senior leadership team may then gather feedback from other school staff, pupils, families and the wider school community. To gain valuable feedback, School X sent out questionnaires and hosted feedback meetings for families and school governors to attend. This collaborative approach ensures that all perspectives impacted by school practice are valued and are actively contributing to informing the decision-making. These elements work together to give the senior leadership a clear understanding of what needs should be addressed in the school improvement plan (SDP) (HWB, 2024).

Once the school have gathered the relevant information on areas of improvement to focus on in the SDP, an action plan will be created. The action plan clearly outlines each step, with assigned responsibilities given to specific staff members. Senior leaders, teachers and other stakeholders work together to follow the action plan and meet set goals by specific dates. School X specified goals to reach by each term and academic year, across a three-year period. These clear expectations ensured progress was tracked and met throughout the year. Finally, the senior leadership team monitor the progress and make any adjustments needed throughout the process. This ongoing practice of reflection and evaluation helps schools maintain positive changes (Gov, 2024).

In line with The Education (School Development Plans) (Wales) Regulations 2014, the goals set within the SDP should be in line with national education priorities (Welsh Government, 2014). Within 'Our National Mission: High Standards and Aspirations for All', the Welsh Government have stated the need for ensuring equity within schools and addressing the impact poverty has on children's education. The Community Focused Schools government initiative was put in place to resolve these issues, by strengthening relationships between schools, families, and multi-agency teams. This should ensure pupils receive the support they need to remain engaged with education (Welsh Government, 2022). Nonetheless, leadership has been identified as the most significant factor influencing the quality of school improvement. Effective school leaders should establish a

clear vision and work collaboratively with the whole school community to meet expectations (Estyn, 2016).

The implementation of the Curriculum for Wales has brought about huge changes in how schools approach their school development plan (SDP). The new curriculum has moved away from more traditional and knowledge-based learning to a skill-based framework with a large focus on exploring critical thinking and creativity. Schools in Wales are now challenged to adapt their pedagogical approaches and teaching strategies they may have used in the past, to ensure that their current SDP suitably aligns with the requirements of the new curriculum (HWB, 2022).

The Successful Futures (Donaldson Report, 2015) was a key document used to inform the new Curriculum for Wales. Donaldson suggested the use of pedagogical approaches that encourage pupils to take ownership of their own learning. Promoting strategies such as enquiry-based learning, real life context experiences and formative assessment methods. It has been found that independent learning involves self-regulation, problem-solving and critical thinking, all of which are essential skills for the successful development of the whole child (Donaldson, 2015).

However, more recent research evidence has reflected the challenges schools face with their school development plans because of these changes in the new curriculum. One of the most significant issues has been that schools are now required to develop their own methods of formative assessment, which suitably align with the child-centred approach of adapting practice to meet individual needs (GSR, 2022). This is due to the Welsh curriculum removing the original performance measures that were in place previously, used to assess pupil progress. The new curriculum requires a focus on self-evaluation, which must be built into a school SDP. Although self-evaluation is a positive tool for reflecting on ongoing progress, it also means that each school may assess the quality of their provision and pupil achievement differently, potentially leading to inconsistencies across Wales (Senedd, 2022).

Arguably, this new approach adds further pressure on teachers and leadership staff, who are expected to develop their own assessment methods while also managing their ever-growing daily responsibilities. Reducing teacher workload has been a key focus for the Welsh Government for several years and remains a priority in the 'Our National Mission: High Standards and Aspirations for All' policy (Gov, 2023). Nonetheless, the evidence suggests that a growing number of teachers are leaving the profession within their first three years of teaching due to significant and unattainable pressures faced within the role. Teachers have suggested that the workload is unmanageable, and teaching unions have indicated that teacher retention has reached a crisis

point (NEU, 2023). To contribute to retaining teaching staff, The Welsh Government should be exploring alternative methods, that remove the need for adding further workload for teachers and school leadership staff (Senedd, 2022).

Furthermore, without a clear assessment framework for comparison, there is a risk of lack of accountability. Arguably, removing the traditional performance measures makes it harder to compare school progress. Meaning it could be more difficult to ensure consistent experience for all learners in Wales. Moreover, the Welsh government need to provide clearer guidance to school leaders on how to deliver effective measures of success to include in their SDP.

Traditionally, theorist Jerome Bruner argued that children learn best when they are actively involved in the learning process. Aligning with the Curriculum for Wales, pupils are encouraged to investigate and problem-solve through role play, building activities, and outdoor learning (Welsh Government, 2022). Arguably, this active and hands on learning approach allows pupils to develop independence and develop curiosity, which reinforces Bruner's theory that learning should be an interactive process (Wood, 2020).

Furthermore, Bruner proposed that effective learning should follow a spiral curriculum, where concepts are revisited over time with increasing complexity. School X follows this approach to ensure that learning has depth and allows pupils to build upon knowledge and skills learnt previously. The Curriculum for Wales echoes this through the progression steps for learning. Key skills and learning concepts are introduced in the early years and are expanded upon as children move through the progression steps. In School X, foundational mathematical concepts such as shapes are initially introduced through play-based learning in progression step one and are later revisited in structured learning contexts like geometry, in progression step three. This reflects Bruner's emphasis on building knowledge progressively. Research has explored how well the spiral curriculum supports independent learning. The evidence suggests that when pupils are guided through inquiry-based learning, their learning outcomes and problem-solving skills improve. This suggests that adaptable approaches, like the spiral curriculum, can effectively encourage independent learning in primary schools (Lazonder, A.W. and Harmsen, R. 2016). In contrast, other studies have shown that without careful implementation, revisiting topics may become repetitive for pupils rather than beneficial. It appears that the success of this approach relies on the teacher's ability to design lessons that suitably connect new information to existing knowledge. Arguably, whether this is being done successfully or not is difficult for senior leadership to measure (Gibbs, B.C, 2014). Nonetheless, while challenges in implementation do exist, current research supports use of the spiral curriculum in promoting critical thinking and self-directed learning, which aligns with the Curriculum for Wales (Welsh Government, 2022).

Another key educational theorist Friedrich Froebel believed that children are active learners, who thrive in learning environments that promote exploration and play (Wasmuth, 2020). Although recent research continues to support Froebel's principles, applying Froebel's methods in the current education system can be challenging. Providing all children with varying abilities, access to equitable learning provision requires careful planning. Some critics have argued that child-led learning alone may not be sufficient for complex subjects, suggesting a balanced approach that allows independent learning, yet with structured guidance (Bruce, et al., 2019).

Following an Estyn inspection, the target for School X was highlighted in the report and therefore was prioritised in the school development plan (SDP). Steps taken to improve provision, included inset staff training, structured observations, learning walks, planning meetings, flexible planning, book scrutiny sessions and effective assessment strategies. These approaches align with the Curriculum for Wales and the Welsh Government's School Improvement Guidance (Welsh Government, 2022).

A key element of the SDP action plan was ensuring staff received appropriate training. Teachers and student teachers were trained in conducting purposeful observations and using digital tools such as Seesaw to document learning and track pupil progress. Additionally, learning support assistants (LSAs) participated in training on child development, play-based learning, and observation techniques, reinforcing their role in supporting pupils effectively. An '*observation proforma*' was introduced, providing a framework for recording pupil progress. This enabled teachers to gather helpful evidence as a guide for next steps in each pupils' learning. Collaborative planning also became a priority, with staff working together to create flexible lesson plans that respond to pupils' varying needs. Teachers were encouraged to organise learning resources effectively for both indoor and outdoor activities, to provide a stimulating environment for independent learning. Assessment for Learning (AfL) strategies were implemented into daily teaching, with a focus on differentiated questioning using 'higher order questioning', scaffolding, and use of open-ended discussions. These methods align with the Welsh Government's AfL Strategy (2020), which promotes formative assessment (Welsh Government, 2022). School day timetables were adjusted to balance teacher-led and independent activities and pupils were encouraged to take ownership of their learning through problem-solving challenges and pupil voice planning sessions with their teachers.

Evidence suggests independent learning offers many benefits. However, in some cases several challenges can make implementation difficult. Despite initial training, without ongoing professional development staff may not feel confident in supporting independent learning. Some teachers in School X found that time constraints remained a challenge, as teachers must balance independent

learning with curriculum demands and other tasks within a full timetable. Consistency in observations and assessments was also a concern, as staff felt they required further training to effectively use standardised tools. Additionally, teachers suggested they found it a challenge to provide a suitable balance of scaffolding and promote pupil independence.

To address these challenges, School X introduced peer mentoring to improve staff confidence. Structured planning and flexible schedules were introduced to further improve staff time management. Assessment methods were refined with clearer guidelines, and all teaching staff received further training in differentiation and higher-order questioning. Scaffolding techniques were also introduced to gradually develop pupils' independence. Additionally, pupils were encouraged to take an active role in lesson planning and assessment, making their learning more engaging.

In conclusion, School X's School Development Plan (SDP) focuses on improving teaching quality and independent learning provision. Following Welsh Government guidelines, the SDP ensures ongoing school improvement through self-evaluation and collaborative planning. A key priority for School X is aligning the SDP with the Curriculum for Wales, which focuses on enquiry-based learning. The school has implemented relevant staff training, structured observations, and effective questioning methods like higher ordering questioning to support these goals. However, challenges such as increased teacher workload and the changes in assessment methods may have created inconsistencies. To address this, School X introduced peer mentoring, flexible schedules, and refined assessment strategies. Research widely supports enquiry-based learning and Bruner's spiral curriculum, although it appears challenges remain. Overall, School X's SDP initiatives aim to facilitate independent learning and improve quality of provision throughout.

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