

10 Ways to Make Marking Matter

Getting the best out of students



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As a teacher there is nothing more frustrating and disheartening when marking your students' work than realising that their understanding doesn't match your expectation. How best to address this issue to ensure your students continue to progress in your classroom?

Effective marking can raise standards in schools

I am pleased to see that we have moved on from the days of the simple 'tick and flick' of students' work — schools are now applying effective creative approaches to their marking policies to help raise student attainment.

In my work as a teaching practitioner and a teaching and learning consultant I touch upon such issues frequently. Assessing students' learning, beyond end-of-unit tests, is a valuable tool and frequent and meaningful marking, with carefully considered assessment points, is crucial. It is essential that students reflect and engage actively on the work teachers have marked, reviewing the feedback provided and creating an ongoing dialogue between the teacher and the learner. This helps students really understand where they have done well and where there is room for development.

So what works?

Working smartly and collaboratively within your departments, or even across departments, will enable you to develop good assessment-for-learning practices without increasing teachers' workload. During meetings allow time for staff to share their ideas and bring along examples of good marking. Teachers should have the opportunity to discuss what has worked for them and to share this across the school.

During a teaching and learning seminar I recently led there were a number of teaching professionals that expressed the paramount importance of including students' views when reviewing assessment for learning and best practice within their schools. Anyone working with children knows that when you ask for an opinion

on a school matter you will get an honest answer. The student voice is one of the most powerful resources available to any school wishing to review teaching and learning practices.

At another school I recently conducted some interviews with students as a way for the school to gauge their views. Simple questions such as: 'What do you like and dislike teachers doing when they mark your work?' proved to be a good starting point in highlighting some of the key focal points for improving marking across the school.

10 ways to embed effective marking within a school:

1. Subject departments should frequently hold moderation meetings with standardised assessments to ensure teachers are consistent in the way they are assessing and marking. Evidence of this should be included in SEF activities and should be used to improve the overall quality of marking across the school.
2. Summative assessments alone will not get students closer to their target and predicted grades. In the build up to a formal assessment, especially the week preceding an assessment, formative feedback is imperative — students should always have written feedback before any formative assessment.
3. In teacher observations and learning walk-throughs, evaluations of teacher marking should be a focal point. We know Ofsted are examining this closely. That said, it also gives teachers and managers a clear picture of how feedback to students is being used to enhance their own learning and the progress they should be making.

4. Senior leaders should have an overview of the assessments taking place and the frequency and quality of marking. It is important to have a model in place to assess, measure and review the effectiveness of assessment for learning policies and the impact this is having on teaching and learning and in raising standards. Departmental Heads and Pastoral Leaders also have a responsibility to perform frequent self-evaluation activities. Deadlines for review and evaluation should be included in the school calendar.
5. Colleagues working collaboratively and sharing their experience is an excellent way for improving classroom practices and is good teacher CPD.
6. Students should be able to observe exemplar answers, peer assess and re-write answers after any assessment or marked work: this will motivate and encourage students towards their learning goals and can be a great morale boost. Reflection time and feedback lessons will enable students to review answers, share knowledge and practise questions again.
7. Teachers should use marking as a method of adapting their own teaching, planning lessons that meet the needs of their students. Teachers should be encouraged to use SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Timely) targets with constructive comments that enable students to review their work. A good example is using open questions like 'what other factors led to the Second World War?'
8. Sharing the success criteria and making the mark scheme explicit to students is essential. If we want students to achieve they must understand how they will be assessed and what teachers or examiners will be looking for when marking their work. Providing prompts, even on assessment papers, is no bad thing. We should remember that we are training students on how to reach their goals and that this does not mean they will be perfect on their very first attempt.
9. Avoid general comments like 'good' and 'excellent' throughout students' work (I can tell you now that using such comments do nothing for motivating a student to improve their work). Also, steer clear of using lots of red or green pen and remember that too much commenting and scribbling can often be counterproductive.
10. Avoid having moderation meetings that simply involve checking assessments and exercise books. Assessment moderation should be about reviewing latest examination criteria, pre-tasks and the appropriate action taken after the meeting with a clear review deadline.

As an educationalist I certainly feel it is important to constantly reflect on the teaching and learning practices taking place within our schools to establish what works best for our students and teachers. If you would like to read more on this subject, visit our website's **News & Media** page or our **LinkedIn** page.

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