



Does reducing written feedback to pupils have a negative impact on progress whilst having a positive impact on teacher time and wellbeing?

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PURPOSE OF RESEARCH

Having completed an adapted version of the Workload Reduction Toolkit survey (Department of marking Education, 2018) within our school, it became apparent that the quantity of written marking, and the time it takes, was having a detrimental impact upon the wellbeing of teachers but not necessarily having a positive effect on pupil progress, many of whom were unable to access the written comments to act upon, and thereby increase progress.

Reducing teacher workload is desirable as it may help to improve teacher retention and wellbeing (Department for Education, 2018; Geiger and Pivovarova (2018). We wanted to find out whether we could reduce the negative impact on teachers while ensuring that children continued to make the same or better progress than they had previously.

THE RESEARCH DESIGN

A retrospective (uncontrolled, within participation) cohort study was used. To define the independent variable (marking), the effect of two conditions were analysed.

IV Level 1 (Control condition) – detailed written marking as per school policy in 2018 (Autumn Term)

IV Level 2 (Intervention) – reduced written marking and feedback with the intervention cohort in 2019 (Autumn Term)

Figure 1 – Research Design



The design allowed for the testing of the following hypotheses:

- H1 – Pupil attainment as measured by in-school teacher assessment systems will not be negatively affected by reducing written marking and feedback.
- H2 – Teacher's perceptions of wellbeing will improve as a result of less time spent carrying out written marking and feedback.
- H3 – Teachers will spend less time doing written marking and feedback.

LIMITATIONS

The trial sample size was low and replication would increase the reliability of the findings.

The data analysis was based on teacher assessments which may have varied between the two years. We had some concerns over the accuracy of the end of Year 5 results which were then used as a Baseline for Year 6 progress in 2019. Year 4 were assessed by an inexperienced teacher at the end of Autumn 2019.

METHODS

Participants and sample size

198 pupils (100 boys, 98 girls) in years 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 in an urban Church primary school took part in the intervention. Their data was compared to the previous year and parallel time frame.

Procedures

Control period

Written marking and feedback was detailed, following the school's policy, identifying what had been achieved and what needed improving. Children then responded to the marking the following day by 'purple polishing'. Teachers undertook an adapted survey based on the DfE workload reduction toolkit (2018) to assess their perception of their wellbeing and the time taken to mark work.

Intervention period

No written feedback was given. Children self marked and polished their work during the lesson. Verbal feedback (AfL) by the teacher was given immediately throughout the lesson. Work was stamped according to the children's progress towards the learning objective. Teachers retook the same survey to assess their perception of their wellbeing and the time taken to mark work at the end of the period.

During both periods, teachers carried out teacher assessments and recorded these on the school's data system. However, in Autumn 2018 School Pupil Tracker (SPTO) was used, whereas in Autumn 2019, the school's system had moved to Scholarpack.

Materials and apparatus

Colour-coded stamps were purchased to indicate children's progress towards the learning objective. Pupil self-marking sheets and pens.



RESULTS

Chi-squared tests of independence were conducted on the number of pupils who were off-track or on-track across the control and intervention periods (see Table 1 to 3).

Table 1. Reading

	Effect size d	CI (95%)	p-value	[w]
All	0.013	-0.169 - 0.194	0.901	0.006
Year 1	0.166	-0.299 - 0.631	0.493	0.083
Year 2	0.226	-0.265 - 0.717	0.374	0.113
Year 3	0.000	0.000 - 0.000	1.000	0.000
Year 4	0.346	-0.135 - 0.828	0.159	0.173
Year 5	0.072	-0.384 - 0.529	0.769	0.036
Year 6	0.154	-0.309 - 0.618	0.525	0.077

Table 2. Writing

	Effect size d	CI (95%)	p-value	[w]
All	0.046	-0.143 - 0.236	0.646	0.023
Year 1	0.071	-0.379 - 0.521	0.770	0.035
Year 2	0.070	-0.400 - 0.540	0.783	0.035
Year 3	0.069	-0.387 - 0.525	0.778	0.035
Year 4	0.148	-0.321 - 0.618	0.547	0.074
Year 5	0.069	-0.387 - 0.525	0.778	0.035
Year 6	0.387	-0.088 - 0.863	0.110	0.194

Table 3. Maths

	Effect size d	CI (95%)	p-value	[w]
All	0.037	-0.151 - 0.225	0.713	0.018
Year 1	0.080	-0.372 - 0.532	0.742	0.040
Year 2	0.000	0.000 - 0.000	1.000	0.000
Year 3	0.081	-0.377 - 0.540	0.741	0.041
Year 4	0.076	-0.381 - 0.534	0.757	0.038
Year 5	0.072	-0.384 - 0.529	0.769	0.036
Year 6	0.204	-0.265 - 0.672	0.401	0.102

Teachers also undertook an adapted version of the DfE workload reduction survey (2018). This indicated an overall improvement in teacher wellbeing with a substantial improvement in the time taken to carry out written feedback on pupil's work.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Replacing written feedback by teachers with immediate verbal feedback to inform pupils of their learning has not had a negative impact on pupils' progress. However, it has reduced the time taken on marking by teachers and their wellbeing has improved.

Future research into this area would benefit from being carried out over a longer time frame (i.e. a whole academic year which would then allow the new systems to be fully embedded).