

An uncontrolled cohort study looking at the effect of written feedback and marking on staff wellbeing and pupil outcomes

PURPOSE OF RESEARCH

Reducing teacher workload is desirable as it may help to improve teacher retention and well-being (Department for Education, 2018; Geiger and Pivovarov (2018); Foster (2019)). However, the potential wider effects of reducing teaching activity in areas such as marking, planning and data recording are less well understood. Based on a workload survey carried out with all our teaching staff in November 2018, Feedback and Marking was an area on which staff felt they were spending too much time. As a result, and after discussions with SLT, changes to our marking policy were implemented in September 2019. This research project has allowed us to trial the changes, whilst monitoring the impact on staff perception of wellbeing and pupil outcomes.

THE RESEARCH DESIGN

Uncontrolled cohort study

An uncontrolled cohort study was used. The independent variable was a phase of workload reduction for the same pupils:

- Phase 1 (IV Level 1) – pre-workload reduction period of during which time, staff were following our pre-test marking and feedback policy, with expectations of daily written feedback
- Phase 2 (IV Level 2) – workload reduction period of one term during which time a move was made towards verbal feedback, with no expectation of a daily written comment



Dependent variables

The following measures were used:

- DV1 (progress) – Pre and post test
- DV2 (teacher perception) – Workload Survey, pre and post test
- DV3 (teacher time) – Pre and post test

The design allowed for the testing of the following hypotheses:

- H1 – Pupil progress as measured by termly data scrutiny will not be negatively affected by reducing marking and feedback expectations.
- H2 – Teacher's perceptions of wellbeing and workload will improve as a result of a reduction to marking and feedback expectations.
- H3 – Teachers will spend less time (per week) on written feedback, and more time (per week) giving instant verbal feedback.

METHODS

Participants and sample size

Pre-test – Progress data of Year 1 to Year 5, Marking and Feedback responses from 15 members of teaching staff

Post test – Progress data of Year 2 to Year 6, Marking and Feedback responses from 15 members of teaching staff

Cohort Information (Academic Year 2019-2020): Year 2 – 30 boys, 30 girls (60); Year 3 – 33 boys, 26 girls (59); Year 4 – 28 boys, 30 girls (58); Year 5 – 24 boys, 36 girls (60); Year 6 – 34 boys, 25 girls (59)

Procedures

Pre-test data collected in December 2018 (pupil progress and staff perception)
Intervention – Change to marking policy in September 2019, with the removal of expectations of daily written comments
Post-test data (pupil progress and staff perception) collected after one term (September 2019-December 2019)

Materials (and apparatus)

Workload survey – November 2018

Feedback Measure Survey (as a result of Workload Survey outcomes) – July 2019 and December 2019

LIMITATIONS

The trial was limited by its small sample size and therefore requires replication with greater numbers. In addition, the results may have been influenced by different teachers between the two years, some of whom are new to teaching or the school. There is the likelihood of inflated effect sizes due to no control group.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The reduction of written feedback by teachers to inform pupils of their learning has not had a negative impact on pupils' progress. However, it has improved the time taken on marking by teachers and, therefore, their wellbeing.

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).

RESULTS

Separate Chi-squared tests of independence were conducted to assess whether the percentage of pupils making expected progress or better had remained constant (comparing the same pupils from last year).

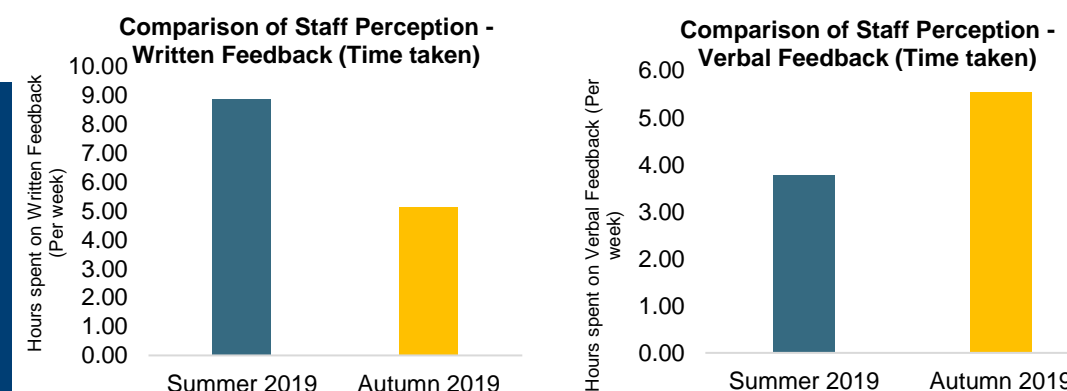
Writing

Compared to last year	Effect size d	CI (95%)	p-value	W
Year 2	0.076	-0.19 – 0.34	0.592	0.038
Year 3	-0.143	-0.13 – 0.41	0.301	0.071
Year 4	0.390	0.11 – 0.67	0.006	0.195
Year 5	0.080	-0.19 – 0.35	0.571	0.040
Year 6	0.157	-0.12 – 0.43	0.268	0.078

Maths

Compared to last year	Effect size d	CI (95%)	p-value	W
Year 2	-0.055	-0.13 – 0.42	0.315	0.071
Year 3	0.569	0.23 – 0.91	0.001	0.285
Year 4	0.247	-0.03 – 0.52	0.081	0.123
Year 5	0.252	-0.03 – 0.53	0.075	0.126
Year 6	0.295	0.02 – 0.57	0.037	0.147

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.



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