



The principles of effective marking¹

Meaningful: marking varies by age group, subject and what works best for the pupil and teacher in relation to any particular piece of work. Teachers are encouraged to adjust their approach as necessary and trusted to incorporate the outcomes into subsequent planning and teaching.

Marking should serve a single purpose – to advance pupil progress and outcomes. Teachers should be clear about what they are trying to achieve and the best way of achieving it. Crucially, the most important person in deciding what is appropriate is the teacher. Oral feedback, working with pupils in class, reading their work – all help teachers understand what pupils can do and understand. Every teacher will know whether they are getting useful information from their marking and whether pupils are progressing.

Consistency across a department or a school is still important, but this can come from consistent high standards, rather than unvarying practice. Shared expectations of marking will help everybody to be clear about what is required of them, but each subject and phase should be able to determine the policy in their areas, responding to the different workload demands of each subject/phase, and drawing on teacher professionalism to create meaningful and manageable approaches. Policies should be judged against the actual hours spent on marking, and adjustments to requirements made where necessary.

Manageable: marking practice is proportionate and considers the frequency and complexity of written feedback, as well as the cost and time-effectiveness of marking in relation to the overall workload of teachers. This is written into any assessment policy.

The time taken to mark does not always correlate with successful pupil outcomes and leads to wasted teacher time. Examples of disproportionate marking practice include: extensive comments which children in an early years class are unable to read, or a written dialogue instead of a conversation. If teachers are spending more time on marking than the children are on a piece of work then the proportion is wrong and should be changed.

Senior leaders and governors are responsible for the effective deployment of all resources in the school. They should take into account the hours teachers spend on marking and have regard to the work-life balance of their staff.

The key is for schools to challenge and review their marking practice, making sure they are considering the impact on teacher workload when setting expectations. Teachers will be better able to exercise their professional judgement about the type of work to be set, including more extensive written tasks, if the marking load is manageable and when released from the burden of deep marking every piece of work.

Feedback can take the form of spoken or written marking, peer marking and self-assessment. If the hours spent do not have the commensurate impact on pupil progress: **stop it.**

¹ Source: Eliminating unnecessary workload around marking – Report of the Independent Teacher Workload Review Group, March 2016

In the Workload Challenge responses, a key driver of particular marking practices was seen to be Ofsted. In response, in the Spring of 2015, Ofsted clearly set out that it does not expect to see any specific frequency, type or volume of marking – it is only interested in the overall effectiveness of marking policies on outcomes for pupils. This clarification is now contained within the School Inspection Handbook:

‘Ofsted **does not** expect to see a particular frequency or quantity of work in pupils’ books or folders. Ofsted recognises that the amount of work in books and folders will depend on the subject being studied and the age and ability of the pupils.

‘Ofsted recognises that marking and feedback to pupils, both written and oral, are important aspects of assessment. However, Ofsted **does not** expect to see any specific frequency, type or volume of marking and feedback; these are for the school to decide through its assessment policy. Marking and feedback should be consistent with that policy, which may cater for different subjects and different age groups of pupils in different ways, in order to be effective and efficient in promoting learning.

‘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.

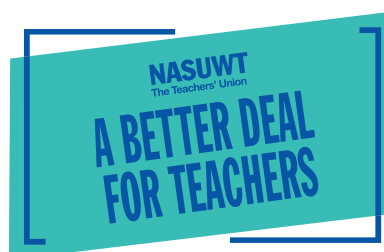
‘If it is necessary for inspectors to identify marking as an area for improvement for a school, they will pay careful attention to the way recommendations are written to ensure that these do not drive unnecessary workload for teachers.

‘It is important that schools take notice of the Ofsted clarification document and that Ofsted continues to train its inspectors so that every school inspection reflects these important clarifications. We are heartened to note that Ofsted is monitoring reports against the clarification information and taking action where necessary, including asking for reports to be rewritten.’

Motivating: Marking should help to motivate pupils to progress. This does not mean always writing in-depth comments or being universally positive: sometimes short, challenging comments or oral feedback are more effective. If the teacher is doing more work than their pupils, this can become a disincentive for pupils to accept challenges and take responsibility for improving their work.

An important element of marking is to acknowledge the work a pupil has done, to value their efforts and achievement, and to celebrate progress. But there are many ways to do this without extensive marking. And too much feedback can take away responsibility from the pupil, detract from the challenge of a piece of work, and reduce long-term retention and resilience-building.

Accepting work that pupils have not checked sufficiently and then providing extensive feedback detracts from pupils’ responsibility for their own learning, particularly in editing and drafting skills. Pupils should be taught and encouraged to check their own work by understanding the success criteria, presented in an age-appropriate way, so that they complete work to the highest standard.



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