



Ticked off with excessive marking?

Every NASUWT member is protected by our Action on marking.

NASUWT Action Instruction – Excessive workload and marking and assessment policies

Members are instructed to refuse to comply with any marking and assessment policy which generates excessive workload and/or has not been agreed with the NASUWT.

Until such time as a policy agreed with the NASUWT is introduced, members will mark and assess pupils in a manner consistent with the principles set out in the Union's guidance.

Implementation guidance



EXCESSIVE WORKLOAD AND MARKING AND ASSESSMENT POLICIES

The NASUWT has produced below advice and guidance on acceptable marking policies and practices within schools. NASUWT members should seek to ensure that they reach agreements on marking that are consistent with this guidance. Where agreement cannot be reached, contact should be made immediately with the NASUWT for further support, advice and guidance.

This guidance is intended to support members in implementing the NASUWT's action short of strike action instruction on marking-related policies. The instruction makes clear that members must not comply with such policies unless they have been agreed with the NASUWT.

In developing this guidance, the NASUWT has taken full account of existing good practice in schools, the expectations of the school accountability regime and research evidence on the ways in which marking and feedback can contribute effectively to pupil progress and achievement.

In summary, the guidance states that:

- schools should take meaningful steps to ensure that marking-related workload burdens are manageable;
- verbal feedback to pupils can be just as valid as written feedback and that written feedback should not necessarily be given greater status in schools' policies;
- there is no need for schools to require that evidence of verbal feedback should be recorded in writing;
- policies should not require teachers to provide detailed written feedback on all occasions when they are reviewing pupils' work or acknowledging their efforts;
- it is not necessary to engage in detailed marking (e.g. 'dialogic', 'deep', 'triple', or 'quality' marking) if this is unnecessary in the professional judgement of teachers;
- any evidence collected through book scrutiny exercises, often referred to as 'book looks', should not be used to form judgements about the effectiveness of teachers' practice; and
- a helpful approximated guide to the reasonableness of marking burdens is the extent to which teachers are able to complete the greater part of their marking during their planning, preparation and assessment (PPA) time.

A checklist is also provided to assist members in assessing the acceptability of their schools' existing marking-related policy and practice.

OFSTED'S EXPECTATIONS

Ofsted's publication, *Ofsted inspection: myths*, confirms Ofsted's expectations of key features of policy and practice in schools.² In relation to marking and feedback, it states:

'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.'

On the specific issue of recording oral feedback given to pupils, the document is clear that:

'...while inspectors will consider how written and oral feedback are used to promote learning, Ofsted does not expect to see any written record of oral feedback provided to pupils by teachers.'

Ofsted inspection: myths further confirms that marking policies and expectations in schools must avoid imposing workload intensive and burdensome requirements on 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.'

NASUWT members should therefore resist any attempt to justify the imposition of onerous or workload intensive marking arrangements on the basis that Ofsted expects such systems to be in place and that schools will suffer detrimental inspection outcomes if they are not.

MONITORING MARKING

Schools may wish to establish arrangements that allow for the quality of marking and its compliance with relevant policies to be monitored. In so far as this information is used to make judgements about the effectiveness of teachers, the NASUWT is clear that this is only acceptable if it has been agreed as evidence to be used for this purpose at the planning stage of the performance management cycle. However, the Union strongly recommends that teachers do not agree to the use of this evidence for this purpose.

Some schools periodically collect samples of pupils' written work to monitor compliance with marking-related policies. Such practices are often described as 'book scrutinies', 'book audits' or 'book looks'. The NASUWT's action short of strike action instructions confirm that any evidence collected through book scrutiny exercises that has not been agreed during the performance management planning meeting cannot be used to form judgements about the professional effectiveness of teachers.

It should also be noted that the DfE Independent Teacher Workload Review Group (Review Group) has stressed that the use of marking for this purpose can undermine its effectiveness for pupils and its manageability for teachers.

'Marking has evolved into an unhelpful burden for teachers, when the time it takes is not repaid in positive impact on pupils' progress. This is frequently because it is serving a different purpose such as demonstrating teacher performance or to satisfy the requirements of other, mainly adult, audiences. Too often, it is the marking itself which is being monitored and commented on by leaders rather than pupil outcomes and progress as a result of quality feedback.' (Paragraph 10)

TACKLING EXCESSIVE MARKING-RELATED WORKLOAD

It is essential that marking, feedback and assessment practices in schools make an effective contribution to reducing excessive workload burdens and ensuring that teachers' time is directed towards activities that support pupils' progress most effectively.

Schools must therefore ensure that marking requirements on teachers are evaluated for their workload impact and recognise that teachers' time is a finite resource that should not be wasted on unproductive marking to the detriment of their entitlement to a meaningful work/life balance. This imperative is set out unequivocally in the Review Group's report.

'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.' (Review Group's emphasis) (Paragraph 25)

'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.' (Paragraph 23)

Marking-related policies must therefore be developed on the basis of a clear understanding of the need to sustain manageable teacher workloads.

'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.' (Paragraph 24)

It is also essential that the workload implications of schools' marking practices and expectations are kept under review.

'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.' (Paragraph 25)

Where reviews of marking-related policies and expectations highlight workload-intensive approaches, schools must discontinue their use and develop appropriate alternatives.

'...if your current approach is unmanageable or disproportionate, stop it and adopt an approach that considers exactly what the marking needs to achieve for pupils. The impact on teacher workload must be taken into account when reviewing, developing and following marking practice and school assessment policies.' (Paragraph 31)

Teachers' planning, preparation and assessment (PPA) time is self-directed time in which teachers have the opportunity to undertake tasks including assessing the work of the pupils for whom they are responsible. The NASUWT is clear that marking therefore represents an entirely appropriate use of PPA time.

The extent to which PPA time is sufficient for teachers to complete the majority of their marking provides a useful approximate guide to the reasonableness of marking burdens. If, despite using PPA time for marking, teachers are required to spend excessive additional time marking pupils' work, this may indicate that burdens are unacceptable and need to be addressed through amendments to schools' marking-related policies and practices.

MARKING-RELATED POLICY AND PRACTICE CHECKLIST

The following checklist is provided to help members ensure that marking-related policies and practices are compliant with the NASUWT's marking instructions and guidance.

The importance of effective approaches to marking and feedback	Yes	No
<p>Marking-related expectations take into account the specific requirements of different subjects and age-phases.</p> <p>Marking-related policies and practices are established on the basis that the sole purpose of marking is to advance pupil progress and outcomes.</p>		
Ofsted's expectations	Yes	No
<p>Expectations about the frequency, type and volume of marking are not justified on the basis that they are requirements of Ofsted inspections.</p>		
Types of marking and feedback	Yes	No
<p>Teachers are not required to indicate in writing when verbal feedback has been to pupils.</p> <p>Teachers are not required to make use of different coloured pen to distinguish marking for different purposes.</p>		
'Deep' marking	Yes	No
<p>'Deep' marking as defined by the Independent Teacher Workload Review Group is used only at the professional discretion of individual teachers.</p>		
Monitoring marking	Yes	No
<p>The outcomes of any scrutiny of teachers' marking are not used to make judgements about their performance or their capability.</p>		
Marking and teachers' professional judgement	Yes	No
<p>Teachers are able to use their professional judgement and discretion to determine appropriate approaches to the use of marking.</p>		
Tackling excessive marking-related workload	Yes	No
<p>Marking requirements on teachers have been evaluated for their workload impact.</p> <p>Marking-related policies confirm that any practices that are found to be unmanageable or disproportionate will be discontinued.</p> <p>Arrangements are in place to ensure that marking-related policies or any proposed changes to these policies will be reviewed for their impact on workload.</p>		



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