3RD EDITION
RESEARCH INTO PRACTICE

REVISED TO INCLUDE RESEARCH FINDINGS & NEW SECTION ON WHOLE-CLASS FEEDBACK

MARK LESS, MARK BETTER!
A HOW-TO GUIDE

Research Schools Network

CHARLES DICKENS RESEARCH SCHOOL

LONDON SOUTH TEACHING SCHOOL ALLIANCE

Mark Less, Mark Better!

A How-To Guide

Contents

1 Introduction

In April 2016, the Charles Dickens Primary School Journal Club met to discuss the EEF's review into the evidence on written marking: *A Marked improvement.*

Some common themes emerged from the discussion. Informed by the review, teaching staff almost unanimously felt that:

- Detailed written marking was not having an impact on pupil outcomes in any way proportionate to the time and effort it took.

- They were often going through the motions to satisfy the perceived demands of a third party, be that Senior Leaders or Ofsted.

- The most powerful feedback they could give to pupils was that given at the point of the work being done.

- A sense of frustration that this just wasn't possible, given the pressures of time and demands of the curriculum.

We considered what marking and feedback would look like in an ideal world and arrived at the following conclusions:

- Feedback would be given to pupils as close as possible to the point at which the work was done.

- We would transfer much of the responsibility for assessment away from the teachers to the pupils themselves.

- The timing of feedback would be moved away from the distance marking completed in the evening, and into the school day.

We then started to think about how we could make those shifts in time and responsibility happen, in order to achieve a positive impact on both teachers' workload and on pupil outcomes.

The Workload Challenge Research Project enabled us to explore some of these possibilities. It also threw up other challenges. What follows in this short booklet is an outline of the practical strategies used by teachers, how these changed over the course of the study and the impact on teacher workload and pupil outcomes.

Jemima Rhys-Evans and Sarah Field.

2 Background and Context

In March 2016, the Department for Education published *Eliminating Unnecessary Workload Around Marking*, a report of the Independent Teacher Workload Review Group. In the report, the chair of the Review Group Dawn Copping argued that three principles should underpin effective marking. It should be:

- **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.*

- **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.*

- **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.*
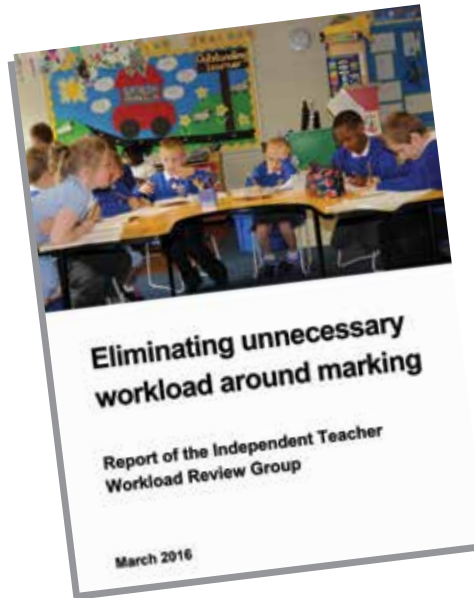
'One message was very clear: marking practice that does not have the desired impact on pupil outcomes is a time-wasting burden for teachers that has to stop.'
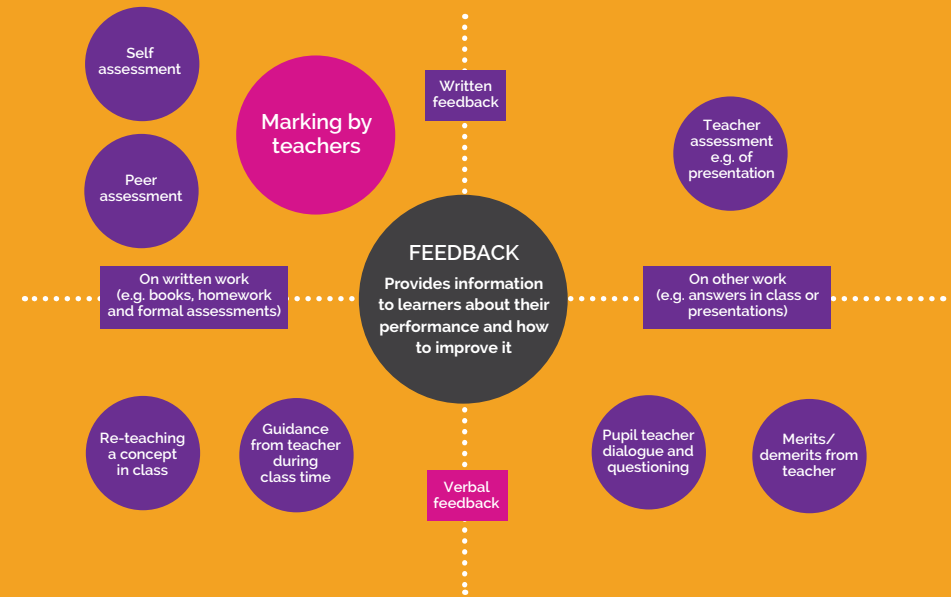
Examples of different forms of feedback from *A Marked Improvement*

Hot on its heels, in April 2016, the EEF published *A Marked Improvement: A Review of the Evidence on Written Marking*.

In this report, a range of feedback models and strategies was explored, looking at the evidence base for each.

Despite finding that *'The quality of existing evidence focused specifically on written marking is low'*, the review was able to draw some conclusions:

- *Careless mistakes should be marked differently to errors resulting from misunderstanding.* Our feeling was that we should better train pupils to check their work and spot these careless mistakes before a teacher looked at it.

- *The use of targets to make marking as specific and actionable as possible is likely to increase pupil progress.*

- *Pupils are unlikely to benefit from marking unless some time is set aside to enable them to consider and respond to it.*

- *Some forms of marking, including acknowledgement marking, are unlikely to enhance pupil progress. A mantra might be that schools should* **mark less** *in terms of the number of pieces of work marked, but* **mark better***.*

'The review found a striking disparity between the enormous amount of effort invested in marking books, and the very small number of robust studies that have been completed to date'

3 The Research Project

In September 2016, the National College of Teaching and Leadership invited schools and groups of schools to apply for funding to conduct research into effective marking practices. Southwark Teaching School Alliance (now London South TSA) was successful in its application and from January to June 2017, eight teachers in five schools across the borough participated in a project exploring the impact - on both teacher workload and pupil outcomes - of moving away from written marking towards verbal feedback.

The study explored how to reduce the burden of written marking, through:

- *Increased and more effective use of self -and peer-assessment. Pupils were explicitly taught how to assess their own and others' work effectively and how to give effective feedback (see Section 6)*

- *Conferencing and verbal feedback instead of written marking. Teachers were asked not to write in pupils' books at all during the study. All feedback was given verbally, either to the whole class, in small groups or one-to-one.*

The aim was not only to reduce teacher workload, but to make it more purposeful. Time previously spent on marking books after school could be used to plan lessons and interventions for the next day in response to pupils' work.

However, two key challenges arose:

- Teachers reported frustration at not being able to write in pupils' books within a lesson, when they ordinarily would have corrected spelling mistakes, illustrated a point with a written example, highlighted sections for improvement, etc.

- Finding time to discuss work with pupils was difficult, especially in classes without additional adults.

Strategies to address these follow in subsequent sections of this booklet, which sets out the 'how-to' of **marking less but marking better,** with references to the published research underpinning the practice.

4 Project Results

The project evaluation was carried out at the University of London Institute of Education, using:

- Entry and exit teacher questionnaires, in which teachers not only reported the number of hours spent on written marking but also on their perceptions of the effectiveness of the marking and of the proportionality of that time with their overall workload.

- Pupil progress data in English and Maths. Progress in Maths was evaluated using age-standardised testing at the beginning and end of the project in the control and intervention classes (using GL Assessment's Progress Tests in Maths).

- Pupil progress in writing was evaluated through moderation sessions at the beginning and end of the project, in both control and intervention groups.

Limitations

Although the project showed that the change in feedback methods resulted in reduced workload with no negative impact on pupil outcomes, the following limitations should be noted:

- Small sample size. The project ran across five schools, with only four submitting complete data sets.

- Time frame. The intervention ran for two half terms. It took a while for teachers to establish new feedback routines, and for children to get used to them. Ideally, a project of this kind would run for at least one complete academic year.

- Contamination from control groups. Some teachers in the control groups started to adopt some of the strategies used by those in the intervention groups, for example increasing their use verbal feedback. Whilst this vote of confidence in the strategies was welcome, it will have impacted on the validity of the data.

Impact on pupil outcomes

There was no measurable difference in progress between the control and intervention groups in either Writing or Maths.

In other words, teachers in the control group spent on average 6.2 hours per week on written marking, with no additional impact on the progress of their pupils. Going back to *Eliminating Unnecessary Workload Around Marking*: '**Marking practice that does not have the desired impact on pupil outcomes is a time-wasting burden for teachers that has to stop.**' Many teachers involved in the project were confident that, over time, a move away from written marking to more immediate and direct feedback would increase pupil progress.

Teacher perceptions of the impact on pupils

Five of the seven teachers in the intervention group were more likely to agree post-intervention than pre-intervention that:

- The change in marking practice had a positive impact on their pupils and their levels of progress.
- Their current marking practice was more effective post-intervention than it was pre-intervention.
- Their current marking practices motivated pupils.
- They were confident that pupils understood their feedback.

Impact on teacher workload

The table below shows that during the intervention, teachers spent on average 6.2 hours less per week on written marking and 3.45 hours on all feedback than pre-intervention. Moreover, as feedback was being given directly to children, those hours fell within the school day, rather than continuing into the evening.

- **Four of the seven teachers in the intervention group said the change of methods had made a significant positive difference to their workload, and three felt it made a small positive difference.**

- **All were more likely to agree post-intervention (than pre-intervention) that:**

- **the time spent on marking was proportionate to their overall workload**

- **their marking practice was time effective**

- **the time spent on written marking was worthwhile in terms of impact on pupil outcomes**

The project was not without its difficulties and challenges, and strategies to address these follow in subsequent sections of this booklet, which sets out the 'how-to' of marking less but marking better, with references to the published research underpinning the practice.

Greater analysis can be found in the formal evaluation report from UCL institute of Education *Reducing Teacher Workload* (Southwark Teaching School Alliance)

	Written marking after the lesson (hrs)	Verbal feedback (hrs)	Total time spent on all feedback per week (hrs)
Pre-intervention	6.9	1.85	8.75
During intervention	0.7	4.6	5.3
Total time saved	6.2 hours		3.45 hours

Impact on workload

Teachers' perceptions of the impact on pupils

5 How to Mark Less #1: Live Marking

Classroom Practice

One of the main outcomes of the study was that many teachers were frustrated by no marking at all. Teachers felt that while they were having conversations with the pupils about their work, it would be useful to write in the pupil's books any changes or comments made in conjunction with the pupils. They wanted to be able to correct small errors in grammar or spelling; to write out an example for pupils to use as a model or simply to highlight an area for improvement.

Following the end of the project, many teachers therefore adapted their practice and incorporated *Live Marking* into their range of strategies: marking within the lesson in order to give pupils immediate feedback.

Advantages of Live Marking included:

- **Assessment for Learning:** Teachers reported feeling far more confident about knowing how the pupils and groups of pupils were doing: how much re-teaching was necessary, how much consolidation and who was ready to move on.

- **Time management:** Since the marking was completed within in the lesson, time was available at the end of the day to plan lessons in response to the pupils' work.

- **Clarity of feedback:** Since the pupils and adults had spoken to each other, everyone was clear about exactly what the feedback meant and what they needed to do next. This is in contrast to the distance marking model, where pupils often reported not really understanding what the teacher meant and, in more cases than we care to believe, not being able to decipher the teacher's handwriting!

Potential pitfalls (and how to avoid them)

- **Wasted learning time:** There is a risk here that we end up with pupils lined up at the teacher's desk, waiting for their books to be marked, losing learning time and getting bored in the process. This was not the case at all. Instead, most teachers described how their role during lessons changed as they spent more time bouncing around the classroom reviewing learning and giving instant feedback rather than working with one group.

- **Superficial feedback:** There is also a risk that in an attempt to 'bounce' around as many pupils as possible, the feedback that each child receives is superficial and focuses on corrections, rather than deeper understanding or improvements. This highlights the importance of using *Live Marking* as one of several feedback strategies, alongside more in-depth conferencing, distance marking (see below) and self- and peer-assessment.

- **Loss of time for guided groups:** This is not to say that there is no place for focused, guided group work. In lessons where this is needed, strategies other than *Live Marking* need to be used. Self-and peer-assessment (see Section 6) or Whole-class Feedback (see Section 8) may be just as effective in this instance. Moreover, Distance Marking - the process of giving a pupil written feedback when they are not there - may still be appropriate for specific tasks, for example in-depth, precision marking of a piece of extended writing. It is important to remember that Live Marking is just one of a range of strategies.

What the research says

There is little research evidence to suggest that post-task distance marking is successful, despite it being the dominant marking practice in the UK (Elliot et al, 2016). It does not engage pupils in the feedback process, does not allow for misconceptions to be addressed and can lead to problems of miscommunication (Carless, 2006). The EEF review lends cautious support to the idea that more immediate feedback is effective: *"The suggestion that faster feedback is more valuable is consistent with studies of verbal feedback that indicate that learners find it easier to improve if their mistakes are corrected quickly".*

Example of using Live Marking to give a written model

Example of using Live Marking to scaffold understanding

Example of using Live Marking to check for understanding

6 How to Mark Less #2: Get the pupils to do it

Self- and Peer-Assessment

One of the strategies to support a reduction in written marking was to enable pupils to self- and peer-assess their own work more effectively. This was important for reasons aligned to the principles outlined in *Eliminating Unnecessary Workload Around Marking,* which stated that marking should be:

- **Meaningful:** If pupils were able to spot and iron out minor slips and errors in advance of the teachers seeing their work, teacher feedback could be more tightly focused on how to improve their work (in Writing) or addressing genuine misconceptions (in Maths).

- **Motivating:** Peer and self-marking within a lesson enabled pupils to receive immediate feedback on how they had done.

- **Manageable:** The marking burden on teachers was reduced.

Although most of us in the project already used peer- and self-marking strategies, none of us were confident that we were using them in ways that were either meaningful or motivating.

How does self- and peer-assessment impact on teacher workload?

Much written marking, especially in Maths, involves simply checking whether an answer is correct or not. If we can develop pupils' skills to self-mark accurately, honestly and - for peer-marking - kindly, that could have a huge impact on teacher workload. For example, if it takes a teacher two minutes to mark each of thirty books, that's one of those precious hours at the end of the day already gone. But if the pupils can do it, even in double the time, that's still only four minutes at the end of a lesson. That then leaves the teacher with time at the end of the day to check who has understood (or not) - and then plan a meaningful follow-on task as well.

What other benefits could it have?

- **Peer- and self-marking gives pupils immediate feedback.** They know to what degree they have met the Learning Objective. If it happens nearer the mid-point of the lesson ('Let's check to see how we're getting on…') that also gives the teacher an opportunity to intervene where necessary. We have all had the same demoralising experience of opening a pupil's book at the end of the day and finding several pages of incorrect calculations. Far better to catch those misconceptions early and address them within the lesson.

- **Peer- and self-marking requires pupils to check their own work first.** Let's give the pupils a bit more responsibility here. In *Eliminating Unnecessary Workload Around Marking*, a key finding was that *'Accepting work that pupils have not checked sufficiently and then providing extensive feedback detracts from pupils' responsibility for their own learning'*.

- **Peer- and self-marking allows pupils to reflect on what they need to do next.** Metacognitive strategies have a positive impact on pupil progress, according to the EEF toolkit. The Guidance Report on *Metacognition and Self-regulated Learning* includes a recommendation that "Pupils will need timely, effective feedback and strategies to be able to judge accurately how

effectively they are learning." Self- and peer-assessment allows pupils to reflect on how to improve their learning and helps to develop those metacognitive skills.

Research on peer marking

Black and Wiliam (1998) state that feedback including peer to peer, teacher and self-motivated feedback have significant positive effects on learning across all areas.

How does it work?

Models: What a good one looks like

Pupils were given concrete examples of what a successful completed piece of work should look like so that they were clear about their end goal. This example should be analysed so that pupils understand not just the whole but also the constituent parts.

Editing pens or highlighters

During the intervention, we designed rules for all pupils to abide by when giving and receiving feedback to and from their peers. The pupils used editing pens or highlighters to identify where they had met their learning objective and to show the changes they had made to their work. Throughout the research period we ensured that the pupils who had written the work had 'the power of the pen' to ensure that they were happy with the changes that were being made to it.

Self- and peer-assessment in Maths

In Maths, pupils were given the answers to problems towards the end of the lesson, either as sheets on a table, at a marking station elsewhere in the classroom, or displayed on a board. Some used the answer sheets earlier on in the lesson to check that they were on the right lines before continuing. Where they had not grasped the concept being taught, they were able to receive adult or peer support immediately. If they had made minor slips in calculations, they could correct these. If they had got the majority of the work correct, they could continue and then move on to an extension activity. Self- and peer-marking of more open-ended problem-solving was trickier as there was often no single correct answer. Different teachers found different ways of resolving this: by building in time at the end of a lesson for groups of pupils to compare their answers and pick apart differences, or by asking pupils to give a short presentation at the end of the lesson on their findings and then receiving verbal feedback from the teacher and other pupils.

Self- and peer-marking in Maths during the lesson meant that at the end of the day it was the work of a matter of minutes for a teacher to see exactly what each pupil in the class needed to do next.

Self- and peer-assessment in writing

A similar approach was possible for writing exercises where the task was fairly closed, such as teaching a specific writing skill. For more open writing tasks, individual targets and scaffolded success criteria enabled pupils

to self- and peer-assess their own work. In the six weeks before the intervention began, pupils were taught explicitly how to use these to assess the effectiveness of a piece of writing. This required a lot of modelling, with visualisers being particularly helpful to demonstrate the process of assessing against success criteria. When used to share good examples of work, visualisers also reinforced pupils' understanding of What a Good One Looks Like.

It also became clear that many pupils did not like other pupils writing in their books. Once the study was over, teachers decided that when were peer-assessing, pupils would give their feedback verbally, and the recipient of the feedback would record it in their books (eg My friend said that I should remember to use a comma after a fronted adverbial).

Some pupils also struggled to generate meaningful feedback for themselves and their peers, even with reference to the success criteria. To help them with this, they were initially given a choice of three options. For example, in a Year 1 class these might be:

- 'Next time, I will remember finger spaces.'
- 'Next time, I will use capital letters for names.'
- 'Next time, I will use a noun phrase.'

Furthermore, these reflections and next steps were provided on a choice of pre-printed labels ('Next time, I will…') so that pupils only needed to identify their next step, not write out the entire sentence. Older pupils were able to assess their own work effectively, once routines had become embedded:

Example of self-assessment in writing using success criteria
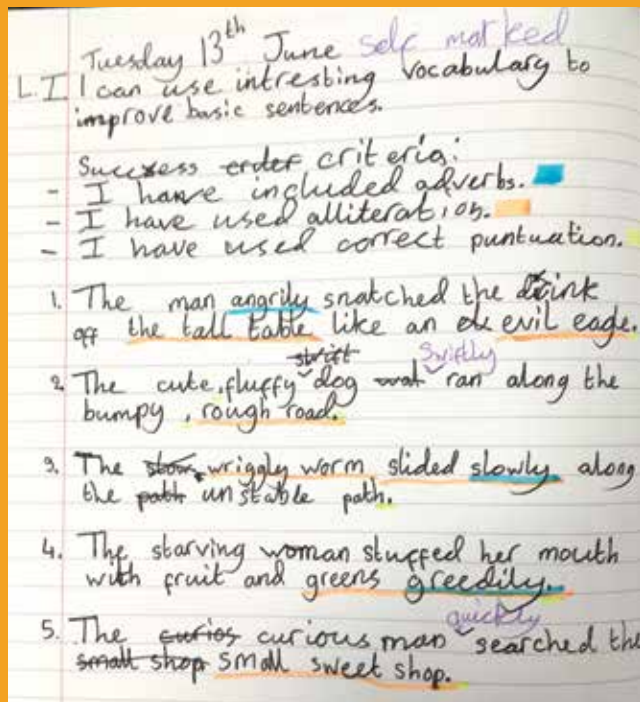
Example of reflective self-assessment in Writing
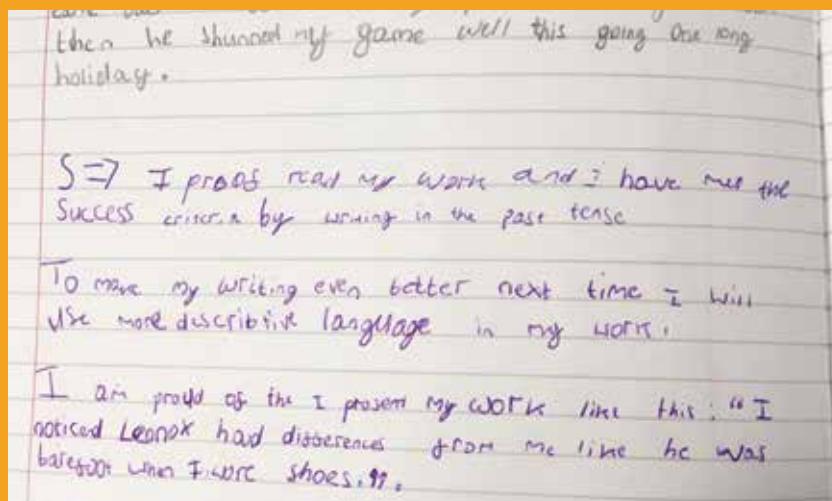
What are the necessary preconditions?

Of course none of this will really work unless a culture of error has been established - that getting things wrong is fine and helps us to learn. If pupils are hiding their errors when self-marking, the teacher is not receiving the information they need about how to help them progress. Pupils need to be taught that making mistakes provides an opportunity to learn and to be open about this. This can be particularly true for pupils who have been identified - and who identify themselves - as clever. For some of these pupils, maintaining this image, both to themselves and to others, is more important than the learning itself. Likewise pupils who often see others achieve more success than them can decide that 'I can't do it' and automatically mark all of their work incorrect.

It is important to spend some time developing classroom cultures and pupils' abilities to assess their own and others' work honestly, openly, accurately and kindly. The following resources and ideas can help:

- Carol Dweck's *Mindset: Changing the Way You Think to Fulfil Your Potential* is the go-to text for encouraging a more positive Growth Mindset.

- Picture books such as *Giraffes Can't Dance* by Giles Andreae and *Stuck* by Oliver Jeffers both reinforce ideas of effort and the possibility of change.

- The short video *Austin's Butterfly* which celebrates the power of precise feedback and perseverance.

- Setting pupils an impossible task and recording their responses to it. Will they give up? Will they encourage others?

- Displays celebrating errors and how pupils have addressed and overcome them ('At first I couldn't do this, but then...) and using key Growth Mindset vocabulary. Many examples of these can be found on the internet.

7 How to Mark Better: Verbal feedback and Conferencing

The starting point for the intervention came as a result of teachers feeling that feedback that they could sit down and discuss with pupils was much more powerful than that given through distance marking. Pupils understood their goals or objectives, understood how to make progress towards them and were more motivated to do so.

Small group and one-to-one Conferencing

We also (post-intervention) drew a distinction between the shallower Live Marking where the teacher tried to check in with as many pupils as possible and the more in- depth conferencing. This would come about in response to the teacher reading a pupil's work at the end of the day and working out carefully what the pupil needed to do next.

Then, as soon as possible, the teacher would meet with the pupil (or groups of pupils where there were common next steps or misconceptions) and spend time giving more detailed feedback.

Most teachers identified small-group or one to one conferencing as having the single biggest impact on pupil progress. It enabled pupils to fully understand what to do next, whether that involved revisiting previous learning to ensure solid foundations, giving pupils opportunities to consolidate their understanding through increased practice, or moving them on to a new challenge.

Whole class feedback

Where common misconceptions arose, the most effective way to address them can be through whole class feedback, often at the start of the next lesson. If marking policies have been adapted to free up teachers' time at the end of the day, this provides opportunities for more responsive teaching, tailored to the needs of an individual class. For more on this see Section 8.

Types of feedback

However, they also were aware that the quality of verbal feedback was important. Much of this was dependent on teachers' subject knowledge and their ability to identify the next step for a pupil or to unpick a misconception.

Hattie and Yates (2013) identify three types of feedback, depending on the developmental level of the pupil:

- When learners are first receiving feedback they will need more corrective feedback, information and guidance on what is wrong and how to put it right. They will also need assurance that they are doing the right thing.

- As learners become more competent when responding to feedback they will continue to need assurance, but will also need to be challenged with suggestions for how to improve things or do things differently.

- When learners are highly competent, it is the role of the person delivering feedback to support the learners' self- regulation and encourage learners to extend their learning and apply it in different ways.

We therefore needed to consider not only the type of feedback, but how it was delivered.

Meaningful praise

Building on the work in developing pupils' positive attitudes to errors and Growth Mindset inclinations, teachers ensured

that feedback was motivational yet related directly and specifically to the learning.

For example, instead of using what Black describes as a "bland and unhelpful comment" (2003,p.44-45) such as "Well done!", We should say, "Well done! You are beginning to use capital letters correctly." During the intervention, teachers used these examples of praise identified by Clarke (2014, pp. 22):

- Well done! You're learning to...
- Good! It's making you think.
- Your brain is growing.
- You're good at this because you spend time doing it.
- If you could already do it or it was easy then you wouldn't be learning anything.
- Your skills have really improved. Do you remember how hard it was last week?
- You kept going!
- You mean you can't do it **yet!**"

Changing "I can't do it" into "I can't do it *yet*", reinforces that the learning process takes time, effort and practice (Clarke, 2014).

Research on praise:

Harks et al (2013) suggests that teachers should always deliver feedback from a motivational point of view. However Clarke (2003) suggests that teachers should be careful about using praise too often. Clarke (2003) suggests that praise can often leave the less able pupils feeling demoralised while the more able students can get complacent.

8 Whole-class feedback

Whole-class feedback can be an excellent time-saving strategy, allowing for pupils to receive high quality feedback which they can act upon immediately.

Although whole-class feedback was less used as a strategy during the research project, it has subsequently become more and more popular. It is particularly effective if assessment has not been possible during the lesson, for example if the teacher has been focused on delivering a guided group. It is therefore a distance feedback approach, but one focused on immediate next steps for pupils. These next steps are absolutely key, with teachers able to use the time freed up from the reduction in written marking, to plan activities for pupils to complete in response to feedback.

After the lesson, the teacher goes through the books and makes notes about the progress of all children, often sorting them into three groups:

- struggled and need more support

- understood but could do with some consolidation work

- ready to move on

A next step is identified for each group of pupils, to be completed at the start of the next lesson. The teacher also notes both common errors, misconceptions and examples of excellent work to share.

This is fed back to the whole class, rather than individually. For example, this Year 4 class found a lesson in which they were required to round to 10, 100 and 1000 challenging, with nine children not meeting the LI. The recording (see Section 9) and whole-class feedback for this lesson might look like this:

Example of whole-class feedback

Instructions to the class for next steps - displayed on board

Whole-class feedback - Maths 17.09.19: rounding to 10, 100, 1000		
Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
Come and work with Mr B	Round the following to the nearest 10, 100 and 1000 a)2,278 b) 5,459 c) 3,501 d) 7,864 e) 12,355 f) 23,488 g) 55,555	A whole number rounded to the nearest 10 is 430. What is the smallest number it could be? The largest? A whole number rounded to the nearest 100 is 2300. What is the smallest number it could be? The largest?

In this example from an English lesson, the teacher has identified common errors of presentation and spelling. They want to encourage pupils to identify their own mistakes and so asks everyone to check and correct this. Mistakes with apostrophes have also been identified and the teacher wants to ascertain if these are misconceptions (genuine misunderstandings) or errors (slips). In the whole-class feedback they therefore also include a challenge to use an apostrophe correctly in two further sentences. The pupils' response to this will inform future planning:

An alternative example of whole-class feedback

Date & LI: I can write descriptive sentences	
What Went Well	Even Better If
Good use of vocab Good use of modelled sentence structures Secure sentence demarcation	Date and LI underlined!
Examples to share (photo/visualiser/photocopy) GH - vocab & accuracy KL - presentation CV - enthusiasm!	SPAG spellings: colossal thousands rough similar which indescribably paradise

Next steps:
Misconceptions - apostrophes of possession - almost all pupils
Consolidation - n/a see above
Challenge – GH, DH, RA, MN: rewrite sentences using more varied sentence starters - adverbials of place?

Instructions to the class for next steps - displayed on board

> **Well done Class 4 – you did a great job writing descriptive sentences about a dragon!**
>
> **Please now complete the following**
>
> 1. Underline your date and LI using a ruler
>
> 2. Check and correct the spelling of the following words, using your purple pen
>   1. colossal
>   2. thousands
>   3. rough
>   4. similar
>   5. which
>   6. indescribably
>   7. paradise
>
> 3. Write two more descriptive sentences about your dragon, using an apostrophe of possession.
>
>   Eg The dragon's breath....
>
> 4. GH, DH, RA, MN: improve your sentences by varying your openers. Where is your dragon? Try using adverbials of place!

In this example from a History lesson, most pupils have achieved the LI and are ready to move on. The teacher has identified three common errors which these children can work on (capital letters for country names, spelling of the word wealthy and weaknesses in presentation), while three children complete their work and the teacher works with the two children who have not accessed the learning. The teacher has also identified an example of excellence to share with the class - in this instance excellence in presentation as this is an area of need for the class.

There are many different templates for whole-class feedback available on the internet, including subject-specific versions.

What the research says

Whole-class feedback is a strategy well-aligned to the Meaningful, Motivating and Manageable mantra of *Eliminating Unnecessary Workload*… as well as Dylan Wiliam's precept that "Feedback should be more work for the recipient than the donor". The EEF's *A Marked Improvement* found that "Pupils are unlikely to benefit from marking unless some time is set aside to enable pupils to consider and respond to marking"

9 Record-keeping and evidence

How will anyone know that I am doing my job properly without detailed written marking?

For some teachers and for most of us at some time, extensive written marking is a way of showing that we are doing our job properly. It may not have an impact, it may take hours and hours, but it is clear that we have celebrated successes and identified areas for improvement. And therefore we are good teachers.

Without written marking in pupils' books, the evidence of the teacher's impact should come from the progress in books. For example, if a pupil could not successfully do two-digit by one-digit multiplication on Monday, but then could do it on Tuesday, there is evidence of progress. Something must have happened – an intervention group, some one-to-one conferencing at the start of the next lesson – to help that pupil to make progress. Alternatively, it might be that on Tuesday, the teacher has decided that the pupil was not ready for two-digit by one-digit multiplication and planned for the pupil to practise one-digit by one-digit using repeated addition on a number line. What there should not be is repeated failure for the pupil.

It was initially necessary for the teachers to keep records of each pupil's attainment in the lesson. Who got it? Who 'sort of' got it but could to with some more practice to consolidate? Who is ready to move on? This record-keeping served to support the teacher's assessment and their planning of next steps for individual pupils and groups of pupils. As the project went on, and after participating schools started to roll-out subsequent changes to their feedback policies in the following academic year, this record-keeping underwent a process of change. Teachers became more familiar with and habituated to the idea of assessing pupils' learning and planning their next steps, rather than marking their books. They gained confidence in this as a process of improving pupil outcomes, rather than proving their own competence and dedication. Some teachers continued, some developed their own systems and some did away with them altogether. The paperwork became less important than ensuring that all pupils received feedback necessary for progress.

Use of assessment for learning and the regular monitoring of books was key to ensuring that all learning activities were pitched so that they would be challenging for all pupils.

Examples of monitoring/assessment books documenting pupils' progress towards their learning objective:

X LO met
\ LO partially met
- LO not met

It also serves as a record of who has had verbal feedback from the teacher. Is there a pupil who is consistently OK-ish and is therefore slipping under the radar?
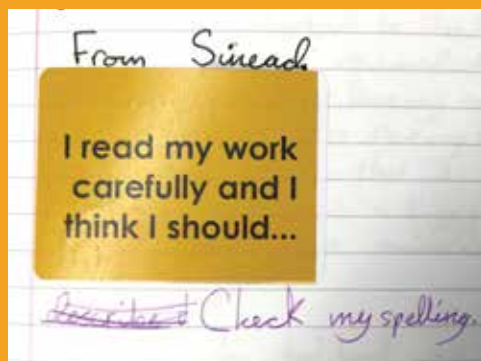
There also needed to be some record in pupils books of when they have conferenced with a teacher. This helps a teacher to see if there is a pupil with whom they have not conferenced. It also reminds the pupil (and teacher) what the specific feedback was. We've all been in the position of giving the same piece of feedback to a pupil over and over again (Please check your capital letters and full stops) without it having any impact at all. If a teacher finds themselves repeating the feedback, might it be that the pupil needs some re-teaching? In which case, the teacher will need to plan an extra piece for work for that pupil or, more likely, group of pupils/whole class. It is also important to differentiate between whether feedback was given by a teacher or a pupil, to monitor the quality of feedback. Stickers can be helpful for this.
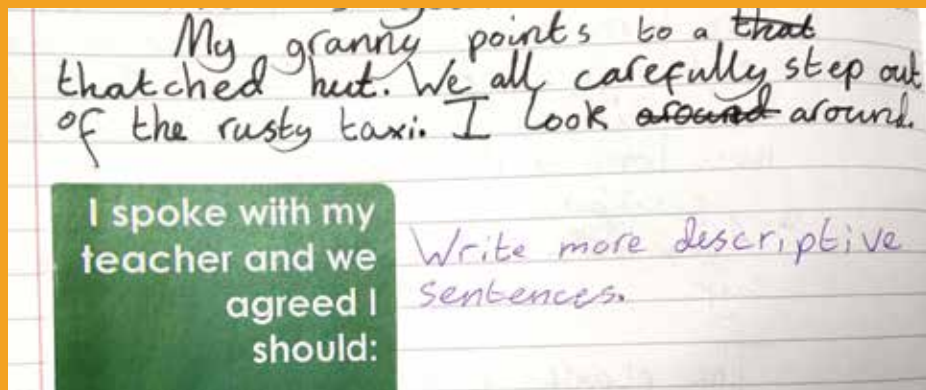
Example of stickers to record feedback

It is important to emphasise that these stickers were not designed to satisfy the demands of third party observers of pupils' books, but genuinely to support pupils and teachers by recording the content of the feedback. And just as with the record-keeping, as teachers became more confident in the new ways of assessing pupils' work and giving feedback, so these stickers became less important and eventually disappeared.

Example of self-assessment sticker

10 Implications: be prepared for everything to change!

None of the elements of this approach is new. However, using them successfully to reduce teacher workload and increase the impact of feedback on pupil outcomes is rather more complicated. The more we thought about it, the greater the implications for everything else going on in the classroom: planning, lesson structure, monitoring and accountability.

How can I find the time to conference with each and every pupil?

One of the greatest challenges for Live Marking and regular conferencing with pupils is finding time in the day. This will be particularly difficult for those teachers without support staff. Being generally resourceful, teachers can identify moments throughout the day to carve out time: a 'soft-start' from 8:45 – 9:05 as pupils arrive for the day but before lessons; assembly time; end-of-the-day story time, with the story being read by a teaching assistant, a parent volunteer or an expressive pupil; handwriting practice after lunch. However, none of these feel hugely satisfactory.

Lesson Structure

The most successful and sustainable way to find time for this conferencing and verbal feedback was to change the structure of each lesson, moving away from the traditional three-parter. Instead, the lesson might start with whole class or small group feedback, moving into new learning and application and then mid-lesson or end-of-lesson review points to address any common misconceptions. In addition, the teacher circulated throughout the lesson giving constant verbal feedback and written scaffolds where necessary.

And if conferencing can be planned into the weekly sequence of lessons, so much the better. For example, instead of five English lessons per week, four lessons plus one for conferencing, feedback and response supports the model well.

Planning

There are also implications for planning. Learning Objectives and Success Criteria need to be clear, simple and easy to assess. For example, "I can use descriptive language" is too vague. Better would be "I can use adjectives, similes and ambitious vocabulary". Planning mid-lesson stops allows pupils to check that they are on the right lines (more relevant in Maths) and that they are incorporating the key elements set out in the Success Criteria (more relevant in Writing).

Success Criteria

For every lesson, where appropriate, teachers created clear Success Criteria which broke down the steps to meet the Learning Objective. Pupils were given the opportunity to review their learning throughout the lesson.

Example of Success Criteria in English:

L.I. I can use a range of punctuation		
	I think	My partner/teacher thinks
I can use possessive apostrophes correctly		
I can use commas in a list.		
I can use full stops and capital letters correctly		

Example of Success Criteria in Maths:

L.I. I can use column addition		
	I think	My partner/teacher thinks
Line up the digits carefully		
Starting with the units add up each column		
Carry over any tens/hundreds to the next column		
Check your answer		

Research on Success Criteria

Sadler (1989) suggests that there are certain things that students must know in order to make feedback effective: students must know what a successful end-goal looks like, how their current performance relates to the successful end-goal and what to do to close the gap between their current performance and the end-goal (Nicol and McFarlane-Dick, 2006)

Mid-lesson learning stops/mini plenaries

Mid-lesson learning stops (also known as mini plenaries), allow pupils to review their work during the lesson rather than at the end when there is no time to edit mistakes and make improvements. For mid-lesson learning stops to be effective, the learning objective and success criteria have to be clear and challenging yet achievable. Once the pupils have done some work, they are stopped and asked to review their work with a partner and highlight where they have met the learning objective. They then have the rest of the lesson to make any changes to their work and ensure that they have met the objective. Mid-lesson learning stops were implemented to enable pupils to review their learning often, track their progress towards their end goal and make any changes along the way.

Sample: lesson plans with mid-lesson learning stops

LO	Main teaching	Mid lesson learning stop	Plenary
I can use a range of punctuation accurately Success criteria: · **Full Stops** · **Commas** · **Question marks** · **Exclamation marks**	Recap with the pupils that they will be writing to Julie Mallet, head of the Peckham Townscape Initiative, to give their opinion on what she should do to improve Peckham town Centre. Show them the good example that we created as a class and get them to recall, in pairs, the features of a letter. Model to the pupils how to use their plan to write their letter and include the variety of punctuation they are expected to use.	Stop the pupils after 20 minutes of writing. Choose a name from the pot and display the pupils' work on the board. The pupil has power of the pen and you work as partner suggesting changes to work focusing on s/c and picking up on any obvious spelling errors the pupil should know. Along with the pupil identify one strength and one area for development and note it down on their work. All pupils to work with a partner to read though work and follow procedure modelled on the board. Swap partners and repeat and then spend the rest of the lesson (10minutes) addressing the area for development.	Stop the pupils with 5 minutes to spare and ask them what their favourite improvement was. Review their improvements alongside their partner and choose their favourite. Choose names from the pot and get 3 pupils to share their ideas.
	All pupils to write letter to Julie Mallett. Differentiated success criteria (. ! ?) for Z, W, H, A, Ke Word mats for Lo, Ke, Z, W, A, H Ca TA and T to circulate Blue and Green table giving feedback focused on the success criteria.	TA to work with W and Ke supporting the conversation. T to work with Li and Sa extending them to use more complex sentence structures.	

Starter	LO	Main teaching			Plenary
Start 26 -5 /3 *4 +8 What number did you end up with?	I can add 4 digit numbers using the column method **SC:** Line the digits accurately Begin with the units column Add each column up Carry any tens to the next column.	Show the pupils a sum on the board 1324 + 1256. Ask the pupils how to find the answer and elicit success criteria. Model lining the digits accurately, begin with the units column, add each column up, carry any tens to the next column. Get the pupils to work on their whiteboards to solve 2332 + 5182= watch the pupils carefully for misconceptions. Send pupils to table to answer 6 questions similar to the ones from the board. All pupils to do 6 sums, no carrying. Direct any additional adults to the pupils who are finding it difficult. *After 10 minutes stop the pupils and reveal the answers to the 6 calculations, get the pupils to tick the ones they got correct. TA to support any pupils who may find this difficult.* *Explain to the pupils that they must choose their challenge, if they found it easy they should choose super or supersonic challenge, if they struggled they should stick with challenge. Remind the pupils that real learning takes place when things are difficult.*			How can we use what we know about column addition to help us solve this subtraction calculation? 2453-1521
		Challenge: 10 sums adding up 4 digits no borrowing. **SC:** Line the digits accurately Begin with the units column Add each column up	**Super challenge:** 10 sums adding up with borrowing **SC:** Line the digits accurately Begin with the units column Add each column up Carry any tens to the next column.	**Supersonic challenge:** 6 sums adding up with borrowing in all columns. SSSChallenge: What is the highest number you can make using these numbers and signs. 1536, 15633, 3744, 34792, 57494, 56385 + + = (TA to support) **SC:** Line the digits accurately Begin with the units column Add each column up Carry any tens to the next column.	
		After 20 minutes give pupils the answers and get them to tick their work. Get pupils to write their PR and go back and correct any incorrect answers. Pupils have the remainder of the lesson to continue on to the next challenge or seek help if they have misconceptions (T and TA to watch out for pupils to support during this time).			

Research into mid-lesson stops

Clarke (2014) advocates the use of more immediate feedback as she believes it is more effective. She suggests that teachers should conduct a constant review of their learners' work through mid-lesson learning stops rather than waiting until the end to avoid learners having to go back and redo their finished piece of work.

Presentation: A word of warning!

Since the research project began, pupils and teachers noticed the presentation in books slipping. To try to combat this, we made sure that pupils knew their books will be looked at often by adults and should be presented neatly and to a high standard.

Book Monitoring: implications for leadership teams

If your school has decided to reduce written marking, and explore other feedback strategies, Senior Leaders should be prepared for the changes in pupils' books when it comes to book looks, monitoring and work scrutinies. They will need to be aware that they will see less teacher writing and more self- and peer-assessment. As ever, the focus of monitoring should be the progress that the pupils are making in their books. And if teachers are responding on a daily basis to what the pupils have done, and they have the time to plan meaningful follow-on activities, the progress should be there to see.

CPD

In order to implement any change in feedback policies in schools, a significant amount of CPD time will need to be given over. Teachers and additional adults will need training on several key areas:

- Developing classroom cultures and growth mindsets.
- Effective use of peer- and self-assessment.
- How to Live Mark within a lesson.
- Effective verbal feedback and conferencing.
- Identifying pupils' next steps.

Parents

It is vital to communicate any change of approach to parents in order to maintain strong, trusting and supportive relationships. Parents can be invited in to see the changes in their children's books and encouraged to talk to them about how they feel about the reduction of written marking.

Ofsted

Sean Harford, Ofsted's National Director, Education, says the following in the Ofsted Mythbusters document:

'… inspectors should not report on marking practice, or make judgements on it, other than whether it follows the school's assessment policy. Inspectors will also not seek to attribute the degree of progress that pupils have made to marking that they might consider to be either effective or ineffective.

Finally, inspectors will not make recommendations for improvement that involve marking, other than when the school's marking/assessment policy is not being followed by a substantial proportion of teachers; this will then be an issue for the leadership and management to resolve.'

Mike Sheridan, Ofsted's Regional Director for London offers further clarification here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pU3JQt

11 Pupil voice

At the end of the project, we canvassed the views of pupils. A summary of their feelings around the replacement of written marking with live marking, verbal feedback, conferencing and self- and peer-assessment follows:

Positives	Negatives
• I like seeing what other pupils in the class are doing, and helping them get better. • I like the stickers. • I like the power of the pen. • I often don't read/understand written marking. • I know what to do when the teacher speaks to me. • I enjoy the conversation with my teacher. • I am better at checking my work. • I can show improvements immediately. • I can change groups according to targets, I'm not always in ….. group.	• I don't like people overhearing what the teacher says to me – I prefer private feedback. • I sometimes find it difficult to think of next steps. • I feel like I am doing less work to make time for marking/editing/reflecting. • I like knowing which group I am in.

Of particular interest is the children's perceptions of improved Assessment for Learning (though of course they would not use that terminology themselves) and of greater responsiveness by the teacher to the work within the lesson. I.e. the quality of feedback they are receiving is helping them to improve, and the teacher is responding more rapidly to the feedback given by the pupils.

In general, the feedback from higher attaining pupils was more negative. They felt that they did less work to make time to edit, they didn't feel challenged and they didn't like receiving their feedback in front of other pupils.

12 Conclusion

In conclusion, our suggestions for how we can all **mark less but mark better** are to use a combination of the following strategies:

- Live marking within a lesson, both written and verbal.

- Self- and peer-assessment within a lesson.

- Whole-class feedback.

- In depth one-to-one or small group conferencing with each pupil once a week.

- Distance marking, where appropriate.

The key principles underlying these recommendations are:

- Ensuring that teachers are able to teach responsively and make best use of their time after school in planning meaningful activities for pupils.

- Ensuring that all feedback is focused on helping pupils to make progress and not for the benefit of third party observers.

- Ensuring that teachers use their professional judgement and curriculum knowledge to decide what each pupil needs to do next to make progress.

- Developing pupils as owners of their own learning, with high expectations for themselves and an understanding that errors help them to learn.

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14 Appendix 1

EXAMPLE OF LIVE FEEDBACK POLICY

Feedback – working document

Feedback Policy

The purpose of feedback and assessment

a) to inform the teacher of a child's attainment and therefore to inform future planning

b) to inform a child of how well they have done and what they need to do next

c) to motivate a child through celebrating success

Principles:

- There is a consistent and manageable method of feedback, assessment and pupil response throughout the school.

- Work is assessed promptly and feedback given as close as possible to the time of the work being completed, including within the lesson.

- All adults working with the children are involved in giving feedback.

- Children are given opportunities to respond feedback and to make improvements to their work.

- Clear strategies for improvement are given.

- Feedback and assessment are used to inform future planning and target-setting.

Work is assessed and feedback given in a variety of ways:

- Live feedback within a lesson

- Small-group and one-to-one conferencing after a lesson

- Distance written feedback after a lesson

- Whole class feedback

- Self- and peer-assessment

Live feedback within a lesson

- Live marking allows a teacher to check that each child has the correct level of challenge: misconceptions can be identified and addressed, small errors corrected and additional stretch can be given where appropriate.

- Live marking is time-efficient and reduces the need for distance marking at the end of the day. This is turn frees up time to plan for the next day.

- Live marking can be written or verbal.

- If a child has needed help within the lesson, the adult giving the help will indicate this by initialising the work. This will support the teacher's summative assessment at the end of each term.

Small-group and one-to-one conferencing after a lesson

- A conversation with a child or group of children about their work can be more effective than written marking as both adults and children develop an unambiguous shared understanding of the next steps.

Distance written feedback

- When immediate feedback cannot be given, work is assessed later to inform future planning and provide feedback to children.

- Teachers exercise professional judgement about the level of written marking that is required. This varies according to age group, subject and task.

- Lengthy written marking is not a proxy for effective feedback.

Whole class feedback

- This works when similar feedback can be given to the whole class: a common misconception or shared next step.

- Whole class feedback is also helpful to model the feedback process and support self- and peer-assessment. Marking one piece of children's work as a group/class also teaches particular points at the same time. Another strategy is to show two pieces of work with the same title, and discuss their differences.

- After this, children then mark against a checklist (written or oral) of requirements such as features of a genre or a good descriptive sentence.

Self-marking

- Children mark their own work in purple pen and have opportunities to correct as they go along.

- Children are given answer sheets or use Success Criteria to ensure accuracy of marking.

- When self-marking, children include a reflective comment on their work. Eg 'I remembered my capital letters and full stops. Next time I will try to use more adjectives', 'I can add fractions when they have the same denominator'.

- When work is self-marked, teachers will look at all books to check for accuracy and plan next steps for individuals and groups of children.

Peer-marking

- Children mark a friend's work using purple pen, using answer sheets or Success Criteria.

- Children give feedback verbally. This is recorded by the child receiving the feedback. 'My friend said that I need to remember commas after fronted adverbials.', 'My friend said that I need to remember that taking away makes numbers smaller.'

- The child receiving the feedback also records who has marked their work.

- When work is peer-marked, teachers will look at all books to check for accuracy and plan next steps for individuals and groups of children.
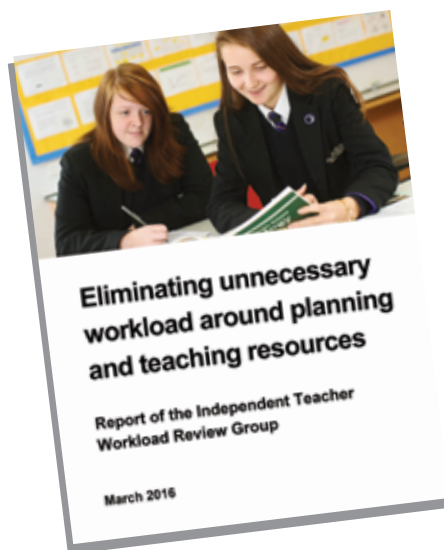
15 Appendix 2

Teacher Workload: the bigger picture

The Teacher Workload Survey in 2016 identified marking as a disproportionately burdensome aspect of teacher workload, along with planning and data management. The survey, repeated in 2019, provided self-reported information on working hours including: reported hours worked and the amount of time spent on different tasks.

Some key findings from the 2019 survey included:

- Teachers report working fewer hours in total in 2019 than they did in 2016, down 4.9 hours from 54.4 hours to 49.5 hours.

- Compared to 2016, primary and secondary teachers reported spending fewer hours on marking pupils' work, down 2.2 hours and 1.7 hours respectively.

- Most teachers, middle and senior leaders reported that their schools had made efforts to change their policies and approaches to reduce workload, but that these had met with mixed success to date.

- Most respondents (55 per cent or more) in both primary and secondary schools reported that approaches to data tracking, school behaviour, marking and feedback, and teacher appraisal had all been changed in the last two years as part of a specific attempt to reduce workload. However, in most cases, only a minority (typically around 20 per cent or less) of those working in schools that had changed these approaches felt these changes had resulted in a reduction in their workload, with notable minorities reporting they had actually added to their workload. The one exception was changes to primary schools' marking and feedback policies, which four out of ten primary respondents (40 per cent) reported had resulted in reductions to their workload.

Eliminating unnecessary workload around planning and teaching resources

Report of the Independent Teacher Workload Review Group

March 2016

Next steps and further support: The Teacher Workload Reduction Toolkit

In July 2018 the Department for Education published the Teacher Workload Reduction Toolkit, a suite of online resources to support school leaders to identify and address workload issues in their settings.

The Toolkit is split into three sections:
Identifying the issues:

- templates for surveys (paper and digital)

- templates for structured conversations (to understand the why as well as the what)

- resources for staff meetings
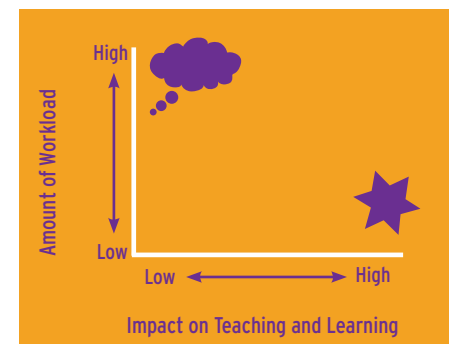
Addressing the issues

- resources for staff meetings to address different aspects of workload (marking, planning, data, communications etc)

- case studies from schools around the country

- research reports
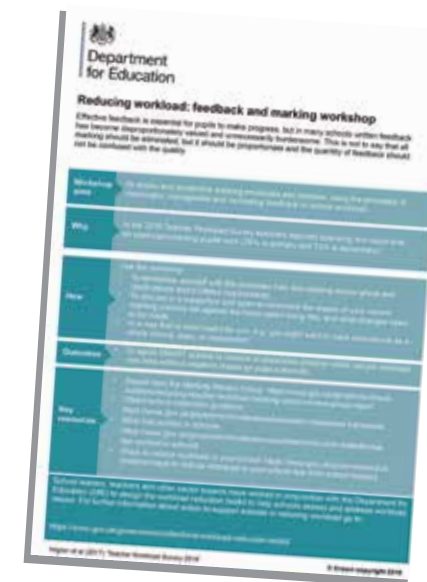
Evaluating the impact

- monitoring tools

- survey templates

- establishing a workload committee

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CONTACT US

London South Teaching School Alliance
Charles Dickens Primary School
Toulmin Street
London SE1 1AF

020 7407 1769
info@londonsouthtsa.org.uk