

This document was archived on 6 November 2015.

Making marking matter: St Marylebone Church of England School

URN: 101152

Local authority: Westminster

Date published: 9 May 2011

Reference: 1300051

Brief description

How raising the profile and effectiveness of marking contributes to a continuous drive to improve assessment for learning across the school.

Overview – the school's message

'We've all seen students glow with pride on receiving a top-grade piece of work back from a teacher and we've also seen the dreadful shrug of disappointment swiftly followed by disengagement when a student feels demoralized by marked work. The way that work is marked can make or break the essential dialogue between teacher and learner: this is the dialogue which enables a student to know how well they are working, what their strengths are and what to do next to improve. As part of our 'personalising learning' initiative - and alongside our well-established systems for student data-tracking and intervention - we wanted to develop an effective, creative approach to assessment for learning which neither strayed from the central purpose of enabling students' progress, nor shackled our staff to a one-size-fits-all marking policy. Our approach was to set the gold standard for the common features of effective diagnostic marking while valuing each department's understanding of their own assessment requirements and fostering teachers' creativity and ownership of their department's ideas. Out of this grew "*Making marking matter*"; a project which evaluated the experiences and views of students and staff, prompted some pedagogical problem-solving, piloted departmental ideas, evolved into whole-staff training, and, ultimately, raised the bar in terms of outstanding diagnostic marking across the school.'



Elizabeth Phillips, Headteacher

The good practice in detail

St Marylebone Church of England School provides outstanding education for its students. Excellent teaching and assessment are central to their students' high attainment and marking is regarded as an integral part of the continuous dialogue between teachers and students about how well they are learning.

Getting started

At the outset a project was set up to:

- identify the marking strategies that students and teachers found most effective
- develop marking as a means of personalising learning
- improve the consistency and thoroughness of assessment strategies.

Students' views were important. A focus group consisting of 12 students was divided into three: one to represent Key Stage 3, another for Key Stage 4 and the third was a mixed Key Stage 4 and 5 group. These students were asked to discuss two questions:

1. What do you like teachers to do when marking your work?
2. What don't you like?

The discussions were filmed and later used in staff training. Students highlighted a number of points about marking. For example, they like:

- to see that their work is carefully considered
- to know that their effort is acknowledged
- to know clearly what they do well, where they go wrong, and, specifically, how they can improve
- detailed comments but not too much writing
- honest comments
- stickers and stamps (especially in Key Stages 3 and 5!)
- time to read what a teacher has written and to ask questions
- grades and levels for work based on clear success criteria
- seeing examples of good work from other students.

They don't like:

- 'a bunch of ticks'
- lots of red pen that can't be read
- doing loads of work which the teacher doesn't see
- 'useless' comments like 'good'
- not really understanding why they got a particular level
- being rushed or not having any time to talk about their work with their teacher.

A further 34 students and numerous teachers were asked their views on marking in 'spot-check' filmed interviews around the school.

This cross-school debate led to students joining heads of learning to shape policy and practice so that, together, they moved step by step through the following stages of development:

- examining examples of marking to distinguish effective and ineffective strategies
- targeting subjects, identifying areas for improvement and selecting a year group or class to trial new approaches
- implementation and feedback to all departments
- reviewing impact and sharing experiences as part of a staff training session
- giving all subject teams the opportunity and time to reflect on developments and consider how they could improve marking in their areas
- publishing and actively sharing guidelines for good practice
- evaluating all marking practice in the light of the guidelines and revising departmental assessment policies.

The outcomes



The school's guidance articulates the principles and key processes that underpin effective marking, and heads of learning and students are clear that subjects must have the flexibility to devise approaches to marking that are fit for their specific purposes. Students felt strongly that adopting a single whole-school format would have obscured the unique requirements of different subjects. The new system helps them to improve their work because the marking is designed to build familiarity with, and, application of, the subject understanding, knowledge and skills that add up to successful learning. This variety of approach has not compromised quality because marking is regularly scrutinised. Books are seen as part of lesson observations and learning walks. All departments moderate work and

sample marking. The personalising learning working party examines marking across the curriculum and provides feedback to every department.

The impact: comments from heads of learning

Hugo Gardner, Head of Modern Foreign Languages says that, 'As a result of "*Making marking matter*", schemes of work in modern foreign languages were redesigned in order to include at least one piece of assessed work that would be diagnostically marked and moderated in each unit. In practice, this amounted to one piece of work every six weeks.' The benefits were immediately apparent.

- Teachers were able to quickly yet accurately moderate pieces of work together.
- The team developed confidence in levelling work according to National Curriculum level descriptors.

- The obvious highlighting of selected language in green (positive) and pink (negative) allowed us to focus very clearly on assessment objectives, such as the specific grammar focus of a unit or task, to the exclusion in certain cases of other errors.
- The strengths and weaknesses of a piece of work were precisely summarised using the marking policy.
- Students had a clear understanding of how they could improve their work.

'In dance, National Curriculum levels are modelled in a variety of new ways including teachers demonstrating, analysis of students' performance and choreography, and sharing exemplar work and success criteria with students,' says Elisabeth Montsumi, Head of Dance. 'Teachers carry out formative diagnostic marking of practical work every term and levels are recorded using a colour-coded system to monitor progress. Marking, with written and oral comments referenced to success criteria, is ongoing throughout the course. Written homework is marked using 'what went well' (WWW) and, 'even better if' (EBI) to signpost strengths and areas for improvement.' As a result of these changes and the consistency they have engendered, when giving feedback to each other in class and when reflecting on their own work, students show noticeable confidence in explaining how improvement can be made. Students, particularly those with special educational needs have benefited from the development of a bank of key vocabulary to use in evaluating their own and others' performance.

Stephanie Cubbin, Head of Art and Design says that, 'Students are asked to evaluate their own learning first, including suggestions for improvement and the identification of short-term learning goals. Teachers review students' evaluations and confirm what needs to be prioritised to secure improvement. This continuous dialogue between students and teachers has been invaluable. It provides a strong framework for detailed discussions about learning not only with students but with parents too, and, importantly, teachers draw on the information to plan learning that is closely matched to the needs of individuals.'

Marking in context

Marking sits within the school's comprehensive assessment procedures that are carefully linked to ensure that teaching, learning and the curriculum are responsive to students' needs and clearly focused on raising achievement. Moderated teacher assessments are collected three times a year and reported home. Reports combine summative and formative assessment, clarifying levels of attainment and focusing on personalised, subject-specific action points. These are discussed twice a year at academic review days, where form tutors help students to prioritise targets and to plan the actions needed to achieve them. Heads of learning undertake regular detailed analysis of students' progress and check that tailored strategies are in place to support them where necessary. Effective assessment practice is underpinned by high-quality professional development opportunities and reliable data that teachers use confidently to set high expectations that challenge students to achieve their very best.

The school's background

[St Marylebone Church of England School](#) is an average-sized secondary girls' school that accepts boys into the sixth form. It serves a diverse community including areas of economic

and social deprivation. The school has three specialisms in performing arts, mathematics and computing, and special educational needs.

Are you thinking of putting these ideas into practice; or already doing something similar that could help other providers; or just interested? We'd welcome your views and ideas. Get in touch [here](#).

To view other good practice examples, go to:
www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/goodpractice