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ECAD6009/7003 – Part B (How a school develops one aspect of its SDP: a report that critically reflects on the actions, impact and evidence base.)

Introduction

In this essay, I will critically reflect on the actions, impact and evidence base of a school to develop an aspect of their school development plan. In accordance to the guidelines established by the British Research Association, I will safeguard the school's reputation and confidentiality by referring to School A. School A's vision is to maintain a sense of 'belonging' and the wellbeing of their students is a main priority. They aim to encourage and improve students' approach to learning, empowering them to self-regulate and actively participate in both their school life and the wider community. The objective is for students to recognize the value of their education, maintain regular attendance at school, and assume responsibility for their choices. School A is located in an urban town in Southeast Wales with a population of around 19,204. According to the most recent Estyn report, School A has 671 students enrolled, 99 of which are attending sixth form, 20.7% of students are eligible for free school meals over a three-year average which is 2.2% higher than the national average, 12.1% of students are identified as having additional learning needs which is 10.9% lower than the national average and only 1% of students speak Welsh at home.

Literature review

The Curriculum for Wales, with its four key purposes, significantly influences the school development process in Wales. The emphasis on creating ambitious, capable learners calls for a development process that not only prioritizes academic rigor but also nurtures creativity and independence. Encouraging healthy, confident individuals requires schools to integrate strategies promoting both physical and mental well-being, while the goal of producing enterprising, creative contributors demands an emphasis

on innovation, collaboration, and real-world problem-solving in the development process. Additionally, the focus on ethical, informed citizens necessitates activities fostering social responsibility, cultural awareness, and inclusivity. Welsh Government. (2022).

The development plan process in Wales is deeply rooted in the principles of sustainable development. The theoretical foundation of sustainable development involves meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. This concept is integral to the Well-being of Future Generations Act, which requires public bodies to consider the long-term impact of their decisions on social, economic, environmental, and cultural well-being. The Curriculum for Wales plays a role in advancing our national objectives outlined in the 'Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015' and aligns with the well-being goals established by the Welsh Government. The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 is a key legislative framework that shapes the development planning process in Wales. This act emphasizes sustainable development and requires public bodies to work toward achieving seven well-being goals: a prosperous Wales, a resilient Wales, a healthier Wales, a more equal Wales, a Wales of cohesive communities, a Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language and a globally responsible Wales. The Act encourages collaboration, integration, and long-term thinking, reflecting a commitment to the well-being of both current and future generations. Literature related to this act, along with academic research and policy documents from organizations like the Welsh Government, would provide valuable insights into the theoretical underpinnings and practical implications of the development plan process in Wales, with a focus on well-being. The core emphasis on promoting well-being is consistently woven throughout the curriculum, never taking a backseat. This commitment is reinforced by the comprehensive 'Framework on embedding a whole-school approach to emotional and mental well-being' adopted across Wales. Welsh Government. (2015).

School Development Plans are like blueprints for schools. They lay out the school's ideas and actions to make education better, focusing on working together and trying new things (Estyn, 2019). These plans follow ideas about how leaders can inspire others and keep making things better, like using teamwork and always looking for improvement (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Spillane et al., 2004; Hallinger, 2011). Estyn, which

checks schools in Wales, looks at how well schools are led, how good the teaching is, and how students feel, thinking that these plans are important to show that schools are following the rules and want to get better (Estyn, 2020). Schools also plan together with teachers, students, parents, and leaders, so everyone has a say (Estyn, 2019). The Welsh Government, which decides on education goals, wants these plans to help make a really good education system. They care about good leadership, high standards, making sure everyone can learn well, and having a teaching profession that includes everyone (Welsh Government, 2021). The government also thinks these plans should care about the community and well-being, not just grades (Welsh Government, 2021). In short, understanding these ideas about leadership, following the rules from Estyn, and meeting the goals of the Welsh Government makes these plans important for schools in Wales. They help schools keep getting better together, considering each school's needs and the whole education system in Wales.

Developing an action point

School A's development plan is a strategic document that outlines their goals, priorities, and actions for improvement over a three-year period. The development process involves a systematic approach to assess the current status, identify areas for enhancement, and implement strategies to achieve desired outcomes. In the Welsh education system, a school's development process aligns practices with policies and frameworks set forth by the Welsh Government. Schools conduct a comprehensive analysis of their current state, considering factors like student achievement, staff performance, infrastructure, and community engagement.

Guided by legislation in Wales, School A is obligated to follow specific rules for development planning. The School Performance and Absence Targets Regulations mandate annual submission of targets to the local authority by December 31. School Teacher Appraisal Regulations require a performance management policy aligning with individual development needs and school improvement priorities. Education Regulations set a three-year School Development Plan (SDP) period, starting by

September 1, 2015. By this date, schools must have a fully compliant SDP. Schools determine their self-evaluation cycle but follow a rolling three-year SDP plan.

The school development planning cycle is used with a well-defined vision of the school's aspirations. It consists of four stages; self-evaluation, strategic planning, making improvement/action and reviewing the impact. School A will utilize self-evaluation for reflective improvement planning, assessing performance, strengths, areas for improvement, and strategies. This annual process aids in advancing school improvement, professional learning, and learner outcomes. School A will monitor progress against set targets throughout the year, emphasizing the importance of celebrating strengths and sharing best practices for system-wide improvement. Accessing qualitative and quantitative data, School A will identify strengths, areas for development, and foster improvements. Estyn highlights the correlation between impact-focused self-evaluation and improved educational outcomes. School A has access to various data sources, including benchmarking, to inform development planning. Estyn suggests three key self-evaluation questions: How well are we doing? How do we know? How can we improve further?

To achieve effective school development planning, collaboration with all stakeholders is crucial. The governing body, including the headteacher, staff, learners, parents/carers, and community, must be consulted in the preparation of the School Development Plan (SDP). SDP integration with existing plans like staff development and spending plans is encouraged to streamline processes and avoid duplication. Priorities, targets, and strategies should be challenging yet realistic, focusing on national priorities. The SDP should encompass professional development strategies aligned with national priorities, emphasizing effective teaching. Community engagement, resource deployment, and continuous monitoring and evaluation of progress are essential components. The SDP, covering a three-year period, acts as a single comprehensive improvement plan. Monitoring the achievement of past targets and providing corrective actions ensure ongoing improvement.

The SDP's next phase involves implementing outlined actions and strategies, with staff actively engaged in preparation and revision. Clear leadership across all levels is essential to sustain staff commitment. The SDP should articulate responsibilities,

accountability, actions, and timescales for optimal resource utilization and to prevent confusion or duplication.

SDPs are dynamic documents, consistently monitored in the development cycle, and formally reviewed at least yearly. The governing body must annually monitor, review, and update the school development plan or promptly after an Estyn inspection, ensuring alignment with the current school context. Revision following an inspection must adhere to the specified timeline outlined in The Education (School Inspection) (Wales) Regulations 2006.

Guided by a well-defined vision, School A embraces a non-confrontational approach to behaviour management, particularly effective for students facing vulnerabilities and mental health challenges. This method, rooted in compassion, well-being, and positive reinforcement, deliberately avoids punitive sanctions. In essence, the non-confrontational strategy for behaviour modification prioritizes cultivating positive relationships and adopts a preventive narrative. However, Lederach argues that merely managing or settling conflicts may not lead to long-term peace, as it often leaves underlying issues unaddressed. Instead, Conflict Transformation involves a deeper engagement with the root causes of the conflict, promoting dialogue, understanding, and structural changes.

School A draws inspiration from Maslow's hierarchy of needs, recognizing that self-actualization, or fulfilling one's potential, is the ultimate goal. However, acknowledging that children must have their basic needs met before reaching this pinnacle, the approach emphasizes the fundamental aspects of safety and physiological well-being. Many of our most vulnerable learners lack these foundational needs, yet we expect them to engage in classroom learning. Hence, the 'belonging' approach becomes imperative, delving into the unique context of each child and crafting personalized care packages to provide the necessary support. By addressing these fundamental needs, we empower students to progress through Maslow's hierarchy, fostering an environment conducive to holistic growth and self-actualization. Some of the ways in which School A has supported students moving through Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is by organising breakfast clubs, increasing drinking water availability, educating students

and parents on the importance of rest, using positive inclusion, meeting and greeting students before they enter the classroom, communicating with caregivers at home, building relationships with teachers and students and celebrating success. However, there is an alternative perspective to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs which is the "Self-Determination Theory" (SDT), proposed by Deci and Ryan. While Maslow's theory posits a hierarchical structure of needs, with physiological needs at the base and self-actualization at the pinnacle, SDT suggests that human motivation is driven by three innate psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. According to SDT, individuals are motivated when they have a sense of autonomy (the need for control and volition in their actions), competence (the need to feel effective in one's interactions with the environment), and relatedness (the need for meaningful connections with others).

Reflection and evaluation

School A's development plan reflects a commendable adherence to Welsh education legislation, incorporating the School Performance and Absence Targets Regulations, School Teacher Appraisal Regulations, and Education Regulations. The four-stage self-evaluation cycle, encompassing reflective improvement planning, strategic planning, implementation, and impact review, underscores the school's commitment to a systematic and evidence-based approach. Stakeholder collaboration is prioritized, involving the governing body, staff, learners, parents/carers, and the community in the SDP preparation. School A's non-confrontational behaviour management approach, rooted in compassion and positive reinforcement, aligns with contemporary perspectives on fostering a positive school culture. The integration of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and consideration of the Self-Determination Theory offer a holistic understanding of student well-being and motivation. Overall, School A's development plan demonstrates a theoretical foundation that embraces legal requirements, evidence-based practices, stakeholder involvement, and a comprehensive approach to student well-being and development.

To enhance the effectiveness of School A's development plan, several adjustments and considerations could be implemented. Firstly, incorporating a more explicit emphasis

on teacher professional development aligned with national priorities and effective teaching strategies would strengthen the plan. Research by Hattie, J. (2009) in "Visible Learning: A Synthesis of Over 800 Meta-Analyses Relating to Achievement" emphasizes the significant impact of teacher professional development on student outcomes. Additionally, to foster a more comprehensive understanding of student motivation, incorporating principles from Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 2000) into the behaviour management approach could provide a nuanced perspective. SDT emphasizes the importance of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in motivating individuals, aligning with contemporary psychological theories. Furthermore, the plan could benefit from a more frequent and flexible review process to ensure adaptability to changing educational landscapes, drawing on the concept of agile educational leadership proposed by Robinson, H., & Timperley, H. (2007) in "Improving School Leadership." This iterative approach would facilitate quicker responses to emerging needs and challenges.

Conclusion

Engaging in research about the school development plan (SDP) and its process in Wales will significantly shape my future practice as a teacher. This exploration equips me with a comprehensive understanding of strategic planning, enabling informed decision-making aligned with national educational frameworks. It highlights the importance of collaboration, emphasizing the involvement of various stakeholders such as teachers, parents, and the community. This knowledge enhances my ability to actively contribute to the collaborative planning process and cultivate a positive school culture. Moreover, the research sheds light on the integration of professional development strategies into the SDP, guiding my personal growth as an educator and aligning my professional development with national priorities. Understanding how the SDP addresses student well-being and behaviour management informs my classroom practices, creating a positive and inclusive learning environment. The emphasis on data utilization in the SDP process equips me with valuable skills in data analysis, enabling a data-informed approach to teaching. Additionally, the cyclical nature of the SDP emphasizes adaptability and continuous improvement, shaping my mindset towards

proactive change and a willingness to embrace new methodologies. Ultimately, this research not only enriches my understanding of strategic planning but also contributes to the development of leadership skills, preparing me to meaningfully contribute to school improvement efforts.

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