

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	Consider the structure of your work when laying out content	I have included subheadings in this assignment
Targed/Target 2	N/A	
Targed/Target 3	N/A	

How a school develops one aspect of its SDP: a report that critically reflects on the actions, impact and evidence base

Word count: 2,497

Introduction

The task for this assignment is to critically reflect how my placement school develops one particular aspect of its School Development Plan. My PTE1 placement school was an English medium, mixed gender school for 11-16-year olds, with just under 900 pupils. As of 2019, 27.5% of pupils were on free school meals (which is much higher than the national average of 17.5%). Roughly 47% of pupils live in the 20% most deprived areas in Wales. The school has a significant amount of English as an additional language (EAL) students, with their percentage being well above the national and local authority average. There are 17 different first languages spoken within the school community, and 52% of pupils are on the school's additional needs register, which is again above the national average of 20.1%. Their last Estyn inspection in 2015 scored the school's current performance as good, and their prospects for improvement as excellent (*School X Estyn Report: 2015, details available on request*). Due to the catchment area and context of the school, the aspect that I have chosen to focus on is the deprivation gap. In the school's Development Plan, the aspect that I will be looking at is that they want "to work in partnership with the Wallich, to support closing the gap in deprivation for pupils and families." (*School X Development Plan 2019*)

Literature review

Pupil deprivation and the effect it has on academic attainment continues to be a major issue in Wales. In 2013, The Joseph Rowntree Foundation published that the deprivation gap was a main focus for the Welsh Government, and that the statistics were showing that evidence of the gap becomes apparent from as early as the age of three, when students start nursery. By the time pupils come to sit their GCSE examinations, children from “better off” families are more than twice as likely to achieve five good GCSE’s, as opposed to those from more disadvantaged backgrounds. In 2011, the Welsh Government introduced the Pupil Deprivation Grant (PDG) which provides all schools with funding for any child over the age of five who receives Free School Meals (FSM). In 2017, the Welsh Government published their final report measuring and evaluating the impact the PDG had on students in Wales. They concluded that there had been a narrowing of the attainment gap and that since the introduction of the PDG, the performance of eFSM students had improved. However, the report does highlight the fact that the PDG is only one in a number of policies the Government introduced to tackle this problem, therefore isolating and measuring its sole impact had been difficult, especially since a lot of schools access other forms of funding and interventions along with the PDG. According to the evaluation report, the main thing schools use the PDG for is to employ staff who work specifically with the more deprived and under achieving learners on their academic, social and emotional needs. When looking at academic needs, this most commonly comes in the form of a teaching assistant. However, in 2018 the Education Endowment Fund found that teaching assistants were providing relatively low impact for a high cost. However, the impact does improve if the TA is assigned to a specific student/s, as opposed to providing general support in the classroom. In 2012, ESTYN released a document on effective practice for tackling this issue and stated 10 strategies for how schools can improve their practice. These strategies and the subsequent guidance from the Welsh Government focus on two groups of strategies to try and reduce the effect that deprivation has on academic attainment. The first group of strategies focus on teaching and learning, and the second group focus more on the student, their wellbeing, family and community. My placement school has forged some very robust community links, they have a strong emphasis on the pastoral and wellbeing side of the school, although parental engagement is something that they are looking to develop further. However, from the point in the SDP that I am focusing on, it seems that their main focus is to work with The Wallich. This is a Welsh homelessness and rough sleeping charity. They also do a lot of work within the community on addiction, conflict resolution and independent living, and work closely with external agencies such as Social Services and the Youth Justice Team. The SDP does not go in to specifics about what services or knowledge in particular

the school is looking to get from The Wallich, but it seems as if this would be linking in to the second band of strategies from the Welsh Government, focusing on the students, the family and the community. Lacour and Tissington (2011) state that in areas where poverty is high (like that of my placement school), families sometimes do not appreciate or value formal education, which can lead to their children not being prepared for the learning environment. They go on to say that one of the best tools for closing the attainment gap is teachers, and effective communication and instruction between the teacher and the student, but also the teachers, leadership and other school staff is vital in achieving this. This is backed up by the views of Allington (1991) who believes that more needs to be done within school for at-risk children, for example taking a more holistic approach to assessing them. Allington suggests that strategies such as voluntary reading data, parental satisfaction surveys and holistic assessments of real reading. However, Shields (1991) argues that the academic attainment, particularly of eFSM students, is directly influenced by the values and beliefs of their family and community and not so much on life inside school itself. Considering this, the school making a link with a charity such as The Wallich could prove to be a positive one.

Developing an action point

In the move towards implementing Donaldson's vision in *Successful Futures* (2015) in which all schools should be working with the Four Purposes at its core, schools in Wales are also beginning to work as "Learning Organisations". At the heart of this, as stated by the OECD (2018) in their findings, is self-evaluation and schools need more critical reflection to sustain progress, but that secondary schools are finding this move more difficult than primaries. With this in mind, schools have begun to create more robust School Development Plans. The Welsh Government (2014) released guidance on SDP's, based on ESTYN's 2013-14 annual report which said that self-evaluation and planning for improvement needed to be improved in just over a quarter of the schools in Wales. The guidance states that the purpose of an effective SDP is to raise the standards of education in of both numeracy and literacy and to reduce the impact that poverty has on academic attainment. The particular aspect of my school's SDP links directly into the Welsh Government's third aim. It should be a three-year, live document, meaning it is an ongoing process and continually being updated. The impact on learner outcomes will be used as the measure of its effectiveness rather than the production of the plan itself, all stakeholders will be involved in identifying strengths and areas for improvement and it should focus on both short and long-term priorities. The first stage in the self-development planning cycle is self-evaluation. The school have identified their strengths in tackling the deprivation gap within the school, using the Government guidance, they run several different interventions, academic and pastoral, targeting those

more at-risk students and they currently have a really strong focus on external and community links and how utilising those can strengthen the work they are already doing. With almost half their students living in the top 20% most deprived areas in Wales, the school is very aware of its catchment area and the subsequent issues this presents. They are a pioneer school for both the Welsh Government and ERW, and they utilise their staff effectively, they have working parties within the school and use INSET days as a time for individuals, departments, and the working parties to identify strengths and areas for development. It is at this point that the guidance says schools need to be backing up these conclusions with both qualitative and quantitative data. In this case, this may have included, for example, tracking information on learner progress, banding information or inspection reports. The second stage is strategic planning, and this is the point where all stakeholders should be involved, for example, the governors, staff, learners, parents/carers, wider community etc to encourage a holistic approach to whole-school improvement. This would be the stage where the school would have decided what action they were going to take, in this case, linking in with The Wallich as a method of tackling their attainment gap. The school does have a parent/carer forum, in which parents attend after school meetings and are informed and consulted on any matters, particularly like actions on the SDP. However, it appears that the decisions of the SDP are taken before these forums, and parents/carers simply give their feedback on what has already been decided. In keeping with the idea that an SDP should be a "live" document, one would presume that the feedback from the forum could and should affect and change any aspects of the SDP, but at present that does not seem to be the case. At this point, the school should have clear success criteria on how their improvements will be made and how success will be measured. From the excerpt of the SDP that I was given, I could not see this information, therefore, I do not know the specific details in how the school will measure the impact of working with The Wallich. Step 3 of the cycle is making the improvements/action. This is where the planning is put into practice, and where everyone will need to be clear of their roles, responsibilities, accountability and the timeframe in which they have to do it. From documents and INSET days that I attended in the school, there seems to be a clear sense of everyone's roles and responsibilities. The final stage in the cycle is reviewing the impact. Reviewing and evaluating impact is a crucial point to the SDP. It is more than just monitoring and tracking progress, the EEF (2016) describe it as a process that should lead to a conclusion on how effective something was. There are many different models that can be used to evaluate impact, from the Impact Evaluation Model by The Training and Development Agency for Schools (2010) to school's own individual impact evaluation models. This again should use similar data as used in identifying the need for development and should be a mix of qualitative and quantitative

data, for example tracking pupil progress, surveys, attendance data, consultations with staff, pupils and parents.

Reflection and evaluation

It is difficult to feel like I can fully evaluate the actions, impact and evidence base of this cycle because I have not been privy to all the evidence and information. In ESTYN's Effective Practice Guide (2012) they state that within their SDP, schools should be demonstrating how the rationale for their use of PDG funding is used and this is something I cannot see on my school's SDP. However, I was only given a section of the SDP, not the whole document. The section I had access to was the section focusing on the schools community links. Whilst I am aware that they already do a lot within the school to work on reducing the attainment gap, with regards to Dimension 6 of the Schools as Learning Environments (2014), "learning with and from the external environment and wider learning system" this seems to be the next course of action they are taking.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2013) reports that the more family and community-based interventions do have a positive impact on student engagement, but there is little positive evidence that claims it improves academic attainment. However, I would argue that this does not necessarily mean that we should not be focusing on these interventions, as it would be unrealistic and damaging for the school and students to expect a child who's wellbeing is not stable to be able to achieve or excel academically. Working with the child, their family and the community should be the first step in a longer process, with the end goal being to improve academic attainment, having also improved their wellbeing along the way. In 2013, Ann Keane (Chief Inspector for ESTYN) urged all headteachers and senior leadership teams to work with outside agencies in order to help reduce the attainment gap so the school are not only addressing their own need that they have identified, but they are listening to the advice and research within the education sector in Wales.

I am unsure how involved parents are on a strategic planning or measuring impact level and parents/carers are some of the most important stakeholders in a school and can be key to providing some vital information and understanding. Deprivation, poverty and academic attainment can be sensitive issues therefore a lot of care would need to be taken by the school when discussing this with stakeholders, however I do think that parents/carers could be more involved in the development plan process. The school had said that parental engagement can be a problem so perhaps this is a key area they need to develop.

The Education Endowment Fund (2017) published a report on closing the attainment gap. They suggested one of the key points should be sharing effective practice between schools. I think the school could and should link in with local/similar schools to see how they are

tackling the deprivation gap and if there is anything they could share or learn from colleagues.

Conclusion

It has become clear to me how vital an effective and robust development planning cycle is to a school. It enables them to work towards sustained and continuous improvement with a clear purpose understood by all. Self-evaluation is central to improvements for staff, students and other stakeholders. The deprivation gap is an ongoing issue throughout Wales, and through my research and readings this is something I have developed a keen interest in and will be looking out for and proactively trying to tackle in my own career. Every child should have access to equal opportunities throughout their time in education and the evidence is clear that deprivation has a negative impact on students' academic achievements, from a young age right through to their GCSE's. The school seems to already have a number of measures in place to tackle this and is working on continuing and extending its provisions to outside the school itself to further this development. Unfortunately at this point I do not know the impact that this action has had as it was an ongoing process that has not yet finished, however I will definitely be making contact with the school in the near future to see if it was a success.

Reference List

1. Allington, R.L., 1991. Effective Literacy Instruction for At-Risk Children. Knapp, MP, Shields, PM (Eds.), Better Schooling for the Children of Poverty: Alternative to Conventional Wisdom, Berleley.
2. Donaldson, G., 2015. *Successful futures: Independent review of curriculum and assessment arrangements in Wales*. Welsh Government.
3. EEF, 2018. Teaching Assistants- Teaching and Learning Toolkit. Education Endowment Fund
4. Egan, D., 2013. Poverty and low educational achievement in Wales: student, family and community interventions. Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
5. Estyn (2013): Working together to tackle the impact of poverty on educational achievement, Welsh Government
6. ESTYN, 2013. Tackling poverty is still not a high enough priority for schools. Welsh Government
7. ESTYN, 2013: Effective Practice in Tackling Poverty and Disadvantage in Schools
8. Higgins, S., Katsipatakis, M., Villanueva-Aguilera, A.B., Coleman, R., Henderson, P., Major, L.E., Coe, R. and Mason, D., 2016. The Sutton Trust-Education Endowment Foundation Teaching and Learning Toolkit.
9. Jones, A., 2013: Closing the Gap in Education. Education Achievement Service for South East Wales
10. Kools, M., Pont, B., Gou  dard, P., Rodriguez, T., Stoll, L. and George, B., 2018. Developing Schools as Learning Organisations in Wales. OECD.
11. Lacour, M. and Tissington, L.D., 2011. The effects of poverty on academic achievement. *Educational Research and Reviews*, 6(7).
12. School X Estyn Report: 2015, details available on request
13. School X Improvement Plan 2019-20
14. Shields PM (1991). School and community influences on effective academic instruction. Knapp, Shields (Eds.), Better Schooling for the Children of Poverty: Alternatives to Conventional Wisdom. Berkeley, CA: MrCutchan Publishing Corp.
15. Welsh Government, 2014. School Development Plans
16. Welsh Government, 2014: What really works? Guidance for using the Pupil Deprivation Grant