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Introduction

In this assignment we have been tasked to write an in-depth analysis of a point taken from the School Development Plan (SDP) from our second placement school. The school in question is in the 3rd year of a three-year plan to improve standards and put in place a model for sustainable improvement post ESTYN inspection. The school feels that the ESTYN recommendations are fundamental to school improvement and form the basis of the priorities for the 2022-2023 school year and are the backbone to the goals and objectives within the SDP. Focus during this assignment will be looking at raising attainment to disadvantaged youngsters within the school. Disadvantaged youngsters are categorized as pupils who receive free school meals.

Raising attainment to disadvantaged youngsters is an important priority for schools to address as it has been shown that students from low-income backgrounds are more likely to underachieve academically. The fact that around 30% of this school's students receive free school meals suggests that a significant proportion of the students are from disadvantaged backgrounds. Improving the attainment of these students is crucial for the school to achieve its overall goal of sustainable improvement and meet the ESTYN recommendations. The analysis of this point from the SDP will involve examining the specific strategies and interventions that the school can put in place to address the attainment gap and evaluate their effectiveness.

Literature Review

The term "attainment" in education refers to the level of achievement or progress that a student has made in their studies. According to Schneider (2018), attainment is often measured by assessing the knowledge, skills, and understanding that students have acquired in specific subjects. In order to measure attainment, it is important to have clearly defined learning objectives or outcomes that students are expected to achieve at each stage of their education. Attainment levels can be measured through various forms of assessment for learning, such as end of module tests or quizzes, teacher assessments and coursework. Attainment is an important indicator of educational success, as it helps to identify areas of strength and weakness in teaching and learning, and provides information for making informed decisions about future educational policies and practices.

Research (Welsh Government, 2018) shows that children who receive FSM are more likely to come from households with lower incomes, and they may experience a range of difficulties related to poverty, including poorer physical and mental health, lower educational attainment, and limited access to resources such as books and technology. Additional guidance (Education Wales, 2019) suggests that poverty within Welsh Education can be addressed by creating an equal school day. They suggest that additional support can be provided for children from low-income families, such as breakfast clubs, homework clubs, and mentoring programs. Additionally, ensuring that all children have access to the resources they need to learn, including books, technology, and equipment. The school as a whole can also create a positive and inclusive school culture that celebrates diversity and respects the needs and experiences of all learners. By taking these actions and implementing other poverty-proofing strategies, schools can help to create a more level playing field for children from disadvantaged backgrounds and improve their educational outcomes. By taking these actions and implementing other poverty-proofing strategies, schools can help to create a more level playing field for children from disadvantaged backgrounds and improve their educational outcomes.

This is backed by Children NE (2023) who adds that “Poverty-proofing education levels the metaphorical playing field. Many strategies overlap with Education Wales, (2019) with the addition of making sure that homework is accessible and can be completed by all children, regardless of their access to technology or resources at home. Allowing access to additional support for children who may be experiencing poverty-related issues, such as emotional or mental health problems, through school counseling services or other interventions ensures that they have the same opportunities to succeed as their more affluent peers.

The Attainment Gap Report (Education Endowment Foundation, 2017) examines the educational attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers. The report highlights that disadvantaged pupils are on average almost two years of learning behind their peers by the time they finish secondary school. A report published by the Department for Education (2018), shows the differences in academic outcomes for students who are eligible for free school meals and those who are not. The report finds that, on average, students who are eligible for FSM achieve lower academic outcomes than their peers who are not eligible for FSM. In particular, students eligible for FSM are less likely to achieve good grades in key stage 3 assessments, thus they are also less likely to achieve good grades in GCSEs. The gap in attainment is evident from an early age and increases as pupils progress through primary and secondary school. In addition, research (Education Endowment Foundation, 2017) identifies a range of strategies and interventions that schools can use to help close the attainment gap, including early interventions, effective teaching and learning, targeted support for disadvantaged pupils, and parental engagement.

Strategies to assist with deficits and how they are exacerbated by the free school meal gap have been discussed by Quigley (2018). Quigley discusses the importance of vocabulary and numeracy knowledge obtained at home and the effect on academic success and how it can help to increase educational inequalities. Quigley provides practical examples of how to address the vocabulary gap, including explicit vocabulary

instruction, promoting wide reading, and fostering a culture of word-rich environment within classrooms. They add that by addressing the numeracy and literacy gap through targeted interventions and teaching strategies, schools can help to improve outcomes for disadvantaged students and reduce the attainment gap. Criticisms around this are that some pupils may not have a support structure at home available to give this assistance.

"Successful Futures" is a curriculum reform document for Wales, which sets out a vision for a new curriculum that aims to be more equitable and inclusive (Donaldson, 2015). The report stresses the need to promote equality in education, saying that all learning should be ensured equal opportunity and excellence irrespective of background so as to have full participation in society and the economy. The report also stresses the need to address inequalities in the current education system, including those related to poverty, ethnicity, language and gender. According to it, the new curriculum should support a culture of respect, tolerance or inclusion that is appropriate for all students irrespective of their individual circumstances and which will allow them to fulfill their needs.

The school whose development plan is being discussed has employed a family engagement officer to help bridge the gap between hard to reach families and the school with a view to improve relationships and support learners' wellbeing. Employing a family engagement officer can benefit schools in numerous ways. According to research (Education Endowment Foundation, 2018) parental engagement has been proven to have a positive impact on student achievement, behavior and attendance. A family engagement officer can help to build trust between the school and parents, improving communication and promoting greater involvement in their child's education. The officer can also support families by providing resources and guidance to help overcome barriers to learning. By strengthening the home-school relationship, schools can create a more inclusive and supportive environment, leading to improved outcomes for students. Engaging strengthening relationships with families and the community has

been discussed by the Welsh Government (2023). The guide suggests that schools should establish a family engagement strategy that outlines how the school will work with families and the community to support children's learning. Additionally it provides some examples of good practice in family engagement, such as involving parents in decision-making processes, providing opportunities for parents to learn alongside their children, and establishing partnerships with community organizations to support children's learning.

Developing an action point

The Welsh Government (2020) suggests that schools in Wales should use a data-driven approach to setting targets within their SDPs to ensure they are always progressing as a . This involves studying a range of data sources, such as end of year and GCSE test results, current and past ESTYN reports, attendance records, and student feedback, through student-led councils or schoolwide surveys to identify areas for improvement and set ambitious yet achievable targets. This is backed by Cambridge International (2019) who discuss the requirements to ensure that the school is continuously improving and meeting the needs of its students. An SDP provides a roadmap for the school's improvement efforts, outlining priorities and targets for the next few years. The document notes that an SDP can help to ensure that the school is focused on achieving its goals and that everyone in the school community is working towards the same objectives.

School development Plans are required to be monitored through an ongoing process of reflection of best practices and monitoring. Monitoring targets and objectives set within the SDP and progress towards achieving these targets is regularly reviewed using both qualitative and quantitative data sources, including pupil performance data, attendance records, and stakeholder feedback. By using a combination of qualitative and quantitative data sources, schools are able to monitor their progress towards achieving the targets set out in the SDP and assess the effectiveness of their improvement strategies. This ongoing self-reflection and critical evaluation enables schools to make necessary adjustments to ensure that they are delivering the best possible outcomes for their students, staff and stakeholders. The importance of monitoring and evaluating the SDP is highlighted by the Welsh Government's School Development Plan Manual, which emphasizes the requirement for schools to have a clear and well structured plan for evaluating the effectiveness of their SDP periodically over time (Welsh Government, 2020).

Involving stakeholders in the SDP is essential to ensuring that the plan is effective in addressing the needs and priorities of the school community.

Guidance provided by the Welsh Government (2020) suggests stakeholders include a wide range of individuals and groups, such as parents, teachers, school governors, local authorities, and community organizations. This is backed by Hopkins (2017) who discussed the need to involve stakeholders in the SDP process as this can help to build a sense of ownership and commitment to the plan, as well as provide valuable insights and perspectives on the challenges and opportunities facing the school. Means of obtaining opinions from stakeholders can include surveys, interviews and focus groups or creating a panel of representatives to obtain views. The Welsh Government (2020) recommends making the SDP available online. This can provide a convenient and accessible platform for parents, students, and community members to review and provide input on the plan. This can help to ensure that the SDP reflects the priorities and concerns of the school community. Additionally, an online SDP can help to promote transparency and accountability, as stakeholders can easily access information allowing stakeholders to track goals and targets set out. Disadvantages of transparency around SDPs has been discussed by Davies (2020). Davies argues that when publishing a SDP issues around breaching confidentiality by sharing sensitive information about staff and students which could put individuals at risk, and potential personal vulnerabilities. In addition, misunderstanding of the school's goals and priorities is a risk that schools must address by presenting the SDP clearly and in a way that is easily understandable for all stakeholders (Davies, 2020).

Measuring the impact of a SDP is crucial to ensure that the school is achieving its objectives and making progress. As previously discussed, it is important for the development plan to have clear goals and objectives and measurable outcomes to ensure those able to be achieved by identifying relevant indicators and backing those with data sources. Research (Conley and McGaughy, 2018) provides insights into how to measure school development plan success. The authors emphasize that the success of a school development plan should be measured by a combination of academic and non-academic indicators, such as student performance on periodical tests or additional assessment for learning

methods, end of year exams or GCSE pass rates, further education enrollment and completion rates, attendance rates, and student and staff satisfaction surveys. The research also stresses the importance of setting clear goals, establishing relevant metrics, and using data to inform decision-making. Additionally, the authors highlight the need to regularly monitor and adjust the plan based on the data collected. This is backed by Shaddock (2014) who adds that using data from the previously discussed sources to drive and how the findings can inform decision-making and improve teaching and learning within the school. This then leads to an effective SDP that can be used practically to enhance and progress a school to reach its potential.

Reflection and Evaluation

The school development plan of the second placement school prioritizes raising attainment for disadvantaged youngsters within the school. To address this, the school has put in place several strategies and interventions to improve the academic outcomes of these students. These include providing targeted support, engaging with families, providing additional training for teachers, and setting challenging targeted yet obtainable targets.

The school has appointed a learning support teacher to work with small groups of disadvantaged pupils to provide additional support and interventions to help them catch up with their peers. To engage families of disadvantaged pupils the school has employed a family engagement officer to help build stronger relationships between the school and families of disadvantaged pupils, promoting greater involvement in their child's education. Providing additional training to teachers will give them additional skills on how to improve the attainment of disadvantaged pupils. This includes training on differentiation, assessment for learning, and supporting pupils with additional needs. The school has set targets for disadvantaged pupils based on their prior attainment levels and attendance and has put in place strategies and interventions to help them achieve these targets.

The strategies and interventions put in place by the school to raise attainment for disadvantaged pupils are in line with recommendations from the EEF's Attainment Gap Report (2017) and the Department for Education (2018). The school has also taken a data-driven approach to set targets within their SDP, as recommended by the Welsh Government (2020).

The appointment of a family engagement officer is a particularly effective strategy to address the attainment gap. According to the Education Endowment Foundation (2018), parental engagement has been proven to have a positive impact on student achievement, behavior, and attendance.

By strengthening the home-school relationship, schools can create a more inclusive and supportive environment, leading to improved outcomes for students.

The targeted support provided by the school's learning support teacher is also an effective strategy to address the attainment gap. This approach allows the school to provide additional support and interventions to pupils who need it most, helping them catch up with their peers.

Providing additional training for teachers on how to improve the attainment of disadvantaged pupils is a positive step towards closing the attainment gap (Allen and Sims, 2018). Effective teaching and learning is a key factor in improving student outcomes, and by providing teachers with the tools and strategies they need to support disadvantaged pupils, the school is helping to ensure that all students have the opportunity to succeed.

Donaldson (2015) suggests the need for a holistic approach to Welsh education. A holistic approach to education is an approach that takes into account the whole child, including their social, emotional, and physical well-being, as well as their academic progress. Donaldson discusses that schools should provide a broad and balanced curriculum that meets the needs of all learners, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Conclusion

In conclusion, closing the attainment gap in Welsh education is of paramount importance. The link between poverty and educational achievement is well established, and it is vital that children from disadvantaged backgrounds are given equal opportunities to succeed in school. By reducing the poverty related attainment gap, Welsh education can become more inclusive and equitable, and ensure that all learners have access to the same high quality education. Closing the attainment gap can also have wider positive impacts on society, such as reducing social inequalities and improving economic productivity. It is crucial that the Welsh Government and educational institutions continue to prioritize efforts to close the attainment gap and ensure equal access to education for all learners. As a teacher, I can play a vital role in this effort by adopting a holistic approach, discussed by Donaldson (2015) to education and taking into account the individual needs and circumstances of each student. By providing a supportive and inclusive learning environment, promoting engagement and creativity, and seeking out opportunities for professional development, I can help bridge the attainment gap and contribute to building a brighter future for all pupils in Wales.

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