

<u>Target 1</u>	Remember that BERA guidance needs to be adhered to in assignments in order to protect the Schools and children involved.
<u>Target 2</u>	To enhance critical analysis, consider integrating a greater number of literature citations. Utilizing more references will aid in the critique and development of your arguments, elevating the depth and quality of your work.

ECAD 6009 - Learners, Schools & Communities: where am I teaching? - How a school develops one aspect of its SDP: a report that critically reflects on the actions, impact and evidence base.

Introduction

The aim of this report is to critically reflect upon the actions that a specific school has taken to develop one aspect of their school development plan (SDP) and the impact of the actions taken. The school that will be reported on is [REDACTED] Primary School. From this point forward, the school will be referred to as 'School X'. The school underwent an inspection from Estyn in January 2024 and, therefore has up to date pupil data available. School X is a small school in a rural area of Neath Port Talbot and hosts 101 pupils in total. Of the 101 pupils that attend school X, 36.8% are eligible for free school meals (eFSM) and 32.5% are identified as having additional learning needs (ALN). Both of these statistics are considerably higher than the national averages which stand at 23.7% and 13.2% respectively (Estyn, 2024). School X's SDP is a three-year plan spanning from 2023 to 2026. The specific aspect of the SDP that will be reported on is to develop pupils' higher order thinking skills by the end of year three of the plan.

Literature Review

School development plans (SDP) or school improvement plans (SIP) are used, not only in Wales but all across the United Kingdom. Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales' government websites all state very similar definitions of what an SDP or an SIP should include, stating that they are strategic plans that schools should develop in order to improve aspects of education that the schools have self-identified as areas for improvement or development (Department of Education, 2015; Education Scotland, 2023; Welsh Government, 2014). The fact that the entirety of the United Kingdom has taken to utilising SDPs in some form shows the importance that the devolved governments all believe SDPs hold in the improvement of education across all four nations. The primary focuses of SDPs in Wales are to raise standards of literacy, numeracy and the impact of poverty on educational attainment (Welsh Government, 2014). While schools in Wales are given freedom over what their individual priorities for improvement will be, the Welsh government have given strict guidance around what must be included in the SDPs. An SDP must include how resources will be used, how targets will be achieved and how staff will be developed in order to achieve the targets set out by the school. The Welsh government also states that *"It will be an ongoing process that is reflected in the status of the SDP as a 'live document'"*. This statement implies that, despite SDPs being laid out as three-year plans, they are subject to change during the process if the school deems it necessary to do so. The aspect of School X's SDP that will be focused on is the improvement of pupils' higher order thinking skills. According to the Revised Bloom's Taxonomy (Anderson and Krathwohl, 2001) there are six stages of thinking skills: remember, understand, apply, analyse, evaluate and create. In that order, these skills are considered lower order to higher order thinking skills (Armstrong, 2010). According to Brookhart (2010), higher order thinking can be defined under one of three categories: transfer, critical thinking and problem solving. Brookhart proceeds to state that the main goal of any teaching professional is providing their learners with the ability to transfer, meaning to learn a theory or skill and later apply what they have learned in contexts that they have not yet experienced. With regards to critical thinking, Brookhart proceeds to state that the focus of educators is giving learners the tools they need to be able to reason and make decisions and that teaching this skill in the learning environment will lead to the learners being able to utilise these skills outside the classroom and indeed in later life. She continues to say that *"a problem is a goal that cannot be met with a memorized solution"* meaning that, because there are very few real-life problems that can be solved using a simple formula, teaching problem solving skills in school can develop learners' abilities to use the same skills in a variety of situations in later life. Attempting to promote the development of higher order thinking skills is not, however, without its challenges. According to Kosasih1 et al, one such

challenge is that teaching professionals must now design their curricula in a manner in which higher order thinking skills are interwoven into the day to day teaching and learning, therefore creating a larger workload for all staff involved in the process of planning. According to Hidayat and Lestari (2022), there are three concerns regarding the forced implementation of higher order thinking skills. The first is “*Teachers’ Misconceptions of HOTS*”. The source states that, having conducted research into the subject, it was found that, when questioned on the components of higher order thinking skills, teaching professionals “*mentioned only a few HOTS subskills*”. This point shows that, before moving towards a curriculum that focuses on higher order thinking skills, teachers and other members of staff within the learning environment must have a firm grip on the fundamentals of the skills and how to deliver them. The second challenge outlined by Hidayat and Lestari is “*limited teachers’ capacity*”. The authors proceed to state that their conclusions from interviewing teachers are that teaching staff had difficulties developing learning materials that implemented higher order thinking skills into their lessons. Due to the similarity of these two points, it could be argued that, better training on how to implement higher order thinking skills into lessons may be an effective way to alleviate the challenges that Hidayat and Lestari have identified. The final challenge that Hidayat and Lestari highlight is “*student’s learning style*”. They state that, according to the teachers interviewed, the learners are “*fond of being spoon-fed*” and that most teachers prefer to revisit topics that the students have not grasped as well as they would have hoped.

Developing an action point

School X’s SDP is a twenty-page document that aims to improve specific aspects of the school over a three-year period. The SDP contains four different targets that the school has identified. School X has called their targets priorities. Priority one is “*To develop pupils’ higher order thinking skills*”; priority two is “*To ensure pupils with ALN make effective progress*”; priority three is “*To develop pupils’ literacy skills / phonics in the foundation classes*”; priority four is “*To develop strategies and tools to improve attendance*”. Each of the priorities are detailed over three pages. The first page of each priority is split into two sections, the first is “*Why is this a priority?*” and the second is “*Success criteria – What will success look like?*”. The first of the sections discusses School X’s purpose for identifying the priority as a target and begins to give some ideas about what needs to be done in order to achieve the target. The second section details exactly what needs to be done in order to be successful in achieving success in terms of the target. Pages three and four of each section of School X’s SDP are split into five columns: Milestones – Actions; Lead Person(s); Start; Finish; Cost. The ‘milestones – actions’ section clearly breaks down, step-by-step, exactly what School X plans on doing in order to achieve the target. The ‘lead person(s)’ section

states what member(s) of staff will be responsible for each milestone. The 'start' section states the date at which each action will take place. The 'finish' section, as with the 'start' section states the date at which each action is expected to conclude. Each part of the SDP also includes a 'cost' section, the cost section gives an estimate as to how much the school will need to spend in order to achieve each milestone and then a final estimated cost for the entire priority. The aspect of the SDP that will be discussed is the first priority, development of pupils' higher order thinking skills by the end of year three of the plan. The first thing to be discussed about this section of the SDP is the "*why is this a priority?*" section. In this section School X states that they need to strengthen pupils' higher order thinking skills in order to support their development of the four purposes. They also state that they must evolve the way in which they teach so that teachers explicitly teach higher order thinking skills and provide pupils with the opportunity to practise the skills and use them independently. These points show that the school is taking the improvement of pupils' higher order thinking skills extremely seriously. School X proceeds to discuss that during monitoring from the local authority it was found that higher order thinking skills strategies were being used in the learning environment and that pupils were becoming increasingly confident in using them. This point implies that this is not a new priority despite the fact that the SDP does not state that this has been a priority prior to this SDP. In the second section School X discusses how they will assess the success of the strategies they are implementing in order to promote improvement in pupils' higher order thinking skills. The school states that by explicitly using the language associated with higher order thinking skills in the classroom, the pupils will begin to use the language and, in turn, the skills involved in higher order thinking. The third, and arguably most important, section of the SDP is the 'milestones – actions' section. Sections three, four, five, six and seven will be discussed together due to them being so closely related. This section outlines the strategies that the school proposes to use in order to achieve their goal of developing pupils' higher order thinking skills. The first 'action', simply titled "*vision*", states that INSET days and whole staff meetings will be used in order to develop staff members' understanding of how pupils learn and how pedagogy needs to evolve in order to develop the four purposes within the school. The leads for this action are detailed as being the headteacher, the senior leadership team and all staff with the action starting in September 2023 and is said to be an "*ongoing*" task with a cost of £0. The next action detailed in the SDP is "*curriculum development*". In this section School X states that Blooms Taxonomy is to be used regularly by teachers in their planning in order to strengthen pupils' higher order thinking skills. The school also states that teachers must use "*key vocabulary*" during lessons in order to promote the use of higher order thinking skills in pupils. The leaders for this section are all teaching staff, the start date was November 2023 and is "*ongoing*" with a cost of £0. The final action is "*monitoring*". The SDP states that

lesson observations and learning walks will be conducted by the senior leadership team in order to evaluate progress towards achieving the SDP target with an estimated cost of £320 for supply teachers to cover the members of SLT who are still also teaching staff. While these actions will aid in the development of pupils' higher order thinking skills, there is little detail in exactly what is expected from staff when they are simply being told to use "*key vocabulary*". In addition to this it may prove useful to increase the budget for this priority and have external training providers for the INSET days in order to ensure that staff get the best possible training in order to achieve the target more quickly and therefore allowing for other priorities to get more attention.

Reflection and evaluation

While observing the practices taking place in School X to develop pupils' higher order thinking skills, it was seen that teaching staff in the school were following the action points from the SDP in order to follow the school's vision of how to achieve the target. However, it was also noticed that, while pupils were being encouraged to use the "*key vocabulary*" that is associated with higher order thinking skills in accordance with Blooms Revised Taxonomy, pupils needed significant encouragement to use the language and were often directed towards a wall with the vocabulary on it in order to remember what the words were. Additionally, even when pupils used the language expected of them, they often appeared uncertain and even answered incorrectly when asked which of the skills they had used. Teaching staff did seem to plan some of their lessons to include higher order thinking skills, there did not seem to be enough emphasis on the transition from lower order to higher order, however. While School X has tried to focus so heavily on the improvement of higher order thinking skills they have seemingly begun to neglect the lower order thinking skills which are equally important to have a firm grasp on. There was also seemingly little focus on higher order thinking skills during INSET days and staff meetings despite the emphasis that they would be utilised for this purpose in the SDP. Additionally, there were very few learning walks and no lesson observations observed in the time spent at School X. In order to achieve the target of developing pupils' higher order thinking skills, the first recommendation would be to attempt to follow the SDP more closely. While schools are, fast-paced, ever-changing environments, the SDP must be followed if School X wishes to see the changes that they have stated in their SDP. Another recommendation is that the teachers in School X focus more on assessing the skills that pupils have utilised during the learning experiences and their own planned activities rather than asking the pupils to use the 'correct language' in order to somehow prove that they have used the skill as just because a pupil uses the "*key vocabulary*" with support from a teacher that they have understood the skill they have used.

Conclusion

Having reviewed a range of literature and observed the practices that take place in School X, I believe that in order for schools to successfully achieve their targets, the primary focus needs to be, not simply a well-written but one that is properly followed by the schools involved. While SDPs are working documents that are subject to change they should not be pushed to one side. In my own practice I aim to continue to plan my lessons with higher order thinking skills in mind and believe that in order for schools to achieve this target all teaching staff need to attempt to do the same and in order to do this must have access to adequate training and resources.

Reference list

Anderson, L. and Krathwohl, D. (2001). *A taxonomy for learning, teaching, and assessing, Abridged Edition*. [online] Available at:
<https://executivevc.unl.edu/documents/4-Revised-Blooms-Taxonomy.pdf>.

Armstrong, P. (2010). *Bloom's Taxonomy*. [online] Vanderbilt University. Available at:
<https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/blooms-taxonomy/#:~:text=Familiarly%20known%20as%20Bloom>.

Brookhart, S.M. (2010). *How to Assess Higher-Order Thinking Skills in Your Classroom*. [online] Google Books. ASCD. Available at:
https://books.google.co.uk/books?hl=en&lr=&id=qo3gEAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PP1&dq=higher+order+thinking+skills&ots=KYEMAtWiuN&sig=M2CYBG1oiUFU8nvWIlxHfzbaTZc&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=higher%20order%20thinking%20skills&f=false
[Accessed 5 May 2024].

Department of Education (2015). *School Development Planning | Department of Education*. [online] Education. Available at: <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/articles/school-development-planning>.

Education Scotland (2023). *Effective School Improvement Planning*. [online] Available at: <https://education.gov.scot/media/pvqpkrhv/effective-school-improvement-planning-guidance-2023-2024.pdf>.

Estyn (2024). *A report on* [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] *Date of inspection: January 2024 by Estyn, His Majesty's*

Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales. [online] Available at: [https://www.estyn.gov.wales/system/files/2024-03/Inspection%20report%20\[REDACTED\]%20Primary%20School%202024.pdf](https://www.estyn.gov.wales/system/files/2024-03/Inspection%20report%20[REDACTED]%20Primary%20School%202024.pdf).

Hidayat, R.H. and Lestari, Y.B. (2022). *Challenges Teachers Face in Applying High Order Thinking Skills*. [online] Available at: <https://www.atlantispress.com/article/125977574.pdf>.

Kosasih1, A., Supriyadi, T., Firmansyah, M.I. and Rahminawati, N. (2022). Higher-Order Thinking Skills in Primary School: Teachers' Perceptions of Islamic Education. *Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Studies*, [online] 9(1), pp.56–76. doi:<https://doi.org/10.29333/ejecs/994>.

Welsh Government (2014). *School development plans Guidance*. [online] Available at: <https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-03/school-development-plans.pdf>.