



Teaching and Learning newsletter: information for parents and carers

Edition 3, July 2018

Welcome to the teaching and learning newsletter, designed to keep parents & carers informed about what's happening in lessons so that you can best support your child.

The purpose of this newsletter is to focus in depth on **feedback**. Feedback was identified by the Parent Voice Group as an area that would benefit from better communication and consistency.

Brine Leas is an evidence-informed school and a key element of our teaching and learning model is to teach responsively and prioritise the planning of lessons. When teachers are busy, planning is the first thing to suffer. Therefore, in line with DfE and Ofsted recommendations, we do all that we can to remove unnecessary workload to allow responsive planning of lessons to be prioritised.

When talking about feedback, it can often be assumed that we are talking about marking, using written comments on work. Written marking is **not** synonymous with feedback. Written comments are simply one tool in a teacher's 'feedback toolkit'; they are neither the most efficient nor the most effective tool, therefore not the tool that teachers will use most often.

1. Where did the 'marking mania' come from?

The EEF (Education Endowment Foundation) Teacher Toolkit was originally published in 2011 as the 'Pupil Premium Toolkit'. It lists several strategies for improving learning, and notes the impact (in months) of each strategy. Feedback ranks as the most effective (+8 months). Since publication, the EEF Toolkit has come under criticism for the reliability of its findings. See <http://www.learningspy.co.uk/research/evidence-and-disadvantage/> for additional thoughts.

Previously, Ofsted published case-studies of outstanding practice. Ofsted published a case-study of a school that used 'triple marking' (teacher marks and writes targets; student 'replies' by improving work in a different colour pen; teacher 'replies' by marking improvements). Schools want to do the best for their students and also, understandably, thought "this is what Ofsted wants". With the EEF toolkit as support, triple-marking policies were imposed up and down the country, including at BLS. Incidentally, Ofsted have pulled back from publishing case-studies because of the negative effect that they can have. See <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/has-ofsted-given-up-on-school-case-studies/> for more information from Sean Harford – Ofsted's National Director, Education.

2. Why the move away from written comments?

a) **Inefficient systems harm teachers and students.** As you may be aware, teaching is currently suffering from a recruitment and retention crisis.

* Almost a quarter of teachers who qualified since 2011 have already left the profession.

* Of those who qualified in 2011 alone, 31% had quit within 5 years of becoming teachers.

Teacher 'churn' means students get a poor deal. There is decreasing experience and consistency within schools nationally. Thankfully, Brine Leas is doing better than the national statistics but it is nevertheless essential that we do what we can to ensure good teacher retention.

b) **There is very little evidence on the effectiveness of marking as a way to give feedback.** The EEF (perhaps feeling guilty for its role in the marking mania and retention crisis?) recognised a lack of evidence to support written marking. In 2016, they published a report and ring-fenced £2,000,000 to fund trials. <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/evidence-summaries/on-marking/>

Even if 'traditional' marking systems were effective, their inefficiency would be reason enough to seek out alternatives.

3. So, if feedback isn't marking, what is it?

Feedback is **information about reactions and / or performance, which is used as a basis for improvement**. In educational terms, feedback tells us what should feed forward into planning future teaching.

Teachers are constantly gathering data, by reading or looking at work, or by asking students questions. This is known as formative assessment. More information here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sYdVe5O7KBE>.

We use this data to inform our next steps to ensure that teaching is responsive: it responds, as immediately as possible, to the needs of the students. Consequently, students may not even realise that feedback has happened.

Responsive teaching *doesn't*, however, leave a convenient audit trail for school leaders or stakeholders to tick-off on a checklist. **Feedback is mainly feedback for the teacher about what to do next:** "what do I need to do in response to what I've seen?".

Essentially, feedback is a misnomer and should be re-named 'feedforward'.

4. What are some common denominators for great feedback?

* **Feedback needs to be not only accurate in its diagnosis of what is wrong, but helpful in enabling the learner to put it right.** Imagine a photocopier, flashing its warning lights at you. You can tell that there is a paper-jam and no toner, but you *don't know how to make things better*. Traditionally, written marking had this problem: students struggled to take the crucial next steps, because the comments weren't helpful. As Dylan Wiliam (international expert on formative assessment) cites: "when told to be more systematic in his scientific investigations, [the student replied] "If I knew how to be more systematic, I would have been more systematic first time round"."

* **Feedback should look forwards, not back.** It should aim to improve the students' work *next time* because the major purpose of feedback is to improve the student, not the work. Feedback is more likely to be *'on the basis of what I'm seeing, you need more practice answering questions like this'*.

* **Students are more alike than they are different.** Whole-class feedback is efficient because students tend to make the same mistakes. Feedback this way is no less 'personalised', it just takes us less time.

* **Feedback should cause thinking.** Whilst students may not always be aware that feedback is happening, it is essential that feedback causes them to think hard. This is because feedback has informed the teacher either to re-teach something the student(s) didn't 'get', or to move on to something more challenging. Either way, this constitutes challenge for a student.

What does it look like in books?

It will vary across subjects but generally looks light-touch. There may be some ticks (to help the teacher) or strategies to alert students to errors or misconceptions (eg. highlighting). There may be evidence of pupils checking their own work (we are developing students' metacognition... more on that in a future newsletter!). Looking in books doesn't easily show if a teacher is planning responsively or not.

As a parent, you can look to see if things that your child was getting wrong / doing badly, have been given more practice in order to improve them.

And finally...

* The DfE intends to publish Brine Leas' journey to reducing unnecessary workload (including through changes to feedback) on their blog <https://teaching.blog.gov.uk/> in autumn.

* In line with our significant changes to feedback, our feedback policy has been rewritten and is pending approval from governors. This will be made available to parents once it has been approved. Subject-specific feedback plans are also being re-written in line with whole-school changes.

What does Ofsted say about feedback?

“Marking and feedback should be consistent with [the school] 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.”

“Ofsted does not expect to see any frequency, type or volume of marking and feedback; these are for the school to decide through its assessment policy”

“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.”

What does the DfE say about feedback?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k4SOqxNGYNw>

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/511256/Eliminating-unnecessary-workload-around-marking.pdf