



# Reducing teacher workload

**The Wows research project**

**March 2018**

**Graham Herbert, Tim Oates, Tim Sherriff and Mick Walker**

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# Abstract

This project was undertaken by one of five Consortia of schools in Wigan in response to the Independent Teacher Workload Review Group report, Eliminating unnecessary workload around marking (DfE, 2016). The project was self-directed and did not draw on any external funding. The project ran for just over twelve months and carefully and accurately applied the principles of assessment without levels. Outcomes of the project show:

1. Gains in reduced workload were seen in every school, some of which were very substantial.
2. The new processes significantly reduced the burden on teachers, improved teacher morale, and improved teaching and learning.
3. There was a dramatic reduction in time spent marking and recording, and an improvement in learning processes and pupil outcomes.
4. The application of the principles contained in the workload report helped with removing previously bureaucratic marking processes that were burdensome and unhelpful.
5. Changes to new marking practices resulted in no reports of negative impacts on pupils' learning; with some schools reporting clear gains in pupils' progress and enhanced engagement with the learning process.
6. The WOWS Consortium showed improvements in National Curriculum assessments in both key stage 1 and 2 across reading, writing and mathematics compared with 2016 (source: Wigan LA). However, at this point further research will be required to investigate any correlation between new marking practices and statutory assessment outcomes.
7. The key resources for improved practice are good management and the professionalism of teachers.
8. Changes to practice can be made quickly to the benefit of teachers and pupils.
9. All schools in the project are committed to keeping their practices under review.

## Foreword

WOWS is a collaborative of 17 schools in Wigan that have been working in partnership for many years. The schools within the partnership differ in their intakes, size, denomination and inspection outcomes. A key feature of the partnership is the trust that exists between schools resulting in discussions that are open and honest: and is a foundation for the partnership work across the other consortia and educational collaboratives in Wigan.

This project offered a unique opportunity to tackle a significant national issue, that of teacher workload and the outcomes have shown that there are simple means of making the workload manageable. It demonstrates that the key resources are good management and the engagement of staff. The project has also shown that change can be made quickly to the benefit of teachers and pupils.

From initial discussions prior to the launch there was a palpable enthusiasm and determination to make things better for staff and pupils. Maybe, for the first time, leaders took the opportunity to reflect on the issue of what is effective marking and what will have the greatest impact on teaching, learning and reduced workload, regardless of external pressures and the requirements of key stakeholders.

Initially, the focus was on reducing workload, but as the project progressed it was apparent that the learning was not solely limited to marking and feedback. As a result, reflections naturally led to discussions and debates about pedagogy and finding the most effective ways to teach.

Discussions and subsequent actions re-confirmed the participants' professionalism. Staff valued being consulted and were given 'permission' to talk freely about how the changes to their practice affected both their professional and personal lives. Pupils were also involved in a meaningful way during discussions, commenting on how it felt to be a recipient of the various marking systems in place.

Finally, I would like to thank all the participants for their commitment and engagement in the project. It is our intention that this work will continue. Many group members noted that being courageous throughout the process was liberating. Being open minded, honest and prepared to question pre-conceived ideas and theories about what constitutes good marking enabled many schools to make significant changes to teacher workload.

**Tim Sherriff**

**Programme lead: Headteacher, Westfield Community School**

# 1. Research topic

## 1.1. Context

In October 2014, the DfE launched the workload challenge. This was a month-long survey asking teachers for their views on how to reduce unnecessary workload.

Analysis of the survey identified marking as one of the three most burdensome tasks impacting on teacher workload. As a result, the DfE set up the Marking Policy Review Group to look at marking practices in schools that are raising standards successfully while reducing marking workload. The Group's report was published in March 2016.

In early October 2016, the With Others We Succeed Consortium (WOWS) held a session to discuss and evaluate the outcomes of the Marking Policy Review Group Report. It was clear from the outset that the findings of the report reflected the collective experiences of the Consortium and they welcomed the recommendations. Following discussions about the potential impact of new approaches to marking and feedback noted in the Marking Policy Review Group Report, the Consortium put together a reflective research project to evaluate their current approaches to marking and consider a range of alternative approaches across member schools. The intended aim was to develop and evaluate alternative ways of working that could be disseminated across all schools in the Consortium and beyond. The project was also viewed as an opportunity to implement a programme of reflective research that is seen as an essential element of an evidence based profession. This type of response reflects the aims and purpose of the Consortium as a community of practice.

The project was supported by all Consortium schools listed in appendix 1 and did not incur any financial costs beyond what could be described as normal school based internal evaluation and professional development. The project was supported by Graham Herbert, Tim Oates and Mick Walker who gave their time and expertise for free (see appendix 4).

This Report shows the various responses to the challenge with many similarities but some variations. These reflect the different approaches adopted by schools that respond to the differing circumstances in which they work. This not only demonstrates how schools can adapt their practices to suit their particular needs, but also provides insights into different approaches offering schools the chance to consider other ways of developing their practice. Each of the participating schools has produced a case study, which shows their individual approach and records the outcomes of their work: these can be found in appendix 5. They are however united by mutual support and challenge and all are committed to keeping their various practices under constant review as part of a programme of continuous improvement.

In response to the workload survey the DfE committed to sharing examples of successful practices schools have used to deal with teaching tasks that can cause unnecessary

workload. This report is intended to make a practical contribution to the professional development of teachers and the pedagogical practice in our schools.

## The WOWS Consortium

The WOWS Consortium is one of 5 consortia under the auspice of Wigan Local Authority. Set up in 2003, there are 17 primary phase schools in WOWS covering a range of provision.

Wigan is a successful Local Authority (LA) with currently 93% of primary schools judged by Ofsted to be good or better. Primary schools are organised in 5 consortia, each led by nominated Headteachers. This system-led approach has been a well-regarded school improvement model and continues to grow in strength, including recognition in a soon to be published ISOS research report on behalf of the Local Government Association (LGA).

The WOWS group has grown considerably over the years and continues to focus on using collaboration and learning groups to enhance everyone's achievement and progress by helping each school to be as successful as possible via challenge and support. WOWS believes:

*'None of us is as smart as all of us' and 'With Others We Succeed'.*

The 17 schools serve very different socio-economic catchment areas and include community primary and special schools, as well as voluntary aided and voluntary controlled faith primary schools. The schools work closely together to provide children with a wide range of high quality academic, arts, music and sporting opportunities. From the very beginning the school leaders have been, and continue to be, committed to supporting each other and all staff across the schools to improve each child's life chances.

## **1.2. Project approach**

The impetus for the project came from a presentation and review of the Teacher Workload working group reports at a WOWS Consortium meeting. The Marking Group Report, *Eliminating Unnecessary Workload Around Marking*, raised particular interest as it challenged many of the assumptions held about marking; the recommendations were viewed as potentially liberating in that they provided a level of confidence to challenge current practices, improve the teaching and learning process and reduce an area with strong links to teacher workload.

Some of the schools had already begun their own reflections on their marking practice which helped to stimulate interest. It was therefore decided that a project on marking and teacher workload would be a focus for the Consortium.



Three educationalists known to the Consortium were asked to join the project to provide a level of external support, guidance and importantly independent challenge.

Through discussion, it was agreed that the aim of the project should be:

- to reduce teacher workload around marking and improve the teaching and learning experience for teachers and pupils.

The objectives of the project were stated as to:

- determine high quality approaches to marking that directly respond to issues identified in the Workload Challenge;
- develop a research-based approach to practice in WOWS schools;
- share outcomes with a wider professional audience.

The structure of the project was agreed as:

- a review of current practice across the WOWS Consortium of schools;
- an evaluation of current practice against the three principles of effective marking identified in the final report of the Working Group:
  - meaningful;
  - manageable; and
  - motivating;
- the establishment of features of good marking practice to be trialled in WOWS schools;
- an evaluation of the modified approaches to marking against their impact and effectiveness in achieving the three principles.

The project was designed to cover the following key working stages:

- presentation and discussion of recent and current practice in WOWS schools;
- proposals for changes to practice and evaluation criteria;
- implementation of modified practices;
- reporting back on changes to evaluate the impact on teaching, learning and workload;
- a report to share findings and future developments.

The agreed process timeline can be found at appendix 3.

The WOWS Consortium agreed that all schools would be required to:

- work with external experts and school partners to investigate the issues associated with reducing workload and develop and test practical and innovative solutions to address these;
- explore the impact of existing school culture on workload;
- investigate ways in which wider school organisational issues may affect workload

in marking;

- ensure that your research project is rigorous and robust;
- evaluate the impact of your project in the classroom and its effect on reducing teacher workload without compromising pupil outcomes;
- submit a detailed final research report including a project summary;
- share the findings of your research and make these available to other schools in the region and nationally.

The expected benefits of the project were to:

- make a measurable positive difference to teacher workload;
- develop long term solutions to tackling workload from which other schools can learn;
- further develop their research skills by engaging with professional researchers;
- develop innovative approaches to tackling workload in general, particularly in meeting the cultural challenges outlined in the Eliminating unnecessary workload around Marking report;
- monitor and evaluate the impact of the project, including any impact on recruitment and retention of teachers;
- create local, regional and national networking opportunities to share successful approaches and raise the profile, principles and recommendations of the Eliminating unnecessary workload around Marking report.

### **1.3. Project structure**

Following the agreement to run the project, a meeting was held between all schools to share current marking practices. Working in groups, the schools identified key aspects of current approaches and challenged their assumptions and perceptions. Initial ideas of how practice could be developed against the three principles of meaningful, manageable and motivating were shared. These ideas were discussed and challenged. Following this meeting, schools reported back to their colleagues with the remit to:

- discuss how current/recent marking practices might be improved with regards to being:
  - meaningful;
  - manageable; and
  - motivating.
- evaluate marking practice and agree or amend the criteria:
- consider how your school would respond to the challenges of the project;
- develop and agree a new or revised approach to marking;
- make a statement of the revised approach, intended achievements and evaluation criteria.

Following this exercise, a meeting was held in which each school reported back on their evaluations of current practices and proposals for change. Each proposal was discussed and challenged against the agreed criteria, practicalities, intended outcomes and methods of measuring impact.

A period of implementation followed and presentations on the outcomes of changes to practice were given against an agreed structure at an event at the end of the summer term, 2017.

The structure of the reports was agreed as:

- a brief overview of previous practice;
- the new approach – how practice has changed;
- principles underpinning the new model(s);
- gains and evidence;
- challenges, issues and solutions; and
- next Steps and conclusions.

An over-view of the presentations is provided in Section 3 of this report. Case studies covering all schools that completed the project can be found in appendix 5 providing details of the various approaches adopted by the schools and their impact.

Over the course of the project, two schools withdrew due to compelling reasons.

## 2. Evaluation methodology

### 2.1. A brief overview of previous practice

Previous practice was epitomised by a heavy reliance on teacher marking of pupils' work, after the work had been completed. Often this was done at home by the teachers and involved a number of common strategies:

- The use of different coloured pens to show the teachers' comments, a different coloured pen to show a teaching assistant's (TA) comments and a further colour of pen to show a teacher's response to the pupils' subsequent actions. This procedure is often referred to as "deep marking."
- Many schools expected pupils to complete RRR to the marked work. This involved: Reading the teachers' comments; Reflecting on those comments; and Responding to those comments – hence RRR.
- Many teachers were not sure for whom the marking was completed. The audience for the marking was often not the children themselves, but more often the Senior Leadership Team (SLT), to provide evidence that the teacher had in fact marked the work. The audience could also be for external agencies, such as Ofsted or the Local Authority (LA). Again, this was to act as evidence that the teacher had completed the work.
- Many schools used the common "three stars and a wish" methodology, where three examples of the pupils' work were highlighted to show that the pupils had fulfilled what was expected in relation to the learning objectives (LO) for that particular piece of work, plus a target or wish that the teacher expected to see fulfilled in the response of the pupil to the teacher's marking.
- The methodology was used in many cases where the children were unable to read the teacher's comment, either because the child was too young to read the comment or lacked the ability to read the comment. This reinforced the notion that the intended audience for the marking was not the child, but rather the SLT or an outside agency.
- If verbal feedback (VF) had been given to a child, this too was recorded on the pupil's work and the nature of the VF was summarised in writing.
- To help support teachers in their marking, a common shorthand or code, had been developed to aid both teachers and pupils in their understanding, such as "P" for punctuation error, "G" for a grammatical error, or "SP" for a spelling error. In many cases these lists of shorthand or code ran for an entire page of A4, a copy of which was placed on each pupil's desk so that he or she could refer to the list in order to enable consistent responses by each child.
- All of this was time-consuming, with teachers often writing more than the pupils themselves. The schools involved in the project used questionnaires for staff to try to determine how much time was spent in marking at home. The results proved quite alarming, with most teachers spending between 7 and 15 hours per week

marking pupils' work at home.

Although some of the methodologies above were not deemed poor practice, they were clearly time-consuming and the impact on pupils' learning was not always apparent. Following the initial input, the schools in the WOWS consortium decided to address their marking policies and measure the impact on student outcomes, including attainment and progression, teacher workload and an evaluation of what actually impacts on teaching and learning.

## **2.2. The new approach – how practice has changed**

The schools in the WOWS Consortium decided to encourage staff to change their marking policies, with an emphasis on real time marking, or “over the shoulder marking”, at the expense of marking when the work had been completed. This encouraged meaningful, manageable and motivational interventions by the teacher. In each of the schools, there was a heavy reliance on self and peer assessment, in which the pupils had to be inducted, as well as the teaching assistants (TAs). Each school initially looked at one element of teaching and learning, for example maths in years 3, 4 and 5 as a pilot and evaluating the impact, before rolling out the methodology across the entire school.

Although there were some individual differences, there were also common approaches which can be summarised as follows:

- There was an increased use of verbal feedback (VF) across the Consortium. SLTs did not expect that VF be recorded, as the impact of the feedback was apparent in the pupils' work. However, some schools preferred that the initials VF be written into workbooks. In many cases this has led to a reorganisation of the teaching delivery and in more than two instances into a reorganisation of the curriculum itself. The timing of lessons has been altered to allow time for deep questioning, discussion and more instant verbal feedback.
- There has been an increase in and early detection of pupils' misconceptions, which can be rectified immediately, thereby improving pupil progression and attainment.
- All schools reported a positive impact upon the quality of teaching and learning, as well as on class organisation. This too has had a positive impact upon the quality of planning, with more time available for planning, discussion with pupils and verbal feedback to pupils. The early interventions to tackle misconceptions has meant that teachers can now differentiate by input rather than by task, thereby improving learning.
- Marking of pupils' work must have an impact, otherwise teachers were discouraged from doing it. Because of this, it became apparent that some former practices were not fit for purpose, as one school aptly put it, “marking for marking's sake,” and were subsequently abandoned. This has encouraged a culture where the impact of interventions is monitored and evaluated for its effectiveness on

improving learning.

- There has been an emphasis on manageability of feedback, its meaningfulness and the extent to which it motivates pupils. As a result, many of the marking policies have been renamed feedback policies. One school noted that its marking policy ran to eight pages; its feedback policy consists of only two pages. Importantly, in most schools, the teachers themselves have written the new policies, rather than the SLT.
- All schools noted that there was now a clearer view amongst teachers regarding the purpose of feedback, as well as the intended audience; this audience is now clearly the pupils themselves, rather than SLT or interested third parties, such as Ofsted or the LA. In turn, this has impacted upon the teachers themselves, since their judgements are now trusted, giving them a feeling of professional worth. All schools noted a dramatic decline in time spent marking. In many schools, no one took home any work to mark in the evenings or at weekends. One member of staff delighted in saying, “I have got my Sunday back!” Another member of staff in another school stated, “Thank you for giving me my life back.”
- All schools noted that the move to a greater reliance on self and peer assessment had a positive impact upon the pupils themselves. In questionnaires they noted an increased confidence among pupils, as well as improved attainment and progression. One school noted that in 2016, 67% of the Year six cohort were working at the expected level in writing. In 2017 this had risen to 87% with 23% working at greater depth. These figures had been verified by LA moderators. In another school, Ofsted Inspectors had noted improved progression, following the introduction of the new feedback policy. Children in this school noted that feedback helps them to learn and motivates them. The Ofsted Inspector commented: “The Quality of teachers’ questioning is very good...supplementary questions are used very well to help pupils identify and correct misconceptions or to extend their ideas. The school’s marking policy is applied consistently. Teachers’ feedback is highly effective and leads pupils to revise and improve their work.”

### **2.3. Principles underpinning the new model(s)**

All the schools involved in the project had been introduced to the DfE publication, *Eliminating unnecessary workload around marking* at the outset of the project. The general principles outlined in this document were embedded in practice in all of the schools, but most notably the following:

- All marking should be meaningful, manageable and motivational (MMM) and should serve a single purpose – to advance pupil progress and outcomes. This principle was the one that all schools based their new feedback policies upon. In other words, if the marking does not advance pupil progress, don’t do it.
- The quantity of feedback should not be confused with the quality of feedback. All schools reduced the quantity of their marking and changed to a policy of feedback

rather than of marking. It became apparent in all the schools that early interventions when misconceptions had been observed resulted in better outcomes for the pupils. Verbal feedback (VF) at the time of writing became much more important in all the institutions than the previous over-reliance on complex and confusing and in many cases inconsistently applied, mark schemes.

- As a result of adopting the above principle, more time was freed for teachers to give the planning of lessons the status it merited. This principle was taken a step further in some schools, by allowing teachers to determine the time they need to complete the work and allowed for much more flexible lessons which often went at a better pace. One school noted: "It meant planning lessons had to be considered and time was to be given within lessons to feedback and mark work with children. The children would take more ownership, marking their own work and assessing whether they had met their learning objective and how much of the success criteria they had met, especially in writing tasks."
- Another principle which all of the schools adopted was that staff had to be clear about the purpose of the intervention, be it verbal feedback or a written intervention. Previously, much of the marking had been to provide evidence to SLT and to interested third parties that assessment and marking had taken place. Now, the focus was entirely upon feedback which improved pupils' learning and outcomes.

## 3. Findings

There were some important findings experienced by all schools in the Consortium, which can be summarised as follows.

### 3.1. Project over-view

1. Before this project, most schools were using marking practices that had evolved over time and were not underpinned by evaluations of their impact on teaching and learning.
2. There was a belief that the marking methods in current use were the result of external expectations.
3. The Marking Policy Review Group Report was seen as liberating, providing the opportunity to do things differently. This was often articulated as giving 'permission' to try other approaches.
4. Marking quantity is often mistaken as a proxy for marking quality.
5. Working collectively provides support through the sharing of ideas and professional challenge through the reporting and evaluation of practice.
6. The key resources for improved practice are good management and the professionalism of teachers.

### 3.2. Impact on practice

1. Changes to practice can be made quickly to the benefit of teachers and pupils.
2. Evaluations of marking practice had profound impacts on other aspects of pedagogy such as the structure of lessons, the use of deep questioning and re-defining the purpose and use of assessment.
3. Gains in reduced workload were seen in every school, some of which were very substantial.
4. The new processes significantly reduced the burden on teachers, improved teacher morale, and improved teaching and learning.
5. Marking is but one method of feedback. It should be viewed as part of an overall assessment strategy.
6. Engaging all staff in the process and where possible pupils and parents has greater impact on practice.
7. Changes to new marking practices resulted in no reports of negative impacts on pupils' learning; with some schools reporting clear gains in pupils' progress and enhanced engagement with the learning process
8. The Wows Consortium showed improvements in National Curriculum assessments in both key stage 1 and 2 across reading, writing and mathematics compared with 2016 (source: Wigan LA). However, at this point further research will be required to investigate any correlation between new marking practices and statutory assessment outcomes.



### **3.3. Ways of working**

1. There must be a direct correlation between any form of feedback and the positive impact on teaching and learning. Otherwise, don't do it.
2. The concept of meaningful, manageable and motivational provides a useful guide to practice.
3. The intended audience for any marking or intervention must be the children and not any interested third party such as the Senior Leadership Team, Ofsted or the Local Authority.
4. Any feedback to pupils should be age-related, so that the intended audience can understand what is said or written.
5. Real time marking, or "over the shoulder" marking has a positive impact upon pupils' learning and progression by tackling misconceptions early and giving the pupil an opportunity to correct errors immediately.
6. Clarity of purpose about the nature of any intervention is of paramount importance.
7. Careful and deep questioning of pupils is as important as marking pupils' work.
8. Self and peer assessment can be useful tools that help to secure learning and progression.

## 4. Conclusion

### 4.1. Gains and Evidence

All schools involved in the project had been asked to provide some quantitative data to highlight the gains that had been achieved by the introduction of the new working practices. All schools opted to use questionnaires both with pupils and with staff to elicit such data.

Using such quantitative data alongside the data available in each school regarding internal assessments of age-related attainment, the project has had a positive impact upon pupils and their learning. One school described a 100% agreement amongst pupils that the new feedback policy was a better way of working. Although some pupils found self-assessment initially challenging, as time progressed and the pupils became more familiar with what was expected of them, satisfaction rates amongst pupils increased. It was also reported that this was particularly true amongst pupils with additional needs. Another school wrote: "Children could clearly see whether they had understood and achieved. They hadn't been reading wordy comments and were not always wanting to feedback to teacher's comments. The children's reactions to the new marking system were the greatest gain. They liked instant feedback. They looked immediately for the yellow highlighting. They were far more involved in their own assessment and wanted to fix any misunderstandings and errors quickly."

Benefits of the new approach have also been noted more widely as one school stated that: "During the school's Local Authority Moderation visit in June 2017, the Moderator commented that the marking system was very clear and concise. It also allowed pupils to edit and self-correct without over direction from the teacher."

In the past, using the old methodologies, learning time had been compromised by pupils responding to staff marking comments. Now, pupils feel more in control of their own learning. Individual children wrote the following responses in their questionnaires:

"I like doing marking with my group in maths because you get to hear the questions everyone else asks."

"I like the teacher marking in the lesson because it saves me writing out bits again the next day. I can just change it there and then."

"What is the point of a teacher writing in your book that you haven't used the most efficient method in maths? It wastes time doing it again. I'd rather sort it there and then."

"I like it now we are doing more marking with other children. When you get it wrong sometimes, it's nice you both have, and you can cheer each other on. If you get it right you can high five!"

The gains noted by staff were similarly positive. All schools noted that marking time had been cut, in some cases dramatically. One school noted: “100% of teachers say that their workload has improved. Teachers report that they manage to get between 75% and 90% of marking completed in the school day.” One school reported a saving of between 50% and 70% in teacher time spent marking. Another school reported that staff had saved on average 50% of their marking time. Another school reported: “Staff have reported that they have developed a more open dialogue with their pupils about improvements that would be appropriate to their learning. Staff also report that they have a greater understanding of each child’s ability and capacity for improvement.”

Some schools recorded significant gains in end of key stage assessments and the WOWS Consortium as a whole showed improvements in National Curriculum assessments in both key stage 1 and 2 across reading, writing and mathematics compared with 2016 (source: Wigan LA; appendix 2). However, at this point further research will be required to investigate any correlation between new marking practices and statutory assessment outcomes.

It is worth noting here, that these comments reflect an improvement in learning in the classroom and its associated positive behaviour among pupils. It also highlights positive relationships developing between pupil and teacher. This is in addition to the positive impact that has already been noted on teachers’ time and work/life balance. One comment from a staff member summarises the feelings across the Consortium, “We love it!”

## **4.2. Challenges, Issues and Solutions**

Such a project is not without its challenges. All schools faced concerns by staff when the idea was first mooted, not least because, as has been reported above, staff were unsure about how Ofsted, the LA and Governing Bodies would react to the reduction in written marking. One helpful factor was to reassure staff that all schools in the Consortium were embarking on the same project. The frequent meetings across the Consortium to discuss problems and issues in an open way helped to assuage concerns amongst staff that they were not alone in attempting to reduce their workload, but that 16 other schools were working alongside them, giving mutual support. One school wrote: “I feel this has been a very worthwhile and empowering project. Everyone is clear about expectations and now has the confidence to discard some very time-consuming practices which ultimately did not benefit pupils. Extensive marking was not value for money – time spent on it did not have a high enough impact on pupils. However, staff needed ‘permission’ to change this and the workforce agreement, along with the WOWS project was the catalyst to enable this to happen.”

Schools also highlighted the need for extensive Continuous Professional Development (CPD), to ensure that the new feedback policy was being implemented consistently. In many schools the onerous marking systems had become entrenched in daily practice

and a whole-school response was needed to change old habits. To develop a new system, particularly one that is age-related, has taken time and extensive CPD, not just for the teaching staff, but for TAs also. As the project progressed in each school, so staff were kept aware of developments in other schools and the findings within school, through regular monitoring and feedback to staff. This was particularly useful when evidence was shared that feedback had had a positive impact upon a pupil's learning. Often this entailed the development of exemplar materials that could be shared with all staff.

In all cases, the governing body was kept informed of developments, as were parents and carers. The impact of the strategy upon pupils' learning remained the focus of attention, rather than the reduction in teacher workload. By adopting this focus, the schools were able to gain support from their governing bodies, parents and carers.

This has been a very successful project, which has had a significant impact upon teacher workload as well as upon learning outcomes for pupils. All the schools intend to roll the working practices out across all elements of school life, so that the same methodology will be apparent to pupils not only in maths and writing, but in all elements of the curriculum.

This will need updated policies to be written regarding feedback and for those policies to be implemented consistently. To do this, NQTs and new staff, both teaching staff and TAs, will need inducting into the new systems and processes. An induction programme will need to be developed, therefore, by all the schools. As one school succinctly wrote: "The key focus in the coming months is to build staff confidence in their marking and offer support to those who were uneasy with the changes."

All schools will need to monitor the efficacy of the programmes – both induction programmes and programmes across the wider curriculum – to ensure success. One way of doing this will be to develop an extensive range of exemplar materials which highlight the success of these other programmes. A portfolio of exemplars highlighting successful interventions will help future induction of staff. In concluding, one school noted, "Our next step will be to use this as part of our marketing strategy to attract and retain staff."

## **Appendix 1. List of Schools completing the project**

1. Highfield St Matthew's Primary School
2. Marsh Green Primary School
3. Marus Bridge Primary School
4. Orrell Holgate Primary School
5. Orrell Newfold Community School
6. St Aidan's RC Primary School
7. St James' CE Primary School
8. St James' RC Primary School
9. St John's CE Primary School
10. St Jude's RC Primary School
11. St Mark's CE Primary School
12. St Paul's CE Primary School
13. Westfield Community School
14. Winstanley Primary School
15. Worsley Mesnes Primary School

## **Appendix 2. The project process timeline**

### **Stage 1: First half-term**

1. A presentation on the findings and recommendations of the Marking Working Group.
2. Presentation and discussion of recent and current practice relating to marking in Alliance schools. (School leads)
3. Proposals for changes to practice and draft evaluation criteria. (All)
4. Reporting back on school decisions including expected impact on teaching, learning and workload. (School leads)
5. Agree evaluation criteria and capturing outcomes method. (All)

### **Stage 2: Second half-term**

6. Implementation. (All)

### **Stage 3: Third half-term**

7. Feedback on implementation with recommendations
8. Group report to be drafted
9. Review and re-draft for final report
10. Publish final report

## Appendix 3. WOWS Schools Statutory Assessments 2016 & 2017 (Source: Wigan LA)

Table 1: Key stage 1 data

Reading					
EXS	EXS	GDS	GDS	Difference 16/17	
2016	2017	2016	2017	EXS	GDS
73%	76%	20%	27%	4%	7%

Writing (TA)					
EXS	EXS	GDS	GDS	Difference 16/17	
2016	2017	2016	2017	EXS	GDS
66%	70%	9%	18%	3%	9%

Maths					
EXS	EXS	GDS	GDS	Difference 16/17	
2016	2017	2016	2017	EXS	GDS
72%	75%	12%	26%	3%	14%

RWM					
EXS	EXS	GDS	GDS	Difference 16/17	
2016	2017	2016	2017	EXS	GDS
62%	64%	5%	14%	3%	9%

Table 2: Key stage 2 data

Reading					
EXS	EXS	High	High	Difference 16/17	
2016	2017	2016	2017	EXS	High
72%	77%	22%	26%	5%	4%

Writing (TA)					
EXS	EXS	High	High	Difference 16/17	
2016	2017	2016	2017	EXS	High
80%	82%	17%	20%	1%	3%

Maths					
EXS	EXS	High	High	Difference 16/17	
2016	2017	2016	2017	EXS	High
76%	79%	16%	25%	3%	9%

RWM					
EXS	EXS	High	High	Difference 16/17	
2016	2017	2016	2017	EXS	High
60%	68%	4%	9%	8%	5%



## **Appendix 4. Details of independent education and assessment experts**

Graham Herbert, former Chief Executive of the Chartered Institute of Educational Assessors (CIEA).

Tim Oates, Director of Research at Cambridge Assessment and Chair Expert Panel National Curriculum Review.

Mick Walker, former Executive Director of QCDA and member of the DfE Teacher Workload Marking Group.

Project lead:

The lead Headteacher, Tim Sherriff, is a co-opted member of the NAHT Primary Sector Council and a member of NAHT's Assessment and Accountability Group.

## Appendix 5. School Case Studies

*Please note: the majority of schools produced exemplars and protocols to support their practice. These can be accessed by contacting the schools directly.*



### Highfield St. Matthew's C.E. Primary School

#### 1. An overview of previous practice at school

Every piece of work had to be marked and we had a marking code to indicate the type of error made. Teachers commented and wrote the next step or asked a question. Children, dependent upon age, were encouraged to respond verbally or offer a written response. Our writing took the longest to mark as we used 3 stars and a wish or next step, despite having success criteria alongside the writing. Teachers marked in green and Teaching Assistants marked in orange. Verbal Feedback was also recorded in the child's book with a VF and a commentary. In Year 1, teachers were writing the learning objective and then writing a sentence to say 'Well done you have achieved your learning objective' for children who couldn't read it. A majority of the marking was taking place after the children had left.

When children were asked in the younger years about marking, they said "I don't like green writing." One child said "I haven't got all day to read them." All children asked from Y1 to Y6 wanted to be told if it was wrong immediately so they could sort it out.

#### 2. The new approach

We wanted to work with the principles of Manageable, Meaningful and Motivating. After recording how long marking was taking it was decided to highlight the Learning Objective in yellow when achieved, a small yellow dot at the side if partially met and left alone if not met. Teachers were to comment appropriately if they had not marked the book with the child. The marking code was kept to highlight the type of errors made e.g. Sp for spelling. Verbal Feedback was not to be recorded. Teachers were encouraged to plan marking work with the children in the lesson and have increased dialogue with the children. With writing, the success criteria the children achieved was to be highlighted so it was obvious what the next steps were. Children were to be more actively involved with self-marking and self/peer assessing. Children were also to be given time to fix work or celebrate achievement within lessons.

#### 3. Principles underpinning the new model

It meant planning lessons had to be considered and time was to be given within lessons to feedback and mark work with children. The children would hopefully take more

ownership, marking their own work and assessing whether they had met their learning objective and how much of the success criteria they had met, especially in writing tasks.

We felt this way of marking would work well alongside the fluid groupings already operating within Mathematics.

#### **4. Gains and evidence**

Children could clearly see whether they had understood and achieved. They hadn't been reading wordy comments and were not always wanting to feedback to teacher's comments. The children's reactions to the new marking system were the greatest gain. They liked instant feedback. They looked immediately for the yellow highlighting. They were far more involved in their own assessment and wanted to fix any misunderstandings and errors quickly.

Teachers gained more time, those that submitted their time recordings showed a decrease in marking away from the children. Originally some teachers had recorded 15 hours a week. The highest recording second time around was 7 hours. Marking children's weekly writing always took a very long time to complete and was mainly cold marked away from the children. The new way of marking made this more manageable for the teachers. Teachers felt they were able to spend more time talking to the children about their work.

#### **5. Challenges, issues and solutions**

- Our major problem was inconsistency of approach and understanding.
- A problem encountered was the different interpretations of marking children's work and assessing against the learning objective. An example of this was a child had understood for example the historical learning objective, so that had been highlighted but had not ensured in their writing that sentences started with a capital letter, this wasn't picked up and the child continued to make the error in several pieces of work.
- There was a difference of opinion within the SLT about whether verbal feedback should be recorded which didn't help staff.
- Some staff still found it difficult to plan time in to mark with the children and lots of books were still going home.
- There was reliance upon teachers to tell teaching assistants about the changes and this again caused another inconsistency.
- The inspectors who visited us had different opinions. One could see progress within the books we looked at and therefore didn't feel the marking project had impacted detrimentally within that year group. Where inconsistencies appeared in other year groups the opinion was we perhaps shouldn't have embarked on the project.

## 6. Conclusions and where next

- Teacher's feedback was positive and the children's feedback even more so.
- The way forward was to ensure a consistent approach and clear direction from the SLT.
- Throughout the whole process our main aim was to ensure the marking resulted in children making progress.
- We have refined our process even further, which is clearly understood by the children, teachers, teaching assistants and after Parents evening, the parents.
- Our younger children understand, discuss what they have got right and what they need to fix without the teacher reading a comment to them. The older children are self-marking and assessing their own learning. Teachers have reduced their marking out of the taught day but we still have a way to go.
- Some teachers felt that they would benefit from observing model lessons demonstrating reactionary marking and how it looks in a successful lesson. We need to ensure we get the right balance within the lesson. We need now to ensure the way we record the teacher's assessments is manageable and how to ensure the assessments best informs next steps for the children. We do not have a perfect system but it is improved from our previous practice. What is important is that all staff are working together and are keen to adapt and change to ensure progress for the children. We have to keep that in our mind, that if it does not benefit the children we don't do it.

**School contact:** Julie Hargreaves

School website: [www.highfieldsaintmatthews.wigan.sch.uk](http://www.highfieldsaintmatthews.wigan.sch.uk)

Tel: 01942 747818



## Marsh Green Primary School

Originally the Marking policy at Marsh Green was designed for maximum evidence that children's work had been checked by a member of staff. There were a range of codes to explain what the marking meant. Evidence was strongly valued, so that there would be photographs in children's books to demonstrate group work, although this often had no clarity at all about what they were learning or how effective this had been. It was also deemed appropriate to have a written dialogue with pupils to prove staff and children were interacting. At the end of a piece of work there was often a comment or question to invite a response from a pupil and time set aside at the start of the day to facilitate this, as feedback was deemed to be effective. Where staff had spent time discussing issues with children it was felt necessary to annotate 'VF' for Verbal Feedback in order to prove that the child had received adult input. Staff felt that the vast majority of their marking time was taken up with maths and English books – particularly with writing. All of this took a great deal of time and unnecessary effort.

This began to change as the new guidance around workload came into being and we began to discuss these issues as a staff. The WOWs project also helped move this on immensely, giving courage to change things and move away from the copious amounts of evidence.

As a staff we began to focus more closely on what feedback actually is and agreed that any form of verbal feedback was far more relevant and effective for children in terms of moving their learning and understanding forward. Much of this began with maths but soon became evident across the rest of the curriculum.

Lessons evolved to reflect this by enabling staff and teaching assistants to work with each group for an amount of time within each lesson and with a specific focus. This helped to address misconceptions, challenge learning and pose deep questions. The need for written feedback or marking became less relevant. At first staff almost needed 'permission' not to have to write and mark in great detail but once this was established it greatly help reduce the workload. There is a greater focus on self and peer assessment alongside clear criteria. This empowers pupils and really helps develop their reflective and evaluative skills. Book scrutinies focus on progress children have made over a period of time rather than checking against the marking policy – ensuring the process is far more valuable with a clearer focus on the pupils.

Teaching has evolved with a greater emphasis on the whole class moving forwards together with differentiation by delivery rather than task. There is a great emphasis on establishing prior learning through very quick assessments so that teaching can be tailored to need. These are quickly marked in one colour to identify gaps, then revisited at the end of the unit so children recognise the progress they have made in their learning.

Much less value is now placed on evidence through marking but the focus is on what the children have achieved. Any marking is instant or at least very timely, as close to the lesson as possible and often within it. Misconceptions are addressed on the spot. Fix-it time follows on from feedback to enable teachers to respond to children's next steps, this is within the lesson or very soon after so that concepts are still fresh in pupils' minds. There is no expectation on staff to take books home but to do the majority of feedback during lessons (trying hard with this one, especially with writing!)

This has proved more difficult for the Year 2 and Year 6 teacher. School have not set out requirements here but the teachers do both mark writing in a more in-depth way, as they want to feel confident when making formal assessment at the end of the key stage and be able to quickly demonstrate to moderators their judgements.

During this week, the second week of the Autumn Term, we had a visit from Ofsted, who fully endorsed the new marking and feedback regime. It was also recognised that the valuable feedback in lessons was demonstrated by the progress seen in pupils' books and anything other than the current marking in the books would have been wasted time. Although we felt comfortable with our new policies and procedures, this had added further confidence that what we are doing is not only right for the children but right for the staff and helps to address the work/life balance issue.

We feel this has been a very worthwhile and empowering project. Everyone is clear about expectations and now has the confidence to discard some very time-consuming practices which ultimately did not benefit pupils. Extensive marking was not value for money – time spent on it did not have a high enough impact on pupils. However staff needed 'permission' to change this and the workforce agreement, along with the WOWs project was the catalyst to enable this to happen.

**School contact:** Headteacher – Mrs Gill Leigh

School website: [www.marshgreenprimary.co.uk/](http://www.marshgreenprimary.co.uk/)



# Marus Bridge Primary School

## 1. A brief overview of previous practice

The volume of work in all pupil books is high. The policy indicated all work should be marked as in English (spellings/punctuation/grammar etc.).

Next steps were to be indicated on all pieces of work.

Marking of all writing was deep – monitoring in places indicated more teacher writing than pupils.

Pink/Green highlighting for edit and improve.

Paired marking used where needed.

## 2. The new approach – how practice has changed:

Volume of work in all pupil books high – policy indicated all work should be marked as in English (spellings/punctuation/grammar etc.) Written pieces in writing book only require edit and improve (see below). Corrections should be identified in other subjects.

Next steps were indicated on all pieces of work. This requirement is no longer in the policy – challenge and review is in place (the next step is the next lesson).

Writing book marking in depth – monitoring in places indicated more teacher writing than pupils. Edit and improve hour for verbal feedback.

Teachers wanted to continue to use pink and green highlighting for edit and improve as it impacts progress.

We have introduced a mastery hour for mathematics and English and structured use of pre-teach or post lesson catch-up. Verbal feedback used rather than written feedback.

Paired marking is utilised more frequently with a more able pupil to support understanding and meta-cognition (marking partners). This needs a visual check by the teacher.

## 3. Principles underpinning the new model(s).

Changes have been made by the teachers themselves in group discussion (following training on research from EEF/MathsHubs/DfE).

Agreement that marking should be meaningful, manageable and motivating.

No research suggests that deep marking has any educational worth. **The quantity of feedback should not be confused with the quality.**

Marking procedures should not **steal time** that could be used more effectively planning and resourcing the next lesson.

### **New staff-agreed feedback mechanisms**

Writing 'next steps' or rewording the WALT (We Are Learning To) is meaningless. Instead, time spent adapting and preparing the next lesson, intervention or review time is more impactful.

The more **immediate** the feedback, the more impactful it is. Therefore, in-lesson, every opportunity should be taken to address misconceptions. **Where possible, pre or post lesson intervention** should be used rather than written feedback.

Paired marking can be worthwhile (see research collated for the EEF Toolkit) – with a more able pupil to support understanding and self-regulation (marking partners) has impact on retention of knowledge, understanding and teacher marking.

## **4. Gains and evidence**

There is a similar trend in progress and attainment to previous year. This appears to indicate that reduced marking practices may not impact directly on pupil progress across school.

A school research project appeared to indicate that the use of the pre-teach hour and accurate prior knowledge assessment leads to gains in learning.

Y5 and Y1 pilot teachers kept diaries (case study) and report since adaptation of policy in February: a reduction of 1.5 hours of marking can be identified per week. Pupil progress data for these year groups indicates that progress continues to be broadly in-line with the rest of school.

In Y6, writing attainment at greater depth dropped this year. However, this was due to insufficient coverage of aspects of punctuation not marking.

## **5. Challenges, issues and solutions**

The timetabling of same day intervention is problematic. Active teaching and feedback throughout the lesson for groups and individuals and the identification of small groups for further tutoring has had a powerful impact.

Teachers still believe that written feedback leads to progress. Therefore, it has to be economical and pertinent as a first principle.

### **Support research**



NCETM: Primary Marking Guidance, April 2016

Debbie Morgan: Teaching for Mastery and Closing the Gap, 2016

OFSTED: Myth Busting briefing paper

Blog: The Wing To Heaven @daisychristo Daisy Christodoulou's Book – 'Making Good Progress?'



#### Next Steps

It should not be necessary to indicate next steps on a pupils' work or to give individual targets for development. In a 'teaching for mastery' approach, each lesson is designed to address a key point which all pupils need to grasp. Therefore, the next key point or next step will be the next lesson.



"Inspectors must not give the impression that marking needs to be undertaken in any particular format and to any particular degree of sophistication or detail."

"The most important teacher activity is the designing and preparing of lessons and it is important that other activity is not too onerous or time-consuming."

"There is remarkably little high quality research to suggest that detailed extensive marking has significant impact."

**School contact:** Michael Gaskill

Headteacher

Marus Bridge Primary School

Kelvin Grove

Wigan WN3 6SP

Tel: 01942 248129

School website: <http://www.marusbridgeprimaryschool.co.uk/>



# Orrell Holgate Academy

## 1. Previous Practice at Orrell Holgate

In September 2015 we introduced a system using coloured pens.

Green for 'growth' and next steps. Pink for 'tickled pink'

The school also used purple 'polishing' pens for pupil self-editing and some teachers would ask children to respond to their next step in purple.

In addition to this...we looked at ways to reduce the need for 'editing' type marking.

We simplified the editing/marking code.

We made sure that each class had a self-editing checklist on their working wall to ensure that children were taking ownership of the quality of their work.

We introduced whole school peer assessment and editing in lots of crazy ways to add emphasis for a period– C.O.W boy and C.O.W girl time where children would wear cowboy hats, or where pupils would edit to music.

### Aims of the system

We wanted an explicit and simple system consistently used across school.

We wanted to link feedback to lesson objectives.

We wanted children to rise to the challenge of the new curriculum.

### Things that worked

The quality of writing across the school improved.

Teacher assessment improved especially within the lesson.

Learning behaviour improved because children were becoming increasingly responsible for their own work.

Data improved substantially for writing and GPS because the pupil marking and editing focus put the spotlight on spelling and 'reading through your work.'

Children said they understood what they needed to do to improve.

Parents liked the 2 colour system because it helped them know how to help their child.

### Problems with the older system...

Some teachers struggled and found it difficult to keep up spending hours marking.

Some teachers wrote far too much – pupils couldn't read it.

Some members of staff felt that they had to encourage children to write a sentence to say they had read the feedback.

Problems with pace: lessons would start with addressing your green for growth from a previous lesson. Sometimes this almost became a mini –lesson!

Making sure that children read feedback and acted upon it historically was turning into a huge chore. Some teachers were devoting a lesson a week to keeping up with 'green for growth'.

As teaching improved, the quality of assessment and feedback/response within the lesson improved - This made marking after the lesson feel meaningless/pointless and was demotivating. "I'm just writing down the next step I have already discussed with a child in the lesson or trying to think of something else."

## **2. New system based on reducing unnecessary workload**

How we changed our practice:

### **We decided to ensure that the majority of feedback occurred within a lesson.**

We kept to green and pink as the children understand what it meant and our pupil reviews told us they liked it.

We exchanged pens for highlighters for the most part as it was easier for teachers and TAs to do the quick 'over your shoulder' marking.

We said that pupils would not only do more self-assessment and peer assessment but that we would mark maths together with larger groups of pupils.

We decided as a staff that comments were most powerful within the lesson not after.

We worked with all of our teaching assistants to make sure that they understood their role within the lesson. We wanted them to feel empowered to work proactively and to offer timely support for whoever needed it. They became and continue to be a powerful tool in our lessons.

We decided we didn't need to do 'deep marking' or marking for 'best copies' of work.

## **3. Principles underpinning the new model**

Lessons are reactive.

High quality feedback is an essential part of the lesson.

Pupil learning behaviour should be constantly developing – we expect the vast majority of pupils to edit their work successfully and we put time and effort into training them to do this.

We don't waste time – if it has no value to this or the next lesson we don't do it.

One of the resonating thoughts from our staff during a meeting about feedback was that when they write a comment in a book after a lesson, it helps one child once. Moving to a model where all staff and pupils are expected to be constantly evaluating work and reacting to/giving feedback helps more children all the way through a lesson.

It is important to strive for the best learning behaviour – we don't 'spoon feed' pupils and **expect them to take responsibility and keep improving.**

#### **4. Gains and evidence**

Lessons are more efficient because teachers are spotlighting needs as they arise in a more incisive manner.

The pace of lessons has improved.

ALL teaching assistants said they felt more motivated and involved in lessons (again this ran alongside other ways of improving teaching and learning.) During a PP review the 'reviewer' said he couldn't tell the difference between teachers and teaching assistants because everyone was modelling and reacting to learning needs.

100% of teachers say that their workload has improved. Teachers report that they manage to get between 75% and 90% of marking completed in the school day.

Teacher involvement in after school clubs has increased from 2/10 in July 2016 to 7/10 of teachers being involved in leading or supporting a club by July 2017. Teachers say they feel 'lighter' at the end of the day.

#### **Pupil responses:**

100% of pupils in Y5 and Y6 said they preferred the instant feedback system to marking after the lesson.

Examples of representative pupil comments (in pupils exact words where possible) are:

I like doing marking with my group in maths because you get to hear the questions everyone else asks.

I like the teacher marking in the lesson because it saves me writing out bits again the next day. I can just change it there and then.

I think it was boring doing your green for growth at the start of a new lesson. Now we can just crack on.

I think we do more work in the lesson now. Sometimes my teacher used to say, "Stop and check your green for growth." If I didn't know how to do it, I would have to wait. Now I feel I can work more.

What is the point of a teacher writing in your book that you haven't used the most efficient method in maths? It wastes time doing it again. I'd rather sort it there and then.

I think we have a bit more pressure on us in a good way. You can't stop, you have to keep going. Sometimes I don't like it when I'm interrupted now but it's better than being told you are wrong at the end.

I didn't like it when I couldn't do my green for growth. I know what it is now.

I like it now we are doing more marking with other children. When you get it wrong sometimes, it's nice you both have, and you can cheer each other on. If you get it right you can high five!

I think it feels 'warmer' doing more marking in the lesson. I always feel closer to the target!

Sometimes I'm on the page after where I've stuck my success criteria in. I might have forgot the steps I need to use but someone always picks it up for me and keeps me on track if I forget.

I think this is nicer for teachers because sometimes my dad is marking books when I go to bed. It's very fair for teacher to not have to be working at bedtime.

I think we are never completely done. We can always make improvements and make our work better.

One child said they didn't like it when a teacher said, "let's just have a chat about this..." in the lesson. They said it was because they knew it meant they were going to have to stop and look at it again. Another child responded, "But it's a waste of the lesson if you don't - wouldn't you rather know."

When I am at work, I won't have a teacher next to me to tell me to check my work. I think I'm more ready for being older.

### **Headteachers' conclusion:**

We went on a journey to reduce teacher workload. I had a real fear that the quality of the work in the children's books would suffer if we reduced the marking load, but knew it was a huge burden for teachers that I had to address. I would never change back to our old system because in looking for ways to cut down on writing comments, we've discovered an approach that has positively impacted the quality of teaching and learning in our school. We have lost nothing at all through reducing teacher workload, but gained the good will of the staff and given them lighter loads (literally) to carry home each evening.

**School contact:** Headteacher, Gail Worrall

[Enquiries@admin.holgate.wigan.sch.uk](mailto:Enquiries@admin.holgate.wigan.sch.uk)

Website. [www.holgate.wigan.sch.uk](http://www.holgate.wigan.sch.uk)

Twitter: @orrellholgate



## 1. A brief overview of previous practice at Newfold Community Primary School.

- Prior to May 2017, our 'Marking and Feedback' system was a considerable burden to both staff and pupils.
- It had evolved in response to a number of Ofsted criticisms of practice which was, in their view, not robust enough to support future learning. Over the past 10 years, a number of adjustments were added to the system in response to Ofsted's comments, but none of the unnecessary processes were eliminated.
- The system was characterised by extensive teacher comments to address misconceptions, guide pupils to future learning targets and encourage pupil responses.
- Often teacher comments would be of greater length and complexity than the pupils' work.
- Pupils would write responses to the teacher comments and in some cases, teachers would further respond to the pupils' comments!
- Following consultation with staff and pupils, all agreed that the Marking and Feedback system in place, was not fit for purpose.
- On average staff at the school were spending 225 hours per week marking pupils' work!
- Learning time in some year groups was compromised by children writing responses to teacher comments.

## 2. The new approach – how practice has changed.

We asked ourselves two key questions:

- What is marking for?
- Who is marking for?

Newfold's approach was not primarily focused on reducing teacher workload; although all staff agreed that this was a considerable barrier that needed to be addressed.

Rather, we had a common belief that a system was required that engages pupils in the assessment process through greater depth and quality of verbal feedback. All stakeholders felt that this would have a far better impact on pupil outcomes rather than extensive written teacher comments and written pupil responses.

### 3. Principles underpinning the new model.

- There is a shared vision throughout the school community that all marking and feedback should be **meaningful, manageable** and **motivating**.
- Leaders have the confidence in Newfold's staff to conduct a professional assessment of pupils' work; there is a real sense of trust and faith in their judgements.
- Staff initial a piece of work to indicate that a professional analysis has been undertaken.
- Staff indicate with an arrow in the page margin, or underline, where they want the child to review their work.
- Staff may still write comments to support future learning if they feel it is appropriate.
- Staff spend more time addressing misconceptions at source by discussing ways to improve outcomes with pupils.
- Our new approach was implemented throughout school at the onset of the project to ensure consistency and provide the opportunity for this new development to be embedded.

### 4. Gains - and evidence

- Staff have reported that they have developed a more open dialogue with their pupils about improvements that would be appropriate to their learning.
- Staff also report that they have a greater understanding of each child's ability and capacity for improvement.
- Pupils have appreciated the discussions with staff at source to impact on outcomes.
- Pupils also say that they have developed a more personal relationship with staff and are more confident to discuss learning developments.
- Pupils appreciate that staff are no longer over marking and over editing their hard work.
- Staff have indicated that there has been a considerable improvement in pupils taking greater pride in the presentation of their work.
- During the school's Local Authority Moderation visit in June 2017, the Moderator commented that the marking system was very clear and concise. It also allowed pupils to edit and self-correct without over direction from the teacher.
- English Consultant Maddy Barnes commented on the positive impact our new approach to marking was having on the outcomes for pupils.
- On average, staff at the school report a reduction of between 50% and 70% in the time they spend marking pupils' work!
- Staff also report that they no longer feel the undue pressure of a Marking & Feedback system that served little purpose for its intended audience.



- Staff say that they now have more time to develop creative learning opportunities and enrich the experiences of the children at the school.

## 5. Challenges, issues and solutions

- The onerous Marking & Feedback system we had in place for so long had become entrenched in our practice. Restraining ourselves from applying the burdensome processes of the previous system was quite a challenge!
- The new system has already evolved, as we now use an arrow in the page margin or underlining where we want children to address inaccuracies depending on a pupil's individual needs.
- Staff comments direct pupils to independently attempt to correct spellings.
- All staff will need to monitor and evaluate pupils' work regularly to ensure that progression is demonstrated in a pupil's learning journey. Time has been allocated for cohort, phase and whole staff monitoring.

## 6. Conclusions and what/where next

- The new system has had a powerful impact on both staff and children at our school. As it has only been in place throughout school since May 2017, close monitoring to ensure impact is maintained will be undertaken.
- Now in September 2017, our staff are applying our approach to marking more consistently.
- We have seen a decrease in the amount of written teacher directions to support children's learning, as staff become more adept at applying the new marking process.
- We no longer have a separate 'Marking Policy'. The principles of our marking and feedback are an integral part of our assessment processes.
- We love it!

**School contact:** Headteacher, Mr Phil Edge

[enquiries@admin.newfold.wigan.sch.uk](mailto:enquiries@admin.newfold.wigan.sch.uk)

Website: [www.newfold.wigan.sch.uk](http://www.newfold.wigan.sch.uk)



# St. Aidan's Catholic Primary School

## 1. A brief overview of previous practice

- Prior to September 2016:
  - Policy was in need of review
  - Inconsistencies of application within staff
  - Using the '2 Stars and a Wish', which often made process very repetitive
  - Many occasions teachers had written more within the marking than the children
  - Predominately distant marking
  - Younger / SEND Children often unable to read the teacher comments
  - Repetitive
  - Time not given to reading and taking on-board feedback
- September 2016:
  - Marking Policy was reviewed as a whole staff
  - Consulted with children and parents

## 2. The new approach – how practice has changed

- Clarity around ages and stages of the children, ensuring policy is fit for purpose
- Intrinsic to the development of the children, their next steps, ensuring the feedback
- Complete removal of all aspects that staff deemed as having no value in children knowing how to take their learning forward
- Positive comments remained
- % increase in verbal feedback
- Use of Purple Pen for re-drafting, further challenge, evidence of deeper challenge (of all learners)
- Marking Symbols reviewed. Evidence from 'Work Reflections' that the symbols are being consistently used and are relevant to the children
- Intentional increase 'in over the shoulder' marking and verbal feedback
- Less marking but more work in books

## 3. Principles underpinning the new model.

- Confidence and reassurance from SLT that marking needs true audience purpose, whether this be for the children or the staff
- Consistencies across Key Stage 1 and 2
- Highlighting of the Learning Objective, with indications if the LO was a Working Towards / National Expectation / Greater Depth / Higher
- Proactive marking in lessons

- Impact on how classes are split within a 1.5 entry school: streaming v vertical groupings for 2017 – 2018
  - Evidence of challenge, progress and those working at Greater Depth / Mastery

#### **4. Gains - and evidence**

- Gained a Sunday back!
- 100% of staff feel the new policy is beginning to have the effect: tangible effect on unnecessary marking and genuine feedback
- Consistency where appropriate
- Children and staff more confidence with flexible groupings
- The lesson structure (planning) was no longer the driver
- Children have demonstrated a knowledge of the policy following discussions
  - With members of the SLT
  - With governors

#### **5. Challenges, issues and solutions**

- Evidence that we can pinpoint where marking and feedback has had a direct impact on teaching and learning
- Evidence that the level of feedback and children's response is having that direct link to taking the learning forward, progress, challenge
- Some clarity about marking symbols
- Some staff concerned that we weren't giving enough praise – or writing it down

#### **6. Conclusions and what/where next**

- Our current policy needs time to embed, although current feedback from staff, children and parents is positive
- Staff have recognised the significant reduction in the distance marking
- Staff have made conscious effort to work proactively alongside the children during lessons
- Ensure children are aware of what can guide them to be further challenged
- An increase in time to read the feedback and respond to it has been noticed in Work Reflections. Monitoring of this will take place during 2017 – 18
- Monitor the policy in other subjects, beyond English and Maths

**School contact:** Mrs J M Farrimond

Website: <http://www.saintaidansprimary.org.uk/>

Tel: 01942 223544



# St James' CE Primary School

## 1. A brief overview of previous practice.

After attending my first meeting linked to the WOWs project, as a school we looked at what our marking and assessment looked like in school and found the following:

Each piece of English and Mathematical work had a Can I, which was taken from the learning objectives and a Steps to Success sheet at the top of the piece of work. Here is an example of this taken from a year 6 English book:

Can I make some correct use of semi-colons in my writing?

Can I discuss events, issues and characters within a book I am reading?

Warriors and Sharks

*Task: Write a short diary extract explaining how you feel about leaving the orphanage. Try to include at least one SS 18 sentence and a semi colon sentence.*

### Steps to Success

1. *Make friends with the text*
2. *Discuss how Margaret feels about getting the job and leaving the orphanage*
3. *Write a sentence to introduce your day*
4. *Write a paragraph describing why you believe you have got the job*
5. *Try to include an SS18 sentence that show what you believe other people think about the reasons you got the job*
6. *Write a paragraph that describes how you feel about leaving the orphanage*
7. *Include an SS18 sentence*
8. *Use at least one other sentence that includes a semi-colon*
9. *Read back your work to check for accuracy*

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

Each piece of work was marked, by the teacher or teaching assistant, against the objective using the symbols (A, AA, NA) while the children self-assessed using each individual step to show where they were on their learning journey. For consistency, they used the same agreed symbols (A, AA, NA). Each piece of work was also marked with a T, TA, D, RP and I to show the support the children had been given during the work.

Each child also had a personal target sheet at the back of their books and individual targets were recorded to support the children on individual areas for development. For example a spelling target if a child consistently misspelt a high frequency word. The children were given no more than three individual targets at any one time. When there was evidence that the target had been met, it was dated and this had to be done three times.

At St James' Primary school, work was always marked in blue but there was no set color for self-assessment from the children. In addition to this, teachers and TA's used highlighters to highlight parts of the work that needed to be improved

- Pink- Think (spelling/punctuation errors etc.)
- Yellow- Places we can make better (i.e. a better word/sentence)

Once a piece had been marked, the children were given time to respond to marking using a different colored pen/pencil to show their responses. The teachers wrote comments about the work. The comments written should have directly related to the learning objective (Can I) but very often did not. In addition to the comments, rewards for work were given using house points.

## **2. The new approach**

After a number of insets in school and through feedback from the WOWS' research group meetings we decided to change our marking and assessment policies.

Firstly, we decided that there were no requirements for teachers to write comments in the children's books unless the teacher felt it necessary to improve the learning of the child.

We also decided to no longer use the symbols D or I (Discussion/Independent) as the children and teachers felt they were unnecessary. The work in the book should be evidence alone that conversations had taken place.

We decided to replace the use of highlighters with the arrow symbol in the margin as this supported the editing process, as the children had to identify the parts of their work that needed to be changed. In previous practice, the teacher was pointing out every error made and taken away the responsibility of the child to check. With heavy emphasis on drafting and editing, spotting individual errors is a vital tool for children.

Additionally, we ensured time was given for verbal feedback relating to steps to success, as this had not always been the practice. In groups and plenary sessions the teachers, TA's and children were expected to talk through what had worked well and what we needed to do to improve the learning more. As we introduced the new requirement the teachers modelled good practice to other adults in class making sure feedback linked to key objective and steps so that the TA's could be part of the feedback process successfully and confidently.

In class, teachers were expected to give immediate feedback to most groups during the lesson and this could be done through group conversations or over the shoulder marking as the children were working. We began promoting over the shoulder marking and discussion with the children as this supported the children's opinions that talking to the teacher helped them see how they could improve their work more effectively.

We also decided to review our symbols as we had concerns about the NA (not achieved) having extreme negative connotations. An arrow was introduced to show we needed more work on this in our next lesson.

As teachers did not have to write comments on the work, they were able to spend more time creating well planned steps to provide a scaffold for children to see where they needed to go next. They also had more time and energy to plan and gather exciting, motivating resources to bring their lessons to life.

Finally, in light of our reading and research it became apparent that there was much more to assessment than simply marking books so collectively decided to rename the policy assessment and **feedback**.

### **3. Principles underpinning the new model**

After the initial meeting of the WOWS' research group, I decided to go away and look more closely at the documents that directly related to our work. I felt it important that I had the evidence to back up our review of the marking and feedback policy, as I knew some members of staff were skeptical about our new approach. Fear of outside expectations was still a niggling issue. I found the following quotes very useful and shared these with staff during a whole staff INSET at Christmas.

OFSTED guidelines clearly stated that there was no expectation on teachers to produce masses of written feedback (*"While inspectors will consider how written and oral feedback is used to promote learning, Ofsted does not expect to see any written record of oral feedback provided to pupils by teachers."* Quote taken from <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-inspection-handbook-from-september-2015/ofsted-inspections-mythbusting>

The Teachers' Standards state that teachers should 'give pupils regular feedback, both orally and through accurate marking, and encourage pupils to respond to the feedback'. There is not a requirement for pupils to provide a written response to feedback: the application of feedback should be evident in follow up pieces of work.

Additionally I had given all teaching staff a questionnaire to complete after the October meeting, as I wanted to gauge how the teachers felt about marking. The teachers' feedback to the questionnaire suggested workload was impacting not on just work life balance, but on the quality of lessons being planned. We felt that by taking away the heavy burden of deep marking we were freeing up time for the teacher to spend on

planning gathering resources, producing quality steps to success and actual teaching a key element of discussion in our Christmas time inset.

I also spoke to the children and my discussions clearly highlighted their preference to talk to the teacher about their work as it meant more to them, was easier to understand and it felt more personal to them.

Finally, as a school, we focused on the key terms **meaningful**, **manageable** and **motivating** key words we used to underpin what we wanted to achieve from our feedback.

#### **4. Gains and evidence**

After a whole term using the revised marking and feedback policy, the teachers were asked to complete another questionnaire and the outcomes were very pleasing.

Teachers felt they were spending less time on their marking (The average time being between 2-3 hours as opposed to the 15 hours one teacher had stated they spent on marking in the initial questionnaire)

Similarly the teachers felt that as a result of the inset we had removed the obligation they felt in relation to being seen to make comments in books. The positive OFSTED quotes and the teaching standards information added further support for our approach.

All teachers felt the assessment that had the most impact on the children was the discussion and the over the shoulder marking. More use of discussion and over the shoulder marking had allowed children to implement changes straight away and feel confident about making the changes. The children themselves felt more able to talk about their own targets as the teacher had talked to them, explained and made them meaningful

Over the shoulder marking and discussion had reduced the time spent going back through work in follow up sessions as this had been hard to squeeze into already crammed timetables.

Less time marking had allowed teachers more time to plan and produce rigorously planned steps to success. The well-planned steps to success are great motivating tools as the children can see what they are succeeding in and what they need to work on (Children will nearly always achieve at least one of the steps)

Towards the end of summer term pupils have been questioned about their learning. The pupil voice interviews have highlighted the confidence children have in talking about their work and their targets.

Since implementing the new policies, progress in each class has been good to excellent and is clearly illustrated in school assessment data. For example – From Dec to July all children in year 6 made progress in reading, writing and maths.

The SEN children in year 6 seemed to have particularly thrived after implementation of the new feedback policy with an average of 4.25 steps of progress in writing, three steps in reading and three steps in maths

## **5. Challenges, issues and solutions**

Younger children find it hard to understand some of the symbols used in the new system and have had difficulty improving their work in response to the sp/g/p symbols. To address this issue more training and discussion is needed between children and the teacher. Using teaching assistants to focus in this area with specific groups may be an option.

Additionally, NQT's/New teachers still feel obliged to mark and write comments. More inset time and open discussions will help to remove this barrier.

Similarly, year 6 and 2 teachers mark with moderation in mind (Moderation courses, in the past, have suggested pointing out and highlighting as much evidence as possible so the moderator is not searching around for evidence). To address this, clarification is needed from moderators.

## **6. Conclusions and what/where next**

At this time the marking/feedback policy is not always being implemented in all areas (History/Geography/Art/DT) as teachers find it harder to mark against the objective in these areas- "We know what we're looking for in English and Maths but we're unsure how to make use of the history objectives etc."

Having only implemented the changes in January we are going to continue to monitor our practise in relation to the new assessment and feedback policy as we start the new school year. Targets for our next steps are:

- Encourage open discussion between staff
- More pupil voice interviews to monitor things from the children's viewpoint
- Ensuring foundation stage are able to implement the policy in their setting
- Introduce maths & writing progress displays, linked to growth mind-set work (Peer Group)

**School contact:** Michelle Singletary  
[m.singletary@saintjames.wigan.sch.uk](mailto:m.singletary@saintjames.wigan.sch.uk)





# St. James' RC Primary School

## 1. A brief overview of previous practice

As a school we have worked hard over the years to guide staff in marking their work with the intention of supporting children and helping them to progress and often the focus has been to make sure that all teachers respond sufficiently to enable this and move away from the idea of just adding a superlative to their work. However we recognise that in doing so, teachers have felt pressured to cover work in 'green pen' - not just to support the children in their class but to satisfy parents and OFSTED.

In order to guide staff a policy that states the following for Literacy and Mathematics has been in place which adhere to the principles of meaningful, manageable and motivating such as, 'When marking writing, the high quality written comment will be positive, recognising and praising achievement, but will also include clear strategies for improvement' and 'Where a child has miscalculated then opportunity will be given for them to correct their mistakes or complete similar calculations which will address misconceptions.' However the interpretation of these and other statements, 'All pieces of work will be marked and approximately one in every third piece of work will have high quality written feedback' meant teachers marking feedback was not always as succinct and child centred as it could be and inevitably therefore it could be time consuming.

## 2. The new approach

Due to other internal projects, testing and class cohorts it was decided that the marking project would be run with the four lower junior classes and the five teachers who lead those classes. The use of more informative self-assessment by the children was decided as the focus of the project.

In order for this to happen, the teachers or pupils would mark the maths calculations/English skills work - whether the answers are correct or not - within the lesson as much as possible ('live marking') to enable pupils to have immediate feedback to improve their understanding and to enable them to write pertinent self- assessment statements. Where there is no right or wrong such as in writing lessons, the use of the success criteria and mini interventions (where the children look for evidence e.g. for modal verbs with a partner) would be more beneficial.

To record their own statements the children would use the code of the use of stars and arrows to focus the children on what they have improved on/used well and what they need to remember/practise further. The teacher's would guide the children in the wording/coding of the self-assessment statements and use a suitable section of plenary time to do so. It was also felt that the English terminology code which had been recently amended in line with the new year group expectations, needed to be more prevalent so it

was asked that copies be placed on tables and on class walls. This would allow teachers and pupils to use this in their feedback and self-assessment to avoid lengthy responses e.g. \*range of mv or ↑ check CL

The teachers would read the children’s responses and tick/initial to show their agreement with the statement. Any additional responses or alterations to the self-assessment would be added where it was deemed necessary.

### 3. Principles underpinning the new model

It was felt that by the children having to consider their self- assessment in more detail against the lesson objectives and success criteria as opposed to a colour code against the WALT as has been a past initiative, that the children would have more ownership of their learning and that the meaningful principle of marking was already being addressed by the children themselves. By drawing attention to the marking code for writing the children would be able to respond succinctly themselves when self-assessing their work and consistency would be provided across the key stage in terms of the new curriculum terminology.

### 4. Gains & Evidence

Both the children and the staff were asked to fill in questionnaires regarding the use of the marking code and the children self-assessing their work in more detail. In order to ascertain whether the strategies were useful, both were questioned on whether they felt progress had been aided. Ten randomly chosen children from each of the four classes were asked to complete the questionnaire and all five members of staff.

#### Children’s Questionnaire Results

	Before	After
I am confident with understanding the Marking Code for writing.	Strongly agree 2.5% Agree 62.5% Neither 2.5% Disagree 22.5% Strongly disagree 10%	Strongly agree 50% Agree 45% Neither 2.5% Disagree Strongly disagree
I am confident with using the	Strongly agree 15% Agree 10%	Strongly agree 45% Agree 35%

Marking Code for writing.	Neither 7.5% Disagree 47.5% Strongly disagree 20%	Neither 17.5% Disagree 2.5% Strongly disagree
I am confident with knowing what I had done well and what I needed to do next in my own writing.	Strongly agree 20% Agree 47.5% Neither 15% Disagree 17.5% Strongly disagree	Strongly agree 57.5% Agree 37.5% Neither 5% Disagree Strongly disagree
My writing has improved since this type of self-assessment has been introduced.	x	Strongly agree 27.5% Agree 60% Neither 7.5% Disagree 2.5% Strongly disagree 2.5%
I am confident with knowing what I have done well and what I need to do next in my Maths work.	Strongly agree 7.5% Agree 42.5% Neither 10% Disagree 40%% Strongly disagree %	Strongly agree 57.5% Agree 30% Neither 5% Disagree 7.5% Strongly disagree

My Maths work has improved since this type of self-assessment has been introduced.	x	Strongly agree 37.5% Agree 37.5% Neither 20% Disagree 5% Strongly disagree
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The headlines are such that there was a marked increase in the understanding and especially the use of the marking code with one teacher commenting that the children seemed to have an improved knowledge of specific word classes and sentence structure. In writing lessons sixty seven percent felt confident before the project with self-assessing by judging what they had done well and suggesting how to improve, with this increasing to ninety five percent afterwards and eighty seven point five percent of children felt their writing had improved since this more specific type of self-assessment had been introduced. Similarly in maths, confidence in self-assessing rose from fifty percent to eighty seven point five percent and three quarters of the cohort questioned felt this more detailed self- assessment strategy had improved their maths work.

### Teacher Questionnaire Results

	Before project	After project
Confident with knowing/using the marking code in writing	3/5 agree 2/5 disagree	4/5 strongly agree 1/5 agree
Use of the marking code reduces marking time in writing		2/5 strongly agree 2/5 agree 1/5 disagree
Children self-assessing using the star/arrow		1/5 strongly agree 3/5 agree

reduces marking time in writing		1/5 disagree (as still had to check judgements)
Use of the marking code and self-assessment (star/arrow) aids pupil progress in writing		2/5 strongly agree 3/5 agree
Children self-assessing using the star/arrow reduces marking time in Maths		2/5 strongly agree 2/5 agree 1/5 disagree
Use of the self-assessment (star/arrow) aids pupil progress in Maths		1/5 strongly agree 4/5 agree

After the project all teachers felt more confident in their knowledge and use of the marking code with 4 out of 5 teachers feeling it reduced marking time. Similarly, 4 out of 5 teachers felt that children taking ownership and self-assessing their work with a comment on what they had used/done well and what they needed to remember/practise further reduced marking time in both writing and Maths.

All teachers felt that the use of the marking code and self- assessment method aided pupil progress in both writing and Maths.

## 5. Challenges, Issues and solutions

The member of staff who did not feel her marking time was reduced by the children self-assessing felt that her time was used to check the children's work for accuracy and checking their comments.

Evidence had been gathered via questionnaires and conversations with staff and children and also looking in books and as such, some inconsistencies (in terms of application of the agreed actions) for the project are evident. The children in some

classes had obviously had more practice and were more familiar with the strategies than others.

Observations focusing on 'live marking', particularly in Maths, and the self- assessment by children in lessons following the agreed method would be beneficial and further guidance in the new academic year for staff needs to be put in place. The project only ran for a few weeks in a busy summer term and some teachers feel they need more time to embed the skill of self-assessing in this way in both Maths and writing.

Therefore for the academic year of 2017-2018 it is felt that a variety of self-assessment and interactive marking strategies needs to be the focus.

The results of the project need to be shared with all staff through the school including teaching assistants and use of the marking code needs to be consistent throughout school so that transition between year groups is transparent to the pupils.

Our school values our pupil's voice and therefore would like to involve the pupils further in the analysis of examples of marking that they prefer. They can also be involved then in feeding back to teachers (against MEANINGFUL & MOTIVATING criteria) which will further embed that at the heart of any change are the children and their learning and progress.

Through research and discussion the production of a reference guide for writing and maths with good samples of a range of interactive marking can be produced to ensure consistency between teaching staff, HLTAs, cover staff and trainees.

A thorough evaluation of the Marking Policy will also be needed.

**School contact:** Emma Burrows  
St James' Catholic Primary School  
[www.orrellsaintjames.wigan.school](http://www.orrellsaintjames.wigan.school). UK  
[e.burrows@osjschool.uk](mailto:e.burrows@osjschool.uk)



# St. John's C of E Primary School

## 1. A brief overview of previous practice

Every lesson in ALL AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM

- Learning Challenges. Every lesson had the learning objective presented as a 'learning challenge question'.
- Self-assessment. Children self-assessed using a traffic light system. After completing a piece of work children would indicate how they had got on against the learning challenge – green for I've got this, yellow for I'm nearly there, and red I need help.
- Marking. Teachers marked against the learning challenge. As they marked the work produced, teachers would record either **A** to show the child had met the learning challenge or **FW** if further work was required to ensure the lesson objective had been met.
- Next Steps. A 'next steps' comment and handwriting judgment recorded for each piece of work (see Handwriting Marking Scheme). We needed to raise standards in presentation throughout school – this was a quick, simple and very effective approach.

ENGLISH LESSONS – every piece of writing

- Marked using our scheme, which consisted of numerous aspects/symbols (see symbols and stampers).
- Awarded a handwriting mark as described above
- Spellings/High Frequency words – spelling mistakes were chosen for the children to write out three times each

WEEKLY EXTENDED WRITING SESSION

This work was marked as described previously but in addition to marking against the symbols, handwriting and spelling comments we also recorded the following:

- Two stars and a wish comments. This involved a time consuming process of writing a comment for each star (positive comments) and the wish (an area to be developed). Not only was this very consuming but for many children a complete waste of time as they struggled to read the comments.
- Target Flaps. Children had targets on a 'flap' at the front of their book. This gave the children writing targets for them to self assess against – the teachers then marked this self-assessment.
- Target Pencils. We changed to Pencil Targets so that the targets could be used whenever a child was writing, not just during English lessons. This enabled

children to become very aware of exactly what their targets were. Staff kept detailed tick list records of which targets had been met at each marking session and also kept track of any new targets set for each child. This record keeping was very time consuming. Teachers have said they didn't change targets because of the record keeping.

- Children responded to the marking. We expected children to respond to the 'two stars and a wish' comments. Trying to find time to do this and time to read the comments was extremely difficult. Many children had to have the comments explained or read to them.
- Teachers marked the response. Teachers then had to mark the response.

MATHS – every piece of work

Work was marked against the learning challenge, a next steps comment written and a presentation mark was awarded. Pencil Targets were also used in the same way as they were in English.

## **2. The new approach – how our practice has changed**

- No more 2 stars and a wish
- Stampers only used in Y1
- Reduced the number of symbols (new version)
- Adapted our use of Pencil Targets for maths and writing
- Increased - verbal marking – but we don't write anything to say it has taken place
- Increased self marking as a class/group (maths, GPS)
- Developed success criteria, self assessment, peer assessment

## **3. Principles underpinning the new model.**

We made the decision to start our initial meeting about the project by asking staff to read the document (see *Eliminating unnecessary workload around marking*). After everyone had read it, we explained about the Wows project. This was a sort of 'light bulb moment' for staff. Everyone was very positive and enthusiastic about the opportunity to reduce the workload around marking. We were already aware that we hadn't gone to the extreme that some schools had. On courses teachers from other schools would describe 'deep marking' involving up to seven different colours of pen/highlighter and marking the same piece of work several times.

**At St John's we:**

- Agreed that we should reduce time being spent on unnecessary marking as much as possible. We all felt strongly that changes would only be made if they would not cause a negative impact on standards.
- Discussed every aspect of marking and feedback that was in place and completed a MAID analysis. This took quite some time. We went through our marking and



feedback policy step by step quite ruthlessly. This was quite difficult in some respects as we were concerned about making decisions that could potentially have an adverse effect on our children. As a result of this process we were able to produce an action plan from the resulting MAID analysis.

- Developed strategies to build marking and feedback into lessons as much as possible. We knew how effective the oral feedback and 'self/peer marking' already taking place was and felt that this could result in a 'win win' situation – feedback could be improved and marking for teachers reduced.
- Aimed to ensure staff no longer took marking home. All teachers took marking or Target Pencil records home regularly. We weren't sure we would be able to do this, but felt that it was something everyone would appreciate. The worst-case scenario would be that teachers took less marking home.
- Agreed that we should trust professional judgment. The Pencil Targets were very effective – children found them motivating, they helped children remember their targets and to self assess. However, keeping track of the targets given to each child, the ones met and then the new targets was an onerous task. No teacher would give a target for a child to use question marks and exclamation marks if they weren't using capital letters, finger spaces and full stops! A child would never be asked to learn the six times table if they didn't know the two times table. It was agreed that we would stop writing a next steps comment because as a teacher you would teach the child appropriately at the next opportunity.

#### 4. Gains and evidence

- Removing the 2 stars and a wish marking process has reduced the workload. KS1 staff in particular are relieved that they are no longer completing a practically useless task, as many children were unable to read/respond to the comments. Teachers have commented that they would dread extended writing sessions, because of the level of marking that followed but moreover the fact that it felt pointless.
- Reducing the number of codes has made marking simpler and quicker. Teaching Assistants like the fact that 'it has removed the need for unnecessary notations' and they feel confident to be fully involved in marking now that paragraphs of comments are no longer required. Marking is now more manageable as the list can be remembered now! Children say 'it is easier to use' when they are self and peer assessing.
- Time is no longer wasted keeping detailed records of the pencil targets. This was a very time consuming process that did not serve any other purpose than give a written record of what had taken place. The children have taken more ownership and discuss when they think they have met a target and are becoming increasingly accurate as to which target they should have next.

- Children self and peer marking and 'over the shoulder' marking by teachers during lessons has led to faster recognition of misconceptions and enables children to respond more promptly and successfully.
- We are in the early stages of embedding this into our teaching and learning. So far teachers and children are positive about the process. As feedback is being given during the lesson, children can respond quickly using Purple Polishing Pens. Early indications are that this is beginning to have a positive impact on learning. For example, during weekly tests teachers stop after a few questions and children self or peer mark the answers. Any mistakes are then addressed immediately which appears to be helping children move their learning on. The children love 'being the teacher' when marking /peer assessing and say 'it points us in the right direction and we can sort it straight away'
- Verbal marking and feedback. This has been particularly well received by KS1 staff and children as this form of marking and feedback is most appropriate. All children respond to oral marking and improve their work with Purple Polishing Pens. Y1 staff and children love the stamps and the feedback that goes with them – they remember stamps they have had before and can say what was good or needs to be improved.
- Developing success criteria has had a positive impact on several aspects of teaching and learning. All children including less able children are beginning to work with increased independence. This has also led to increased confidence and more accurate self and peer assessment. Children are keen to share errors. It has given teachers a more detailed analysis of exactly which part of the learning challenge the child is struggling with. We are seeing children choose to self-correcting independently. They have been heard to say 'I need to do ...' they then get a PP pen and edit their work. Teachers can instantly see what a child's first attempt was and how they chose to amend it.
- Outcomes do not appear to have been impacted negatively. Target Tracker data shows that all year groups made above expected progress during this academic year in reading, writing and maths.

## 5 - Challenges, issues and solutions

### **All staff were concerned about the implications during Ofsted Inspections if marking was reduced**

Although we have wanted to reduce marking workload, staff and SLT had concerns for the implications during Ofsted Inspections. After sharing the document and explaining the WOWS research project, we all felt strongly that this was a great opportunity to trial ways of reducing the workload. The fact that most WOWS schools were to be involved and the details in the document gave us the confidence to be bold. We also decided that if at the end of the project we have concerns, we could always reintroduce systems if we feel that is necessary.

### **In lesson marking and peer assessment could be embarrassing, inaccurate and difficult to complete with all children**

Upper Key stage Two teachers had concerns that peer assessment could cause children to be embarrassed sharing work, mistakes and misconceptions with peers. This turned out not to be the case in the end as everything heavily focused on the successes and any next steps were presented positively. Marking by the children in class is not always completely accurate. However, the benefits of children being able to address errors and misconceptions are felt to outweigh this. It goes without saying that adults check the marking anyway. Not all books can be marked during the lesson and we certainly would not want this to impact on teaching and learning in a negative way. This has been addressed by ensuring every child has a combination of verbal, over the shoulder and distance marking over time.

### **Necessity of handwriting and motivational comments**

We considered removing the writing marking symbols. However, staff felt it had a huge positive impact on handwriting and presentation. Children found it motivational – they were heard to say ‘I want an outstanding’. As a result, they remain as part of our marking scheme, but are no longer used for every piece of work. Teachers implement as a class and sometimes we have a whole school focus when necessary.

During staff discussions and pupil voice sessions it was discovered that children love having ‘good’ ‘excellent’ etc. written after their work and staff like doing it too, so we have re-introduced this because it was found to be motivational.

## **6. Conclusions and what/where next**

### **Conclusions**

- Workload has been significantly reduced 100% of staff took marking home each week – now 100% of staff rarely if ever take marking home
- Greater understanding of the struggles and abilities of each child – for both teachers and children
- Self and peer assessment is more accurate and more frequent
- Formative assessment is even more frequent and more accurate
- Target Tracker is now updated more regularly by all staff
- Teaching assistants feel more comfortable and confident when marking and giving feedback
- Children know what their targets are and how they can move their learning forward
- Children work and self correct more independently

### **Next steps**

- Continue to embed verbal and written peer assessment
- Continue to develop success criteria

- Continue to develop 'over the shoulder' marking by adults and self-marking by pupils as the lesson progresses/during mini-plenaries

**School Contact:** Janet Ashley

Tel: 01942 222133

[www.saintjohns.wigan.sch.uk](http://www.saintjohns.wigan.sch.uk)



# St. Jude's catholic primary school

## 1. A brief overview of previous practice at St Jude's

- Teacher writes VF to evidence that they have given Verbal Feedback, and then pupil uses a different pen (purple) to show they have acted on VF.
- Minimum 50% of work 'Deep Marked' with 2 stars and a wish- all subjects
- Wish highlighted in yellow; stars highlighted in pink.
- Wish to be actioned during 'feedback time' (usually the next day)
- Marking should 'first and foremost' focus on the WALT.
- In English, age appropriate spelling and punctuation to be marked.
- Handwriting across all subjects to be marked.
- Children to self-assess with traffic lights and comment- age appropriate.
- Further 2 pages in the policy regarding presentation including location of date and WALT, how work should be glued into books and how to correct a mistake etc.

Staff felt the marking was onerous and did not have a positive effect on the children; staff felt that they marked for the SLT and Ofsted.

When discussing possible changes we could make, one teacher commented, "Look, just tell me what you want to see and I'll give it to you." This opinion was pretty much universally shared.

It was agreed by all that this needed to change, however how to change was difficult due to the fear attached.

The biggest fear, by far, was the fear of 'THEY' (Ofsted, DfE). Marking was done for leaders and 'THEY' not for the children. How the marking affected progress was not as important as how the marking looked.

## 2. The new approach – how practice has changed

The new approach was developed through several staff meetings, formal and informal discussions with both pupils and staff and most importantly, by working collaboratively to ensure all parties had ownership of the new policy.

At the beginning of the 'marking project' staff were signposted to all the relevant documents; teacher workload survey 2016; reducing teacher workload etc. What became apparent at this time was the depth of fear amongst teachers about 'THEY'. Even though the staff had read the relevant documentation, the staff felt the documents were not a true reflection of what 'THEY' wanted to see. What I personally found both surprising and sad was the fear associated with 'THEY'. These are teachers I work with, fellow professionals, mothers, fathers, grandmothers and yet these hardworking people are as fearful of 'THEY' as a child is of the monster under the bed. It was during this time that it became obvious

that 'THEY' had to get the message out as to what 'THEY' wanted to see regarding marking.

We decided on several changes, however some things remained (teachers needed something to hold onto, they were not willing to completely commit to the new method) - VF will remain and a different coloured pen will still be used to show children have responded to feedback. I countered that verbal feedback was 'doing your job' and that I would know the children had responded to feedback as there had been progress made. It is the job of a teacher to talk to a child and if the child progresses then the teacher had talked to the child and had made an impact. Staff however, were unwilling to let this particular part of the policy go and still wanted to show that they had talked to the child.

Change of name to feedback policy was very important. Teachers viewed feedback as talking to the pupils and marking as writing in the children's books. By changing the name of the policy helped the teachers change and realise that what mattered was – what is meaningful to the individual child. If a child responded to written marking then write a long comment. If a child responds to talking then talk to them. Feedback can take many different forms. The teachers know the children so it is at the teacher's discretion.

The key changes are:

- Policy name changed from Marking, feedback and presentation of work policy – A five page long document.
- Now called Feedback policy- A two page long document.
- Key to the new approach and words used throughout the new policy are, is it: Manageable, meaningful, and motivational.
- Use of dialogue between pupil and teacher emphasized.
- Purple pen used for editing- teacher will then write VF (or identify in the way they desire) if the editing was self-editing or based on Verbal Feedback.
- All work will be marked (in order to show the pupil that the teacher has looked at their work) however, the amount of marking will be at the teacher's discretion- this phrase is central to the success of the project.
- When appropriate, pink highlighter will be used to highlight positives.
- 'Deep marking' will take place at teacher's discretion; wishes will be used at teacher's discretion.
- Traffic lights used for self- assessment at teacher's discretion.
- Key to the new approach is the phrase- at teacher's discretion.

### **3. Principles underpinning the new model.**

It was agreed that the main criteria to judge if the changes had been successful was a teacher based time criteria- had teachers spent less time marking, more time responding and felt their workload had decreased. It was felt that the effect of marking on progress could not be accurately judged due to the variety of other factors that affect progress. It was thought worthwhile however, to ask what children felt about the changes.

It was felt by all that marking must not be a re-run of the lesson e.g. to mark and map out in 12 books how to complete column addition correctly through 2 stars and a wish marking was pointless. Why not spend the time thinking about, and re-planning the next day's lesson, so that the 12 children who had not understood would have a better understanding the following day.

Meaningful, manageable and motivating (MMM) was to become central to the new method. The mantra was to become, 'If it isn't MMM, don't do it'.

Feedback was much more focussed- what is the WALT- feedback to the WALT, focus on the WALT.

Key to underpinning the new model was the actions of the SLT and the trust given to staff regarding marking.

The key principles underpinning the new policy are:

- Decreased time marking. Increased time to plan next steps.
- Marking is marking not a re-run of the lesson.
- Increased use of dialogue and immediate feedback- the 'here and now'.
- Increased trust (from SLT) leads to increased satisfaction of staff, which leads to increased productivity.
- Feedback to the WALT and success criteria.
- Is it Meaningful, Manageable and motivational? Will it enable progress? If not, then don't do it.

#### **4. Gains - and evidence**

Gains and evidence were positive across the board. Trust, and putting the children first was very important for staff. Anecdotal evidence shows that staff feel like they are assisting the children and helping them progress (what they actually do the job for) as opposed to sticking to rigid guidelines.

The key gains are:

- Teacher's feedback indicates less time marking and less time 'wasted' on activities which they felt did not benefit the children.
- Teachers 'felt' more respected and trusted- treated like a teacher not a child.
- 20 Pupils questioned across the school- only a few (older pupils) noticed a change and none thought the change detrimental. Almost all enjoyed that 'next day' wishes had been removed. All enjoyed the pink highlighter. All enjoyed the teacher helping (dialogue) them.

#### **5. Challenges, issues and solutions –**

- Fear 'The big bad THEY'. Almost removed through signposting to relevant documentation- but still evident. 'THEY' definitely do exist- the teachers' bogeyman!!
- Evidence, Trust and the SLT- Solved by changing what book monitoring entails. Emphasis not on work and written feedback. Emphasis shift to work and next day's work. If the next day's work shows progression then quality feedback must have been given. It does not need to be seen to have happened.
- As we are a Catholic school we follow the Come and See program for RE. Therefore, for RE only, we mark in line with the Archdiocese's expectations.

The following section was fundamental to the success of the project if we had not discussed, and worked at length on trust and evidence, then the whole project would have failed. A change in mind-set of both teachers and SLT cannot be emphasized enough.

The evidence point was, and is, key to teachers believing in this new method. By the leaders clearly stating that marking and feedback could not be judged on that day but on the next day was essential to the mind shift.

I explained it to the staff as- if a child can't do a maths problem on Monday but then can do it on Tuesday then feedback worked. Even if your actual written marking consisted of a single word; your feedback, what you said to the child, worked. Leaders cannot then say your marking and feedback are insufficient; the child progressed that's what matters, that's what's meaningful.

By doing this it also helped (somewhat) remove the fear of 'THEY'. Teachers felt that they now had an answer when 'THEY' questioned them about the marking, "The leaders told me to do it", removed some of the fear.

## **6. Conclusions and what/where next**

- The unknown!!!
- We have reviewed our findings but need to re-review based on the group's findings.
- Ofsted / DfE and what they think is essential- still concern over actual evidence. Again the fear of 'THEY'
- Governors need more involvement.
- Continued 'mind shift' essential.

We are continuing with our new policy, but I firmly believe that the only way the teachers will fully accept it, and will feel comfortable moving away from page after page of marking, will be at our next Ofsted and an actual inspector telling them its progress and feedback that matter and it must be MMM.



Major teaching universities need to be involved. It is very difficult to change a mind-set (especially the mind of a teacher with 20 years of marking in a certain way!) It is much easier to train the new teachers than to change the old.

Headteachers and SLT need to be involved - possibly through NAHT and others. If the leaders of school are not on board then nothing will change.

'THEY' need to be removed from the mind of teachers. Although, I have no idea how you remove a bogeyman!

Ofsted and future reports are essential - if Ofsted praise these paired back MMM policies then perhaps teachers will begin to believe.

**School contact:** St. Jude's Catholic Primary School

Acting Headteacher: Mr Damian Wilson

Tel. (01942) 204091

Email: [headteacher@saintjudes.wigan.sch.uk](mailto:headteacher@saintjudes.wigan.sch.uk)

<http://www.saintjudes.wigan.sch.uk/>

# St. Mark's C.E. Primary School



## 1. A brief overview of previous practice

Previous practice involved staff intervening via marking during lessons to extend or consolidate learning using pink pen, which helped demarcate that it was done during the lesson, and then written feedback was provided in books after the lesson in green.

Pupils were then expected to respond to feedback by using the 'RRR approach' (read, reflect, react) prior to next lesson which would be then followed up by staff replying to the child's RRR. This approach was very similar to the much-favoured 'triple marking' method.

### Impact upon staff:

A survey was conducted with staff which discovered that the average hours each week spent marking outside of the lesson was eight hours which had a large impact upon the well-being of staff. Consultations with staff also identified that they felt that great marking equated to quantity of written feedback. It was clear that a cultural mind shift needed to occur to address this misconception and in discussions with staff we coined the phrase 'redundant wordage' to describe written feedback that didn't have an impact on outcomes for children.

### Impact upon pupils:

Through holding a pupil voice consultation, it was clearly evident that pupils benefited when an adult spoke to them to give feedback about their work, particularly when it was immediate.

It was also interesting to note that pupils equated 'good work'/'working hard' with getting everything 'right/correct' and that this perception caused a negative impact upon both their resilience and engagement with learning.

When questioned about the RRR approach, pupils stated that they didn't like going back to previous work and completing their RRR when too much time had passed and that they understood their responses were often 'superficial' in quality and lacked depth.

## 2. The new approach – how practice has changed

In order to ensure engagement from staff, a pilot group of volunteers was consulted and the new approach was co-constructed. This was introduced from Easter. Key elements included:

- Stop using RRR

- Stop Marking at home & start investing time in assessing & planning for who needs support/extension
- Introduce marking which:
  - a) Scores effort/attitude
  - b) Assesses if a child has 'got it', needs a 'greater depth' 'further support'
- Continue to intervene in lessons using pink pen
- Beware of 'redundant wordage'

### 3. Principles underpinning the new model

- Recognition of the need to shift pupil mind set of 'getting it right'= hard work/good work
- Commitment to reduce time spent on marking and channel 'freed up time' to planning activities which embrace 'Assessment for Learning' principles
- Recognition of the need to shift staff mind set of good feedback = lots of marking & inevitable 'redundant wordage'
- Clarity for the workforce with regards to the core purpose of marking/feedback
- Understanding that feedback should refer to a) attitude/effort and b) next steps

### 4. Gains: Measuring the impact of the pilot

Senior leaders spent time with each teacher evaluating the impact of the pilot by triangulating the learning process using a Q & A session to monitor workbooks, floor books, evaluated planning & next steps.

#### Impact

Staff could clearly articulate where they had intervened and how this had improved T&L outcomes and the mechanism used to triangulate impact is now an integral part of our self-evaluation processes.

All staff stated 'the children love it' and this was also evident when speaking to pupils.

More productivity in books and an increase in resilience was evident which was as a result of the growing shift in pupil mind-set in terms of 'what great **learning** looks like'.

The average number of hours spent marking was more than halved and one teacher stated: 'Thank you for giving me my life back'.

### 5. Challenges and solutions

For some staff the triangulation process highlighted that the range of resulting interventions on offer lacked breadth, and that there was clearly a need for further clarity on what types of activities could be delivered to effectively 'stretch it/fix it'. In order to address this issue, leaders agreed to give further support to staff on 'what an intervention

can look like' through the production of a series of 'so what' posters for staff and some additional training session to introduce these.

A range of confusing terminology was being used by staff to describe interventions (pre-teach/catch up, consolidation, etc.). It was subsequently agreed that the terms 'Fix it, Got it, Stretch it' would become part of The Wings' CE Trust's vocabulary.

Staff complained that time was being wasted due to running out of stickers and that the actual time spent peeling and sticking these was excessive. Bespoke stampers from Vistaprint were purchased to address this.

Timetabling of lessons could be restrictive and stop staff from intervening. It was agreed that staff would have the professional freedom to introduce more flexibility in their timetables.

Writing is proving more difficult for this approach, as unlike many other curriculum areas, it isn't 'right or wrong' and often covers many applied skills. The introduction of a slightly different approach was implemented for this area.

## **6. Conclusions and where next:**

The new approach has clearly had a positive impact upon outcomes for pupils, academically, socially and emotionally. Monitoring and evaluation has demonstrated that progress in books is more demonstrably evident and consultations with pupils and staff show that attitudes toward learning are improved. The quality of dialogue with staff about the teaching and learning sequence also shows improved understanding of the purpose of feedback and staff wellbeing as a result of reduced workload has improved.

Our next step will be to use this as part of our marketing strategy to attract and retain staff.

**School contact:** Rachael Coulthard, CEO at St Mark's CE Primary School, The Wings' CE Trust

[enquiries@admin.saintmarks.wigan.sch.uk](mailto:enquiries@admin.saintmarks.wigan.sch.uk)

Tel: 01942 748618



## St. Paul's C.E. Primary School

At the start of the project, teachers discussed marking workload during a staff meeting. The focus for this meeting was to revise the marking policy. Teachers were open with their ideas and appreciated that their views were taken into consideration.

The views that the staff shared during feedback were constructive and positive. Staff raised no concerns about the expectations on their marking or how it has an impact on their workload.

Staff were asked to complete an anonymous workload questionnaire in the months following this. Questions were taken directly from the government survey, selecting only the questions that were more fitting of our school situation. The views of teachers were quite different from the views shared during the staff meeting. It was found that practice around marking at St. Paul's was in need of a review.

Teachers felt that their workload was extending beyond typical working hours. Many teachers felt that their work/life balance was at risk of suffering. Most staff indicated that too much of their time was spent marking/correcting pupils' work.

We looked at the areas that were causing staff to feel this way. There was a feeling that, although staff understood that there were certain expectations, some elements of marking were effectively 'doubling up' what had already been done.

Staff felt that, as they were completing an online tracker for assessment, the tick-boxing of the corresponding assessment sheet was unnecessary. Staff felt that they were marking as expected but felt that these expectations were to be carried out for all core subjects in all lessons. Staff felt that we were sometimes marking because we felt we needed to rather than to move learning forward.

We addressed these concerns and made changes to the marking policy to reflect the current methods now used in school. We have placed much more emphasis on the importance of the use of 'verbal feedback'. We have a growing understanding of the importance of self and peer assessment and teachers now have more confidence in promoting this. We have trained Teaching Assistants to be involved in assessment within class so that their feedback is counted when they have worked 1:1 or with a group in class. We have adapted symbols used for marking - largely within EY & KS1. We have a classroom poster with a marking key for pupils to use as a guide to recognizing what their marking means.

Reflecting on the marking policy alongside the anonymous questionnaire, made it evident that staff were largely placing expectations on themselves. They felt that they needed to reach a certain standard of marking at all times, this was particularly evident with teachers who were new to the school.

The biggest misconception that became apparent was that the quantity of marking correlated with high standards. This meant that, although a lot of time was spent on marking, it wasn't always quality marking and, in some cases, was 'marking for marking's sake'.

It was clear that the SLT and SMT needed to clarify any concerns and ensure that marking expectations were clear but also purposeful. Following discussions in staff meetings, expectations are much clearer now and there is an understanding that deep marking is based on quality not quantity and is not the standard for all subjects and all lessons.

Key principles that were raised were sustainability - if this level of marking could truly be kept up. Also, purpose - considering why we are doing this and who it is for.

Teachers have reduced the number of times that they use 'red for response' in their books after discussing how purposeful this was. Teachers now write 'green for growth' comments that encourage a growth mindset to give children a more meaningful comment. The importance of verbal feedback is clear across school.

The most noteworthy gain for our school is that teachers feel more involved in the process of developing the marking policy. They were involved in the changes that were made and are part of the shared vision for the future of marking for our school. Teachers have more understanding of what is expected of them – in most cases, significantly reducing workload.

It is evident from assessments and whole school data that the review of the marking policy and lessened teacher workload has not made a negative impact on progress. Essentially addressing the point that the additional workload around marking did not appear to make significant positive impact on pupil progress.

The impact of the changes made based on staff feedback is positive but with recognition that we are still developing this. It is evident from lesson observations and book trawls that teachers are clear in their approach and all follow the marking scheme with the needs of their cohort in mind. In terms of the impact in class, the children understand what their marking means and how they are expected to respond.

A key issue that now needs to be addressed is book scrutiny. Although the marking policy goes hand in hand with the expectations of the standards of marking in books, teachers feel less confident that there is 'enough' in their books as they are handed in for review and less confident about the 'quality' of their books.

The solution for this is for school leaders to reach a mutual conclusion on the way that they are approaching book scrutiny and, much like the marking policy, move towards reviewing and updating the way in which this has been approached in years gone by.

This project is by no means finished for our school and we want to use this as a starting point for development. The changes that have been put in place are already making an impact, but that is not to say that there isn't room for improvement. We hope to further embed the principles that underpin this project as we move forward.

This project has been important for us to undertake as a school. Although steps were already in place to reduce workload, it became more apparent that the extent to which some books were being marked was unnecessary.

When making changes to our marking policy, we were cautious. It takes confidence to reduce marking to the extent that it has a positive impact on teacher workload whilst still feeling secure, as a school leader, that the necessary expectations on marking are still in place. This might be an area that we continue to develop.

We do have some steps to take forward, particularly exploring marking expectations within foundation subjects, and we know that the principles of this project need to be embedded. The key focus in the coming months is to build staff confidence in their marking and offer support to those who were uneasy with the changes.

This project has allowed us to praise teachers for going above and beyond in their marking and now allows us to thank them for that by reducing their workload.

**School contact:** St. Paul's C.E. Primary School

Contact name and email - Miss Katherine Fletcher [k.fletcher@stpaulswigan.org.uk](mailto:k.fletcher@stpaulswigan.org.uk)

Headteacher: - Mrs Alison Jackson

School website - <http://www.stpaulswigan.org.uk/>



## Westfield Community School

Our project focused on the marking of writing as staff had identified it is often the most time consuming subject to mark.

### 1. Previous practice.

Prior to the project writing was marked extensively. Teacher comments focused on the learning objective often with a supplementary question. The questions and prompts were written in terms of next steps and designed to 'move the learning on'. It had been agreed that time was allotted at the beginning of each lesson for children to reflect on the teachers comment and respond in writing if appropriate.

### 2. The new approach – how practice has changed

Following an in-depth discussion relating to the impact of the previous strategy staff agreed to trial a new approach. On any identified piece of writing the following would apply:

- Criteria e.g. specific focus for the writing would be established and for consistency a whole school self-assessment key was referenced. An exemplar model would be shared with the pupils. This would be applied to pieces of significant writing across the curriculum. The number of criteria would be left to the professional discretion of the teacher.
- Prior to the end of the lesson, time would be allowed for the pupils to self-assess against the criteria. In KS2 the pupil would use the 'key' in the margin. The teacher would mark the pupils' self-assessment with a double tick if it was correct and a dot if it was incorrect. Depending on how many dots it may require a conversation.
- In KS1 the pupils would tick against criteria within the writing and the teacher would do the same if it was correct. At the end of the lesson the pupils would self-assess against 3 'Can I' boxes.
- An overall comment on the piece of work would be left to the discretion of the teacher.

### 3. Principles underpinning the new model.

The staff had commented, particularly in upper key stage 2 that they were concerned over the time spent on marking writing compared to the **impact** of the comments. More time could be devoted to preparing the learning.



## **Process**

The project was trialed in Years 1,3,4 & 5. Years 2 and 6 were excluded due to additional demands related to end of key stage assessments. Teachers recorded the time it took to mark a piece of writing pre- and post the project. Pupils were interviewed (See appendix) pre- and post project with reference to whether they checked their work, read and understood the teacher comments and if they found being given an exemplar useful.

The members of the senior leadership team monitored quality through work scrutiny pre- and post project. Following the project staff completed evaluations. (See appendix)

## **4. Gains and evidence**

1. Teachers recorded that the time spent marking identified pieces of writing prior to and post project reduced by on average **50%**.
2. Teachers could focus their marking on different aspects of writing, where appropriate, rather than potentially commenting on multiple aspects.
3. The requirement for the teacher to write extended comments in relation to the criteria has been significantly reduced. A Year 5 teacher commented,
  - “It drastically reduced marking time and highlighted the children’s understanding of grammatical terms and if they can use them correctly”.
4. The pupils were more actively involved in the learning process via a formal self-assessment system. Greater numbers of pupils commented that they, for example, always checked their work before giving it in to be marked by the teacher. This was replicated with reference to reading teachers’ comments, understanding what teachers’ comments mean and having regular access to exemplars. Therefore by creating the opportunity for immediate reflection hopefully the learning process would be more intrinsic and therefore more meaningful.

## **5. Challenges, issues and solutions**

Staff were wary of it becoming too focused on technical aspects of writing with a reduced focus on composition and effect. Also, some pupils overthought the content of their writing and potentially it could stifle the fluency of the writing process. Initially some pupils found the self-assessment challenging and required further practice in this skill. However, it was an inclusive process as the choice and number of the criteria used was at the discretion of the teacher. The choice of which pieces of writing to use was left to the discretion of the staff.

## **6. Conclusions and what/where next**

- Staff unanimously endorsed the new approach and its impact on workload.

- Staff appreciated being involved and consulted about how workload could be reduced without any negative impact on the quality of the work being produced.

A Year 4 teacher commented,

*“I would like to give my perceptions and feeling towards the effects of the recent changes in our school marking policy. I feel that the changes have been beneficial in creating more time for the planning and preparation of high quality learning experiences for the children. Before the changes came into place, I felt like too much of my time was spent writing comments that the children often didn’t read -sometimes through the constraints of time within the curriculum. Often where next steps were given, the children might not meet this concept again until later in the term, and so were sometimes either forgotten or not relevant on meeting the concept again. I believe by streamlining the marking policy and bringing it back to a simple model, the children are able to access my feedback quickly without confusion in a positive way”.*

- New approach has been formally adopted as part of the school’s feedback policy.
- The quality of writing was maintained and in many cases improved as a result.
- Teachers’ professionalism has been endorsed.
- Governing body involved throughout the process and very supportive of the outcome.

#### **Where next?**

- Develop criteria relating to composition and effect within writing. This would fit seamlessly with the concept of Comparative Judgement.
- Consider wider effects of implementing a feedback policy

## Appendix 1

### Marking: pupil questionnaire Pre-project

Key:

1 – never

3 – sometimes

5 - always

Questions	1	2	3	4	5
Do you check your work before you give it to your teacher?	4	4	29	9	31
Do you read the teachers comments after your work has been marked?	15	5	21	6	31
Do you understand what your teacher's comments mean?	8	5	28	12	24
Are you shown what an excellent piece of work looks like?	2	7	23	12	31

### Post-project

Questions	1	2	3	4	5
Do you check your work before you give it to your teacher?	0	3	14	12	37

Questions	1	2	3	4	5
Do you read the teachers comments after your work has been marked?	0	2	6	9	49
Do you understand what your teacher's comments mean?	2	1	14	15	33
Are you shown what an excellent piece of work looks like?	0	5	7	11	43

Key:

1 – never

3 – sometimes

5 - always

## Marking Project Evaluation: staff questionnaire

	Pre-project	Post project
<b>Time spent marking</b>		

What in your opinion were the benefits of the new approach for:

a) the pupils' learning

b) you as the teacher

Were there any weakness/problems associated with the new approach for:

a) the pupils' learning

b) you as the teacher

Do you think we should adopt this practice into our marking/feedback policy?

Do you have any further ideas how this could be improved further?

**School contact:** Tim Sherriff Headteacher  
headteacher@admin.westfield.wigan.sch.uk  
<http://www.westfield.wigan.sch.uk/>



# Winstanley Community Primary School

## 1. Previous practice

Monitoring records show some strengths in practice but inconsistent

In the majority of books there was evidence of poorer practice, much of which represented teachers wasting their time marking as there was little or no impact. For example:

- Unhelpful, vague comments e.g. “watch your spellings” and “improve your handwriting”
- Comments at the end of work repeat the learning objective and add a comment such as “yes you can!”
- Some teachers wrote extensive comments of two or three paragraphs suggesting ways of improving work – but child was not able to understand the points being made as too young or ability level too low. Questions the audience for these comments!
- Next steps learning comments were often simply the learning objective for the next lesson
- And so on...

## 2. The new approach – how practice has changed

- Different emphasis – child is the audience for comments, not Ofsted or the member of SLT monitoring the books!
- If it has no impact, don't write it!
- Oral feedback is given greater significance: focus on checking and probing understanding during the lesson and adapting teaching accordingly. Quick identification of misconceptions / poorer work and promptly putting child back on right track.
- Be specific, accurate and clear re praise and advice for improvement (scaffolding for learning). Be brief!!
- Ensure effort and perseverance are recognised.
- Greater value put on self and peer assessment (but check these!).
- Give time in lessons for response to written comments.
- Where verbal feedback is given, mark work with v – no need to write what that feedback was, should be obvious from change in work.

Subject leaders and SLT were asked to monitor feedback / marking so as to be able to coach staff to better practice.

Examples of feedback to staff:

- Positive
- “Up to date marking. Quality marking and feedback results in good progress and evidence of subsequent learning. Marking is motivational and meaningful.”
- “Up to date marking. Very motivating. Frequent meaningful comments leading to improvements – good impact on learning”

Not so positive!

- “ ...little evidence of meaningful support for the child to improve work. Little evidence of motivational marking.”
- “lots of ticks and some instructional marking, though much is not responded to. Feedback does not generally relate to objectives”

### 3. Principles underpinning the new model(s).

- Reduction in time spent marking
- Marking to have impact or not worth doing.
- Feedback mechanisms to include more oral feedback for immediate impact.
- Consistent practice across school from EYFS to Y6
- We looked as a staff (staff meetings) at each other’s work and checked against *agreed criteria, for example:*

*“Feedback mechanisms to include more oral feedback for immediate impact.”*

*Reduction in time spent marking*

*NB expectation that child takes responsibility for checking own work – not done for them by teacher.*

### 4. Gains - and evidence

- Scrutiny of books now shows on-going dialogue resulting in clear progression and prompt correction of misconceptions/ errors and / or improvement / extension of work. Evidence: scrutiny records, children’s work, discussions with children, portfolio of examples
- Scrutiny of books also shows minimum ‘wordage’ for maximum impact – reducing the time teachers spend on marking work out of lesson time. Evidence: scrutiny records and teacher questionnaires.
- Teachers now see their books as their ‘badge of honour’.
- Assessment data shows that more focused feedback has positive impact on outcomes – day to day improvements add up to improved test results / teacher assessment at end of year. We believe this has to do with the need for improved subject knowledge and questioning skills if teachers are going to be more reactive within lessons; our inset programme reflects this.

- Children say that feedback helps them learn and motivates them (children's questionnaires)

**Ofsted report:** The Quality of teachers' questioning is very good...supplementary questions are used very well to help pupils identify and correct misconceptions or to extend their ideas. The school's marking policy is applied consistently. Teachers' feedback is highly effective and leads pupils to revise and improve their work. (November 2016)

## **5. Problems, issues and solutions –**

- Initially the biggest problem was convincing staff that they had 'permission' to write less and abandon '3 stars and a wish' practices. They were entrenched in the notion that the more they were writing, the more highly they would be thought of as teachers. We gave them permission and it was liberating!
- Teachers were concerned that children were wasting time if they allowed them to respond to marking at the start of the next lesson. Again, permission was given.
- Knock-on requirement for improved questioning skills and subject knowledge meant that INSET became quite intensive.
- Subject leaders were asked to monitor quality of feedback in terms of impact on learning – INSET needed.
- New staff needed to be brought into line with our new policy – could be difficult as these staff had not gone on the same 'journey' over time as existing staff. Also time demand on SLT to coach these staff. File of exemplars helped to set the standard for new staff.

## **6. Conclusions and what/where next**

Although our work was stimulated initially by the 2015 Better Maths Conference, it was informed by other key documents such as EEF, Workload balance reports - Report of the Independent Teacher Workload Review Group, Teachers' Standards 6 etc.

Our teachers are very happy with the current system / policy and take a pride in their books for different reasons now.

Children feel supported by teachers and express their confidence that they will receive useful feedback on a regular basis.

Where next...

- Ensure that portfolio is kept up to date, to be used with several new staff ( 5 maternity leaves this year).
- Whole school inset session on feedback policy to remind existing staff of expectations.



- Subject leaders to continue to have monitoring quality and effectiveness of feedback on their list of duties. Regular feedback to SLT.

**School contact:** Karen Thompson Headteacher

[enquiries@admin.winstanley.wigan.sch.uk](mailto:enquiries@admin.winstanley.wigan.sch.uk)

<http://www.winstanley.wigan.sch.uk>



# Worsley Mesnes Primary School

## 1. A brief overview of previous practice

- Marking codes used - designed for ease of communication but not consistently or particularly in a way that reduced workload
- Growing Green / Perfect Purple in marking
- Clear Objective commented on and developed in written feedback
- On-going margin commentary
- Verbal feedback given (and noted VF)- Sometimes then also written down
- Extended written feedback - some to the point- much not
- Book Monitoring that while not monitoring written teacher feedback and commentary, did comment on it in a positive way
- Strategies in existence that could influence teachers' workload in a good way but were directed at improving marking in books.
- Discussion in SLT about reducing workload initiatives but this was not joined up thinking within our marking practice.

## 2. The new approach – how practice has changed

Reiteration of the school's approach to written feedback– value all types of feedback- Verbal feedback and response encouraged - child /adult, child/child

Redesign of the codes for written feedback involving all staff and children to ensure a consistent approach appropriate to the ages of the children.

Update of Assessment Policy to clarify that marking is one of a number of ways to feedback with examples.

An explicit link to the Growth Mindset strategies adopted throughout school.

### Feedback strategy inset

In lesson marking - Over the shoulder    Pupil involvement – Self marking and pupil voice

Timely comments to individuals or groups – Looking for the opportune moment and the perfect comment or question to intervene and reinforce or extend learning

Mini-plenaries / on-going sharing of good practice examples

Group Feedback to cascade to others – strengths and development points

Assessment for learning – Planned for in daily/ weekly planning    School marking codes

Quality questioning

Post-its

Target cards/sheets

Addressing misconceptions

Peer work

Written comments

Emergency Targets to address non-negotiables from previous years

### **3. Principles underpinning the new model.**

- After brief feedback from the conference there was an attempt to take away the “guilt” about marking;
- “Permission” given by SLT to minimise the written feedback but not to lose the quality of feedback
- The challenge – initially that written feedback could be less prevalent and progress would remain at least at the standard of previous learning.
- Moving forward the improvement in the quality of all feedback – e.g. verbal, peer, written etc. will lead to improved progress and mastery/ greater depth throughout the learning in school.

### **4. Gains - and evidence**

- Teacher Questionnaire - re time spent / difference the change in emphasis in written marking has made- Positive response to initiative
- Good examples of effective feedback/ marking being collected.
- Monitoring - Effective feedback evidenced by the response and progress in children’s learning – in book scrutiny/ lesson observations/ children interviews.
- Internal Data indicates increase in children working at age related expectation and above in writing in all year groups.
- *2017 Year 6 writing – 87% at expected level 23% Greater depth (moderated by the Local Authority moderators)*
- *2016 Year 6 writing 67% at expected and above – NB different cohorts!*

### **5. Challenges, issues and solutions –**

Staff clarity of “Eliminating unnecessary workload around marking” findings and EEF “Quality of feedback” research.

Development of a consistent approach across school

Development of a consistent approach that is age appropriate

Building a clear and explicit link between the school existing assessments for learning, existing on-going planning that is reactive within lessons /daily etc. and the feedback given in lessons through verbal and written response.

Creating a portfolio of quality examples where effective feedback has improved children’s work (be it verbal, peer, written, target cards, etc.)

Use of staff peer groups to develop and celebrate approaches to feedback

School's coaching expertise focussed on workload

## **6. Conclusions and what next**

**GOAL** That the removal of the “need” for extensive written marking will create a valuable conversation and be the catalyst for more effective feedback that will raise standards across school as well as supporting teachers’ workload concerns.

Actions and monitoring of teachers’ wellbeing.

Develop and monitor the quality feedback that ensures progress in learning.

Training and coaching for staff.

Include all in the conversation.

Consistency.

**Contact:** David Worthington

[headteacher@admin.worsleymesnes.wigan.sch.uk](mailto:headteacher@admin.worsleymesnes.wigan.sch.uk)

01942 776457

School Website <http://www.worsleymesnes.wigan.sch.uk/>

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