GUIDANCE PAPER

ASCL Association of School and College Leaders

Marking and Feedback

Guidance at a glance

This guidance is relevant to senior leaders, governors and middle leaders in England and Wales. It is designed to provide support when reviewing and designing feedback, marking and assessment policies.

Feedback can take many forms and is effective when it challenges pupils' thinking. Marking is one type of feedback; written feedback can be effective when its use is purposeful and within clear parameters. All types of feedback should be viewed through the lens of "how does this promote pupil learning and pupil confidence, and what is the impact on pupil progress?"

In March 2016, the Marking Policy Review Group (MPRG) concluded that:

- all marking should be meaningful, manageable and motivating
- schools should review their policies and practices in accordance with these principles
- marking should be seen as one type of feedback and be part of an overarching assessment policy alongside practices that inform teachers, create positive pupil outcomes, and drive future planning

In April 2016, the **Education Endowment Foundation** reported that there is remarkably little high quality, relevant research evidence to suggest that detailed or extensive marking has any significant impact on pupils' learning.

This guidance looks at the following:

Section 1 Overview

Section 2 Implement a feedback, marking and assessment policy

Section 3 Giving written feedback with impact on pupils and teachers

Section 4 Making written feedback more efficient

Section 5 Further information

1   Overview

The MPRG commissioned by the DfE was established to consider effective practice on marking in schools and which raises standards for pupils without creating unnecessary workload.

The group looked at the workload implications of certain marking practices, developed a set of principles, and made recommendations about marking policies and practice.

In their published report, *Reducing Teacher Workload: Marking Policy Review Group Report*, the Review Group concluded that all marking should be meaningful, manageable and motivating, and recommended that schools should review their policies and practices in accordance with these principles.

Marking should be seen as one type of feedback and be part of an overarching assessment policy alongside other practices that inform teachers, create positive pupil outcomes, and drive future planning. The challenge is how to make marking both powerful and manageable.

The *Teachers' Standards* state that teachers should "give pupils regular feedback, both orally and through accurate marking, and encourage pupils to respond to feedback".

2 Implement a feedback, marking and assessment policy

Create collective ownership of a feedback policy

Involve teachers in a review of marking and feedback to develop a shared understanding of:

a)   the purpose of marking and feedback – what constitutes effective (and ineffective) marking and feedback?

b)   how teachers plan marking and feedback so it is useful for pupils and teachers

c)   how the school communicates its marking approach to parents

d)   how marking supports teacher planning

e)   how teachers know whether marking is having a positive impact on pupil progress and pupil confidence

f)   how teachers develop pupils' self and peer assessment skills

g)   how marking is monitored across the school

h)   how marking is manageable without placing unreasonable demands on teachers

i)   how and when 'grading' of pupils' work is to be used: research shows that where grades are present, pupils are unlikely to read or act on written feedback

j)   how to get the right balance in the amount of written feedback so it does not create pupil dependence

Departmental and faculty feedback policies

Departments may differ in their approach to some of the above, however, it is advisable to have some underlying principles which underpin a common approach across faculties; it is worth bearing in mind Dylan Wiliam's view that "feedback should be more work for the recipient than the donor".

The key questions which all departments should be addressing in formalising their feedback policy are:

- how will the feedback promote learning?
- when is marking the appropriate type of feedback?

- how will the learner know how to use the feedback?

- how can we ensure pupils act on the feedback?

- how do we know this is securing improvement?

- how can we ensure written feedback is given sparingly so that it is meaningful?

- how will we ensure a school-wide consistent approach to SPAG, literacy, and numeracy from both staff and pupils?

- what do 'high expectations' look like in a key piece of work? Establish minimum expectations for pupils in presenting work for marking and feedback

Make effective use of teachers' time

Ensure colleagues understand it is the quality not quantity of written feedback that matters. Time is teachers' most precious commodity. Producing ineffective written feedback which is not having a discernible impact on learning is time spent unwisely. Ensure you prioritise planning so teachers think about:

- where to inject challenge

- what type of assessment will be best placed to reveal the gaps in learning (for example high quality questioning)

- how to make pupils think deeply in response to high quality questioning

This is likely to have more of an impact on pupil learning.

Communicate marking and feedback policies to stakeholders

The purpose of feedback is to improve pupil learning; marking is not for parents. Once your feedback policy is agreed by departments and staff, ensure you have a clear communication plan for parents and governors via, for example, induction evenings, newsletters, parents' evenings and website. All stakeholders need to understand how feedback is given to pupils and what pupils are expected to do with the feedback.

Communicate marking and feedback policies to inspectors

Ofsted have published **myth busting documents** about marking. Regardless of any area for improvement identified at the previous inspection, inspectors should not report on marking practice, or make judgements on it, other than whether it follows the school's assessment policy. Inspectors will also not seek to attribute the degree of progress that pupils have made to marking that they might consider to be either effective or ineffective.

Monitor and evaluate

Monitoring checks things are going as planned, and involves monitoring the consistent use of the school's feedback and marking policies so leaders are confident this is a school-wide practice. Evaluation assesses the impact of the policy on outcomes. Impact is always evidence-based, however, evidence may also be gathered by looking at drafting stages of work, pupils' books and by talking to teachers and pupils.

3 Giving written feedback with impact on pupils and teachers

In *The Power of Feedback*[1], John Hattie summarises effective feedback: "To be effective, feedback needs to be clear, purposeful, meaningful, and compatible with students' prior knowledge, and to provide logical connections."

What can be considered to be ineffective?

Marking does not necessarily result in feedback and marking is not the same as giving feedback; just because comments have been written on pupils' work does not mean pupils will have received feedback.

Marking is effective when it has a clear purpose to:

- correct misconceptions
- provide further clarification
- increase effort
- increase aspiration
- build pupil confidence

Instructional feedback is the most effective kind of feedback to lead to improvements or an enhancement in pupil performance. This could be by presenting pupils with a probing question or a further challenge. If the desired impact of the feedback is to increase effort, feedback is effective when it focuses on the task, not the student, ie the failure of the task is clearly attributed to a lack of effort, not the ability of the pupil.

Marking and feedback should be responsive to pupils' needs and not disjointed from the learning process. It is effective when it is focused on developing pupils' understanding and teachers should have these questions in mind: "Will this help pupils learn? How will I know?" This could be in a subsequent piece of work or in an immediate response from the pupil, depending on the context. When responding immediately to feedback, pupils' responses are best if the feedback is of low quantity but high quality.

Research shows that certain kinds of praise as feedback can be motivating, however, it may also have the effect of making pupils less likely to act on written feedback. Praise is most effective when it is specific and rewards effort, and least effective when it rewards ability and is general. When marking, do not praise pupils for meeting the minimum standard; this could be perceived as having low expectations. Use praise sparingly, as part of feedback is knowing what impact you want it to have.

Ineffective written feedback may include:

- marking that doesn't involve pupils in responding to feedback
- marking that doesn't inform planning
- marking that uses inaccessible language for pupils
- extensive written comments which could be summarised more concisely

Teachers are encouraged to decide in advance the purpose and expected impact of their feedback to make it more effective.

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1   John Hattie and Helen Timperley, 'The Power of Feedback', *Review of Education Research*, March 2007, Vol. 77, no. 1, pp 81-112

Marking is planning

When marking, teachers inevitably draw useful conclusions about what pupils can do now and what they may be able to do in the future. Marking should inform future planning and enable teachers to decide what needs to be taught again or better.

4 Making written feedback more efficient

Teachers' marking workload should be manageable for teachers and pupils.

Clarify expectations for students

Marking can breed overreliance on the teacher and schools may want to consider establishing expectations for pupils about presenting their work to teachers for feedback. For example, this might include the minimum expectation that all work is proofread before it is handed in (with a checklist intended to provide guidance on what they should address during proofreading), and pupils identifying where they have made mistakes and annotating accordingly.

Pupils need to be familiar with each subject's approach to marking and understand that this may vary. For example:

- some marking may have a specific focus on a particular skill and a piece of work does not have to be marked for everything
- marking is one form of assessment and it may take the form of spoken, written, peer-marking or self-assessment with the common purpose of supporting pupils' learning and progress
- pupils are trained on decoding specific marking and feedback
- with certain work, only the application of the learning will receive the feedback, not necessarily anything else that is in books leading up to this. This creates high expectations about pupils applying their learning into a piece of work for teachers' consideration and prioritises teachers' time effectively.
- marking is a two-way process and there is an expectation that pupils will need to think and act in response to the feedback given

Make more efficient use of teachers' and pupils' time

Suggestions aimed at making marking more efficient for teachers, and enabling pupils to receive and act on appropriate and challenging feedback are:

- Use a list of codes which match likely feedback tasks in advance.
- Predict likely misconceptions or errors and design a list of numbered actions likely to be required for pupils to challenge their thinking further. Pupils are then simply assigned a number and the numbered feedback tasks are displayed on the board.
- Prioritise redrafting and only accept and mark work after feedback has been given and acted on; only mark work once it has reached a specific quality.
- Mark a pupil's work in relation to the quality of a previous piece of work by issuing plus, minus or equals.
- Make more use of in-class feedback, for example use a visualiser whilst pupils are undertaking a task to support the identification of common mistakes and give the whole class timely and immediate feedback.

Effective feedback leading to enhanced pupil performance

"The only important thing about feedback is what students do with it." Dylan Wiliam[2]

In order to improve learning, pupils must actively use the feedback. Dylan Wiliam advocates making feedback into detective work so that pupils are encouraged to look at the feedback more closely and think about their own work more analytically. The following are some suggestions as to how this can be achieved:

a) Tell the pupils the number of incorrect answers to questions and ask them to find them and correct them before marking ('find and fix').

b) Write feedback comments on separate strips of paper and pupils have to match the comments with the piece of work.

c) Ask pupils to rank pieces of work compared to success criteria.

d) Ask pupils to develop success criteria for an 'outstanding' piece of work then give them anonymised examples to assess against the criteria.

e) Ask pupils or groups of pupils to devise a plan to move a piece of work to the next stage or a higher grade.

Peer and self-assessment

A strong culture of peer and self-assessment needs to be established throughout the school and college, starting from when pupils join. Strategies to develop pupils' capacity for self-assessment are essential and the suggestions are provided to help develop effective practice:

a) Introduce pupils to self-assessment using samples of anonymous work and ask pupils to describe what feedback they might give to the author of the work. Pupils can then move more confidently into peer assessment.

b) To develop pupils' reflective skills, start with a simple approach of 'plus, minus, interesting' when judging a piece of work.

c) Pupils may be asked to reflect on something they found challenging or easy or how they might improve if they did the task again. (It may be worthwhile telling pupils in advance that they won't have to make the improvements they have identified on this piece, to avoid the incentive to say the work is fine as it is!)

d) Teachers may select a good answer to share with the class and pupils use this to improve their own work.

e) Create pupil-friendly mark schemes so that pupils can mark their own work effectively.

f) Issue highlighters to pupils so they highlight areas of work where they have demonstrated evidence of skills according to the mark scheme, or success criteria for the piece of work.

g) Develop pupils' meta-cognitive skills so they understand how they learn best and can apply this to their own self-assessment.

Comparative judgement

The organisation **No More Marking** advocates comparative judgement:

- Instead of marking an essay against a rubric, mark the essay against other essays.

- Instead of making an absolute judgement about one piece of work in isolation, comparative judgement involves making a series of comparisons about pairs of pieces of writing.

In this way we can understand pupils' progress relative to others. The advantages are it is quick, accurate, can be used immediately to give helpful and specific feedback, and has longer-term potential to change and improve the way you teach writing.

5 Further information

DfE, *Reducing Teacher Workload: Marking Policy* Review Group Report
https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/reducing-teacher- workload-marking-policy-review-group-report

DfE, *Teachers' Standards*
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/ file/301107/Teachers__Standards.pdf

ASCL guidance *Lesson Planning and Teacher Resources*
http://www.ascl.org.uk/help-and-guidance/guidance-papers/ascl-guidance-lesson- planning

Education Endowment Foundation, *A Marked Improvement?*
https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/evidence-summaries/on-marking/#closeSignup

No More Marking
https://www.nomoremarking.com/

How ASCL can help

If you are considering a professional learning programme for your school or group of schools to implement a new approach to lesson planning, ASCL can help by:

- developing a bespoke one-day training day to initiate your professional learning programme

- designing a full professional learning programme over two or three terms for your school or group

- designing a full programme to help you manage and reduce teacher workload in your school or group, including all three elements of marking, planning and data management

Visit our website **www.ascl.org.uk/consultancy** or contact ASCL Professional Development on

0116 299 1122 for more information.

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