



## **To what extent has the new marking and feedback policy impacted the learning and well-being of the pupils in Llanharan Primary School?**

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### **Summary**

**The action research asks two inter-related questions about a new marking and feedback policy. It explores how the policy can make a difference to both pupil learning and pupil well-being. Pupils and teachers have indicated that this new policy with its emphasis on clear feedback has had an impact on the way pupils react to teacher marking and to their perception of its purpose. Although more work is needed to trace the impact on performance this initial study highlights the importance of attitude in learning and looks forward to developing mind-set approaches in the future.**

### **The context**

Over the past three years there have been significant staff changes at Llanharan Primary School. New teachers have brought with them fresh ideas and methods of practice. Upon review, the SLT highlighted that many of the school policies no longer accurately reflected the ideology of the school. As a school we embarked upon the process of altering the policies so that they would provide a fairer and more honest interpretation of our school. This was in the main a relatively straightforward task, and over the course of several staff meetings we were able to modernise a large bulk of our policies. The marking and feedback policy however was one which proved to be much poured over and hotly debated. It was clear that changes were needed, but far less so on what and how needed changing.

Getting the marking feedback policy right for our school was of the highest importance, as we as team shared the views of Brown (2004-2005) in that:

‘Assessment is probably the most important thing we can do to help our students learn.’

The challenge was now to make sure that we were conducting our assessment in a manner which gave best opportunity for our students learn. We agreed that there needed to be a greater emphasis on providing opportunities for the children to respond to their marking in

a way which moved their learning forward. This meant a focus upon specific, high quality verbal and written feedback, as:

‘If assessment is to be integral to learning, feedback must be at the heart of the process’ (Brown 2004-2005)

There were several months of trial and error, tweaking and modifying, until we arrived at a policy which we believed to strike the best balance between feasible teacher workload and learner attainment and self-esteem.

The purpose of this action research project is to evaluate the impact of the alterations for our learners: Has it worked? How do we know? What happens next?

### **What we did**

In order to answer these questions a mixed methodology of quantitative and qualitative research methods was used. The quantitative branch of the research took the form of a survey asking students for their opinion on a number of matters surrounding the old and new marking policies. The survey was completed anonymously and distributed to year 3/4 and year 5/6. The qualitative branch of the research took the form of a semi structured questionnaire. This was conducted with a random sample of pupils from year 2 to year 6. Each year group was asked to provide 3 children to the random sample. The questions were centred on how the pupils felt the marking had changed. Each child was presented with a piece of their own work marked to the old and new policies and asked a series of questions on how the marking helped them learn and made them feel. The old style marking was used as a base-line in order to compare the new system and reactions to its implementation. Staff wrote brief statements about how they felt the new marking policy was impacting the learners within their classes and whether the changes were worthwhile.

### **The results**

Whilst the data could not conclusively answer the question of whether our marking policy has had an impact upon the pupil’s attainment, it provided a valuable insight in to the pupil’s attitudes towards the implementation of our marking and feedback policy.

#### **Positive signs**

The results from the research provided many insights into the role and importance that marking takes within our school. The most telling statistic was that 72.73% of pupils either agreed or strongly agreed that they really cared what their teacher wrote in their book. Only 2.27% disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement. It was a great relief to the teachers that their hard work and efforts were valued by the pupils. It was also pleasing to discover that 82.22% of pupils had a neutral to ‘strongly agreeing’ response to the question

which asked whether marking makes them feel valued and shows them what they are really good at. This combined with the high percentage of pupils caring about marking suggests that the marking is having a positive impact upon the well-being of the pupils in the school.

Through the interviews the pupils also gave some interesting views on to how they thought the marking has impacted their learning and wellbeing; with all children interviewed now stating that not only do they see that their teacher has valued their work but are able to provide comment on the specific parts that are valued. Furthermore, through the interview process all children presented with their work under the new marking policy were able to identify the specific area for improvement. An example comment was 'Because he has given me a green for growth and said what I can improve on'. The same pupil had previously commented that when work was marked using the old policy that she could not see areas for improvement as their teacher had 'just ticked the work'. Although this is a snapshot in to the response to the questionnaire, all followed a similar pattern. The identification of areas for improvement by pupils is a significant finding in the research.

There is also evidence to suggest that the new policy has in some way contributed to an increased attainment in some pupils, specifically in year six. In year six, the class teacher commented on the impact of the new policy:

'the new policy has enabled me to target and pin point areas for the pupils to improve in order to upskill their work. I have looked closely at the level descriptors to see what progress needed to be made in order to push the learners up to the next level and have provided opportunities in feedback for the pupils to work towards these targets. It has also helped the pupils understand where they are what steps they need to take to move to the next level. As a direct result of this I have enabled four pupils in my class to attain level 6 in Numeracy and Literacy.'

The point about the four pupils is that, by implication, they would not have achieved level 6 without the interventions. This statement suggest that the new policy has offered class teachers the structure in which to target individual and specific elements that they wish the children to improve upon, thus moving their learning forward.

## **What next?**

### **Findings**

- Because of the new marking system, pupils were able to pinpoint what they had done well and what they needed to do in order to improve

- Pupils had a greater appreciation of why their work was 'marked'
- Where detailed feedback is given, pupils have the means to improve work
- Pupils give greater value to feedback when they see its purpose

However, for all the insights, confirmations and reflections obtained from this action research it has been very difficult to comprehensively prove that the marking feedback has a key role in wellbeing; this is partly due to the fact that there was no previous baseline of attitudes towards marking available. However, the pupils greater understanding of feedback and the purpose of such feedback could be interpreted as contributing to a sense of well-being. Brigley [2016] writes that:

'When pupils understand processes and can see the care that teachers are giving to responding to work, it can give pupils a sense of pride'

This action research can now act as the baseline of attitudes, and it is now planned that each year a similar action research can take place in order to monitor and record the pupils' responses to marking and feedback. The research has shed light on specific areas to address in our implementation of marking and feedback policy and as a staff we need to review the marking and feedback policy once more in order to address these specific shortfalls. An emphasis will now be placed upon fostering a Growth Mindset within the pupils in the school. As a teaching staff, we will look at implementing the ideas of Dweck (2012) in order to move the children from a fixed to an open mindset with a view to improving.

### **Work in progress**

For all the positives listed, there are still some areas which still need to be addressed within the school. The fact that only 27.27% agreed that the comments in their book were easy to understand suggests that, as teachers, we need to think carefully about what we write in the pupils' books, as the research suggests that they really care about it. In addition to this only 22% of pupils agreed that they had enough time to respond to their teacher's marking, which begs the question why mark for responses if there is no time to respond? The final challenge posed from the research is one centred on the pupils' attitudes towards marking in general. 40% of the pupils surveyed believed that the marking was not for them but was for the teachers. This suggests that the learners do not see themselves as a central and important part of the marking of feedback policy, which is something that needs to be addressed

## **Bibliography**

Judebrigley.co.uk/blog Accessed May 2016

Brown, Learning and Teaching in Higher Education, Issue 1, 2004-05

Dweck, C. [2012] *Mindset: how you can fulfil your potential*, Robinson: New York.

## Appendix

### Sample Survey

Marking Questionnaire

Mr Arthur is conducting some research in to how the marking in the school helps you learn. He would also like to know your opinions about certain aspects of the marking.

1. What is your opinion on the following

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

My teacher marks my work often

I understand what my teacher wants me to do after my work is marked

The marking is easy to understand

The comments are easy to understand

The marking makes me feel valued and appreciated

The marking makes me feel like I am doing well

My next steps are clear

I feel that my work is better than my class

The marking now is different to how it used to be

The marking is for my benefit

Marking is for my teacher

Marking is for me

### Response to Questionnaire

Marking Questionnaire

Do you think your teacher has done a good job in marking this piece of work?

Yes No

Do you think that the marking has shown you clear ways in which you can improve your work?

Yes No

Why? because he has given me a green for growth and said what I can improve on.

Do you understand what your teacher has particularly valued about this piece of work?

Yes No

How? Because he has ticked pink this work and

Do you feel that your teacher has valued your efforts in this piece of work?

Yes No

Why? because he has read it

Any other comments

## Results

SurveyMonkey Inc. 11:54 28%

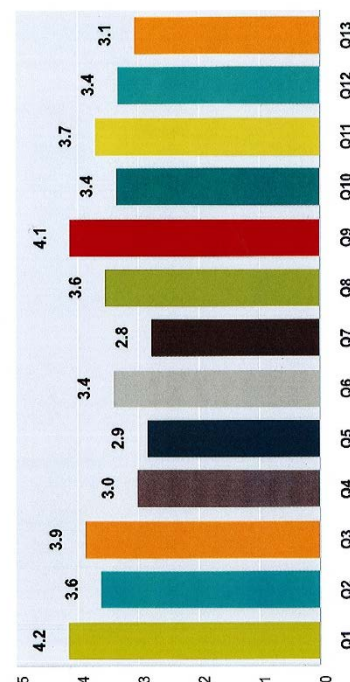
	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)	Total	Weighted Average
Q1	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	24.44% 11	35.56% 16	40.00% 18	45	4.16
Q2	2.22% 1	4.44% 2	40.00% 18	35.56% 16	17.78% 8	45	3.62
Q3	0.00% 0	6.82% 3	29.55% 13	31.82% 14	31.82% 14	44	3.89
Q4	9.09% 4	18.18% 8	45.45% 20	15.91% 7	11.36% 5	44	3.02
Q5	8.89% 4	17.78% 8	51.11% 23	22.22% 10	0.00% 0	45	2.87
Q6	2.22% 1	15.56% 7	37.78% 17	26.67% 12	17.78% 8	45	3.42
Q7	20.00% 9	26.67% 12	20.00% 9	20.00% 9	13.33% 6	45	2.80
Q8	6.67% 3	6.67% 3	33.33% 15	31.11% 14	22.22% 10	45	3.56
Q9	0.00% 0	2.27% 1	25.00% 11	29.55% 13	43.18% 19	44	4.14
Q10	11.11% 5	15.56% 7	28.89% 13	13.33% 6	31.11% 14	45	3.38
Q11	0.00% 0	17.78% 8	24.44% 11	26.67% 12	31.11% 14	45	3.71
Q12	15.56% 7	17.78% 8	13.33% 6	22.22% 10	31.11% 14	45	3.36
Q13	20.00% 9	20.00% 9	17.78% 8	17.78% 8	24.44% 11	45	3.07

Basic Statistics

	Minimum	Maximum	Median	Mean	Standard Deviation
Q1	3.00	5.00	4.00	4.16	0.79

### Marking Questionnaire Results

Answered: 45 Skipped: 0



## **Marking and Feedback Policy**

### **School Vision**

We believe feedback and marking should provide constructive feedback to every child, focussing on success and improvement needs against learning intentions; enabling children to become reflective learners and helping them to close the gap between the current and desired performance.

### **Principles**

Marking and feedback should:

- Be manageable for teachers.
- Relate to learning intentions, which need to be explicitly shared with children.
- Involve all adults working with children in the classroom.
- Give children opportunities to become aware of and reflect on their learning needs.
- Give recognition and appropriate praise for achievement.
- Give clear strategies for improvement against success criteria.
- Allow specific time for children to read, reflect and respond to marking.
- Involve children in the same process (whether oral or written), to ensure equality across subjects and abilities.
- Take an ipsative approach (where attainment is based on that person's previous attainment) within the context of marking towards the learning intention.
- Respond to individual learning needs, marking face-to-face with some and at a distance with others.
- Inform future planning and individual target setting.
- Be accessible to children.
- Use consistent codes throughout the school.
- Ultimately be seen by children as positive in improving their learning.
- Encourage and teach children to self evaluate and peer evaluate wherever possible.

### **Strategies**

#### **Summarise feedback/marking**

This usually consists of ticks and crosses and is associated with closed tasks or exercises.

#### **Formative feedback/marking**

With oral feedback, in the course of a lesson, teachers' comments to children should focus firstly on issues about the learning intention and secondly, and in a whisper, on other subsidiary/individual features.

## *Quality marking*

Not all pieces of work can be “quality marked”. Text level or extended writing across the curriculum needs to be marked in detail with next steps clearly given.

Wherever the task is open or narrative, feedback should focus first and foremost on the learning intention of the task. The emphasis in marking should be on both success against the learning intention and improvement needs against the learning intention. Focused comment should help the child in “closing the gap” in what they have achieved and what they could have achieved (e.g. “what else could you say about the prince?”, “say something about the prince’s personality”, “Try one of these words: handsome, elegant, and arrogant.” With English narrative writing, codes can save time and make the feedback more accessible to the child: highlight two things in pink (*tickled pink*) which are best against the learning intention and put an arrow and highlight in green (*green for growth*) where improvement against the learning intention could take place, including a “closing gap” comment. These comments are written on the ‘draft page’ of the literacy book. In school the pupils refer to this as two stars and a wish. Where codes are inappropriate, success and improvement should be pointed out verbally or in written form. Useful “closing the gap” comments are:

- A **reminder** prompt (e.g. “What else could you say here”).
- A **scaffold** prompt (e.g. “What was the dog’s tail doing?”, “The dog was angry so he....”, “Describe the expression on the dog’s face”).
- An **example** prompt (e.g. “Choose one of these or your own: *He ran around in circles looking for the rabbit/The dog couldn’t believe his eyes*”).

Comments in Welsh are added, see appendix.

## **Secretarial features**

Spelling, punctuation, grammar etc, should not be asked for in every piece of narrative writing, because children cannot effectively focus on too many things in one space of time. When work is finished, ask children to check for things *they know are wrong in their work* and current word/sentence level objectives when they read it through. A maximum of three additional spellings should be underlined with correct spellings on the ‘draft’ page of the literacy book.

Only give children feedback about those things you have asked them to pay attention to. This will mean that some aspects of writing are unmarked, but over time will be marked on subsequent pieces of work.

## **Self-Marking**



Children should self evaluate wherever possible. Children can identify their own two successes and look for improvement points. The plenary can then focus on this process as a way of analysing the learning. Pupils can underline their own 'two stars' but do not highlight within their books and self evaluation comments are made on the 'draft page'.

### **Shared Marking**

Using one piece of work from a child in another class or a previous year to mark as a class, using a visualiser, at regular intervals, models the marking process and teaches particular points at the same time.

Another strategy is to show two pieces of levelled work, with the same title, and discuss their differences.

### **Paired marking**

Before end of the lesson, children may occasionally be asked to mark narrative work in pairs. The following points are important:

- Paired marking should not be introduced until Key Stage 2, unless teachers feel younger children are ready for this.
- Children need to be trained to do this, through modelling with the whole class, watching the paired marking in action.
- Ground rules (e.g. listening, interruptions, confidentiality, etc) should be decided, and then displayed as a poster.
- Children should alternately, point out what they like first, underlining using a pencil, and then suggest ways to improve the piece, but only against the learning intention and not spellings etc. The 2:1 success to improvement ratio should be followed, to avoid over-criticism. If 'post it notes' are used for a group evaluation they need to be securely attached on the 'draft page'.
- Pairings should be ability based, of two middle, two more able or one middle and one less able together.
- Encourage a dialogue between the children rather than taking turns to be the "teacher": they should discuss each other's work together (e.g. "I think this bit really shows how that character feels, what do you think?")

### **Organisation**

- The first 5 minutes of a lesson should be used to address closing the gap prompts from previous lessons.
- Where possible, children should be encouraged to self-mark.
- Wherever class discussion takes place, feedback is given orally. Notes in 'assessment jottings' section on planning sheets might also be necessary to inform future planning as a result of the discussion findings.

- Children need to have some feedback about their work, but flexibility is important, depending on the nature of the task and the time available.
- Distance marking should be accessible to children and manageable for teachers.
- When work has been distance marked, time should be given for children to read and then make one focused improvement based on the improvement suggestion. In order for the marking to be formative, the information must be used and acted on by the children.
- Pupils self evaluation or paired marking comments should always be underlined as highlighting is for teaching staff.