

# TEACHER FEEDBACK TO IMPROVE PUPIL LEARNING

Guidance Report



Education  
Endowment  
Foundation

The authors would like to thank the many researchers and practitioners who provided support and feedback on drafts of this guidance. In particular, we would like to thank the advisory panel and review teams.

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# FOREWORD



All teachers understand the importance of providing meaningful feedback. Done well, it supports pupil progress, building learning, addressing misunderstandings, and thereby closing the gap between where a pupil is and where the teacher wants them to be. This process is a crucial component of high-quality teaching and can be seen in classrooms across all phases and subjects.

However, not all feedback has positive effects. Done badly, feedback can even harm progress.

Nor is feedback 'free'. Large amounts of time are spent providing pupils with feedback, perhaps not always productively. So how can we ensure that the feedback provided by teachers to pupils is useful and moves learning forward?

Historically, in answer to this question, much consideration has been given to the methods by which feedback is delivered. Specifically, should feedback be

written, or should it be verbal?

One can see this as a 'feedback methods see-saw' that has tipped back and forth between an emphasis on extensive written feedback and a focus on more verbal methods of feedback, which may take less time.

This guidance report aims to move beyond this 'see-saw' and focus on what really matters: the principles of good feedback rather than the written or verbal methods of feedback delivery.

At the EEF, we believe in learning from educational research—

using findings on what has, and what has not, been effective in classrooms to guide us towards 'best bets' for practitioners. As such, this guidance encourages a renewed focus on the principles of effective feedback. These principles form the first three of our recommendations and provide the central messages that run throughout this guidance. They state that teachers should:

1. lay the foundations for effective feedback, with high-quality initial teaching that includes careful formative assessment;

2. deliver appropriately timed feedback, that focuses on moving learning forward; and, crucially,
3. plan for how pupils will receive and use feedback using strategies to ensure that pupils will act on the feedback offered.

Of course, if these principles are to be effectively delivered, schools require a carefully designed and thoughtfully implemented feedback policy, and school leaders play a crucial role in steering this process. These policies set the direction for how feedback is delivered in schools, and they require a careful balance. They should specify the need for evidence informed principles to be at the heart of practice, and exemplify this, but the methods and timing should be left to a teacher's professional judgement. When and how to offer feedback is most appropriately answered by the teacher responding to the particular learning context of an individual pupil.

The recommendations in this report have been drawn from a systematic review of the best available international evidence, in addition to a review of current practice, and refined in consultation with a panel of expert practitioners and academics. As will be explained, much of the research on feedback remains limited, but this guidance offers recommendations on what we can infer from the evidence. Alongside this report the EEF is committed to working with the sector, including through our colleagues in the Research Schools Network, to further explore and implement these recommendations with further training, resources, and partnerships.

It is our hope that this guidance will refocus feedback practice on the principles of effective feedback, and away from the 'see-saw of methods', providing recommendations on how to offer purposeful and sustainable feedback that can move learning forward.

**Professor Becky Francis**  
Chief Executive  
Education Endowment Foundation

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*“It is our hope that this guidance will refocus feedback practice on the principles of effective feedback and away from the ‘see-saw of methods.’”*

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## GUEST FOREWORD

The term ‘feedback’ was first used in the late 1940s to describe features of mechanical systems that used information about the current state of the system to improve future performance. Years later, the term was picked up in psychology but, unfortunately, was used in a much narrower sense. For example, one influential review of research on feedback defined it as ‘any of the numerous procedures that are used to tell a learner if an instructional response is right or wrong’.<sup>1</sup>

The result of such definitions was that statements that only provided information about the current level of achievement, such as ‘your typing speed is 46 words per minute’, came to be regarded as potentially effective feedback even though such information provided little guidance about what to do next. It is as if someone installed a thermostat in a house that allowed people to set a desired temperature—and provided an accurate indication of the current temperature—but forgot to connect the thermostat to a heating or cooling system so that the information might actually be useful. Feedback has to be part of a system that is set up in such a way that the information can actually be used to improve it, and that is why this guidance report from the Education Endowment Foundation is so relevant, important, and useful.

Rather than thinking about feedback as an isolated event, this report makes it clear that feedback is likely to be more effective if it is approached systemically, and specifically, by adopting three fundamental principles: careful groundwork before the feedback is given, providing well-timed information that focuses on improvement, and also taking into account how learners receive and use that information.

The reason that effective feedback requires careful preparation is because the quality of feedback that a teacher can provide depends crucially on the quality of the evidence about learners’ achievement that is available. If a teacher cannot think of what to say to a student—having seen the student’s work—then the fault is most likely that the questions, task, or activities that were assigned were not designed with a view to giving feedback in the first place. The starting point for effective feedback is eliciting the right evidence.

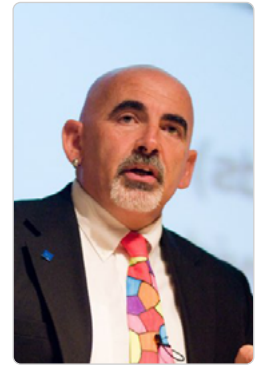
The second principle—the idea that the focus of well-timed feedback should be to move learning forward—is

important because the word ‘feedback’ can lead us to think of feedback as a backward-looking process—in Douglas Reeve’s memorable words, the post-mortem rather than the medical. The main role of feedback, at least in schools, is to improve the learner, not the work. The idea is that, after feedback, students will be able to do better at some point in the future on tasks they have not yet attempted.

The third principle draws attention to the simple—but often forgotten—fact that the only thing that matters with feedback is what learners do with it. If learners have no interest in improvement then no matter how thoughtful and insightful the feedback is, the time that teachers spend on crafting the feedback is likely to be wasted. For feedback to be effective we need to create classrooms where students welcome and use feedback. As Stiggins, Arter, Chappuis and Chappuis remind us, the most important decisions taken in classrooms are not taken by teachers but rather by learners.<sup>2</sup>

The other welcome feature of this guidance is the focus on the importance of opportunity cost. That is to say, every hour that teachers spend giving feedback to their students is an hour they don’t have to spend on something else.

The existing research does not tell teachers how to guarantee the feedback they give their students will be effective, and probably never will; teaching is just far too complex for this ever to be likely. What this report does do, in my view, is to provide the best advice that we currently have on how teachers can spend their time in the ways that are most likely to benefit students.



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*“Rather than thinking about feedback as an isolated event, this report makes it clear that feedback is likely to be more effective if it is approached systemically”*

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A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Dylan Wiliam'.

**Dylan Wiliam**

Emeritus Professor of Educational Assessment,  
Institute of Education, UCL

# INTRODUCTION

## What does this guidance cover?

This guidance report focuses on teacher-delivered feedback and is relevant to the teaching of all students aged 5 to 18, within any subject area.

Teacher feedback is an area of teaching and learning that is a central priority for teachers and is often associated with improving pupil attainment.<sup>4</sup> However, to date, evidence has failed to indicate exactly ‘what kinds of feedback are likely to be helpful in a given situation’ (William, 2018).<sup>5</sup> This is largely due to the nature of the existing evidence base, a ‘tangled web’<sup>6</sup> of research (Shute, 2007) which suggests that while the average impact of feedback may be positive, the range of impacts is also very wide. While some studies have shown that feedback can support learning, others have shown that, when delivered poorly, it can also hamper it.<sup>7</sup>

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*‘It is clear from the research that there is little agreement leading us to a straightforward model or recipe for “effective” feedback.’*

**Ruth Dann (2018)<sup>3</sup>**

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This guidance report offers a set of recommendations based on what we can infer from the literature, drawing on three sources:

- **a systematic review of the evidence** on teacher feedback led by Dr Mark Newman at the EPPI-Centre—Dr Newman and his team have reviewed and analysed the evidence on teacher feedback interventions published after 2000;
- **the expertise of an advisory panel**—the recommendations draw on the expertise of academics and current practitioners. These include Caroline Bilton, Clare Christie, Megan Dixon, Harry Fletcher-Wood, Professor Steve Higgins, and Andy Tharby; we also thank Professor Ruth Dann for her guidance at the outset of the project and Professor Dylan William for his support in drafting recommendations;<sup>8</sup> and
- **research on current practice**, including *Feedback in Action*, a review of current feedback practice in English schools led by Dr Velda Elliott and her team at the University of Oxford (2020) and funded by the EEF;<sup>9</sup> this review conducted surveys with 247 primary teachers (from 194 schools) and 144 secondary teachers (from 113 schools), alongside interviews and case studies in 2019.

A full reference list may be found at the end of this report.

## Who is this guidance for?

This guidance is applicable to primary schools, secondary schools, and further education providers and offers recommendations on how to deliver feedback to 5- to 18-year-old learners. Early years is not included as the underpinning systematic review found little relevant evidence in the area.<sup>10</sup> Most of the evidence is not drawn from a special school context, however, many of the messages are still likely to be useful and relevant for practice in special school contexts.

The guidance is aimed at class teachers who provide feedback to pupils as well as senior leaders who devise and implement school feedback policies. It targets all subjects, providing principles to suit all, along with examples to demonstrate feedback provision in particular subject and phase contexts. Additional audiences who may find the guidance relevant include governors, parents, programme developers, policymakers, and education researchers.

# INTRODUCTION

## What is teacher feedback?

For this guidance report, we focus only on feedback from teachers to pupils. Feedback may come from other sources, be that peers, the pupils themselves, or parents. However, given the size of this area, to concentrate our review and recommendations, we have focused the report exclusively on teacher feedback. Future EEF resources may focus on other sources of feedback.

This specific form of feedback may be defined as:

*'information given by a teacher to pupil(s) about their performance that aims to improve learning.'*<sup>11</sup>

When giving this information, teachers have a range of decisions to make, and can provide feedback in a variety of different ways. Feedback can:

- focus on different **content**;
- be delivered in different **methods**;
- be directed to different **people**; and
- be delivered at different **times**.

These four aspects of feedback are expanded in **Figure 1**.

Figure 1: What is teacher feedback?



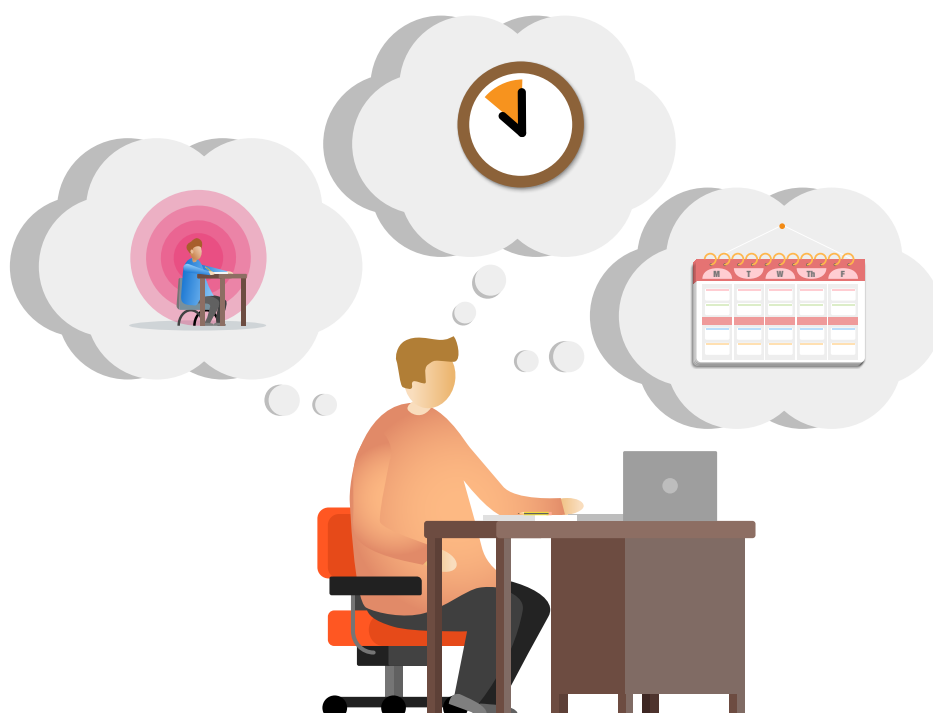
## The 'opportunity cost' associated with teacher feedback

Before exploring recommendations, it is important to acknowledge a central challenge associated with the delivery of teacher feedback: workload. Feedback, and particularly some forms of written feedback, continue to take up a large amount of teacher time, limiting the time teachers can give to other tasks and often with a negative impact on their wellbeing.<sup>13</sup>

When designing feedback policies and delivering feedback, schools should be particularly aware of this 'opportunity cost'. What other tasks may a teacher

need to sacrifice to provide feedback? Is the cost to other aspects of teaching, such as reducing planning time, worth the time spent on feedback? How can we provide teachers with the time required to provide effective feedback whilst also delivering all other aspects of effective practice?

Although this opportunity cost may vary by subject and phase, it is a cost experienced by all teachers. We remained very aware of this potential cost when drafting the recommendations.



## Reading this guidance report

Each recommendation begins with a reflective vignette—an illustrative scenario that outlines common challenges faced by teachers—before posing questions that the recommendation attempts to answer or clarify. Recommendations also include case studies of current feedback practice in schools.<sup>14</sup> Both the vignettes and case studies seek to represent current practice in schools and contextualise the evidence. They do not necessarily demonstrate best or poor practice.

Each recommendation also features reflections on ‘what *might* work in the classroom’. While a large number of studies examine feedback, not every specific classroom approach has been rigorously evaluated in an English setting.<sup>15</sup> These reflections, therefore, offer techniques and suggestions for what *might* work in the classroom based on our interpretation of the evidence and our panel’s expertise.



# SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

## Principles

# 1

### Lay the foundations for effective feedback



- Before providing feedback, teachers should provide high quality instruction, including the use of formative assessment strategies.
- High quality initial instruction will reduce the work that feedback needs to do; formative assessment strategies are required to set learning intentions (which feedback will aim towards) and to assess learning gaps (which feedback will address).

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# 2

### Deliver appropriately timed feedback that focuses on moving learning forward



- There is not one clear answer for when feedback should be provided. Rather, teachers should judge whether more immediate or delayed feedback is required, considering the characteristics of the *task* set, the individual *pupil*, and the collective understanding of the *class*.
- Feedback should focus on moving learning forward, targeting the specific learning gaps that pupils exhibit. Specifically, high quality feedback may focus on the task, subject, and self-regulation strategies.
- Feedback that focuses on a learner's personal characteristics, or feedback that offers only general and vague remarks, is less likely to be effective.

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# 3

### Plan for how pupils will receive and use feedback



- Careful thought should be given to how pupils *receive* feedback. Pupil motivation, self-confidence, their trust in the teacher, and their capacity to receive information can impact feedback's effectiveness. Teachers should, therefore, implement strategies that encourage learners to welcome feedback, and should monitor whether pupils are using it.
- Teachers should also provide opportunities for pupils to use feedback. Only then will the feedback loop be closed so that pupil learning can progress.

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## Methods

### 4

Carefully consider how to use purposeful, and time-efficient, written feedback



- Written methods of feedback, including written comments, marks, and scores, can improve pupil attainment; however, the effects of written feedback can vary.
- The method of delivery (and whether a teacher chooses to use written or verbal feedback) is likely to be less important than ensuring that the principles of effective teacher feedback (Recommendations 1–3) are followed. Written feedback may be effective if it follows high quality foundations, is timed appropriately, focuses on the task, subject, and/or self-regulation, and is then used by pupils.
- Some forms of written feedback have also been associated with a significant opportunity cost due to their impact on teacher workload. This should be monitored by teachers and school leaders.

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### 5

Carefully consider how to use purposeful verbal feedback



- Verbal methods of feedback can improve pupil attainment and may be more time-efficient when compared to some forms of written feedback.
- However, as with written feedback, the effects of verbal feedback can vary and the method of delivery is likely to be less important than ensuring the principles of effective teacher feedback (Recommendations 1–3) are followed.

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## Implementation

### 6

Design a school feedback policy that prioritises and exemplifies the principles of effective feedback



- Enacting these recommendations will require careful consideration and this implementation should be a staged process, not an event. This will include ongoing effective professional development.
- Schools should design feedback policies which promote and exemplify the principles of effective feedback (Recommendations 1–3). Policies should not over-specify features such as the frequency or method of feedback.

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# 1 Lay the foundations for effective feedback



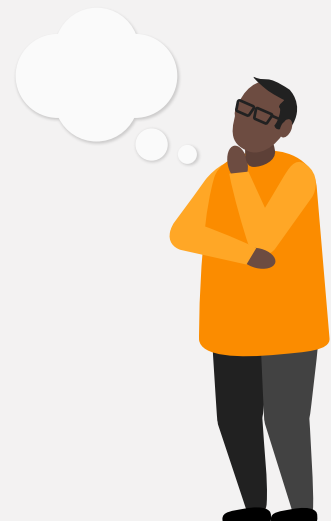
Saïd is a Year 6 teacher in a primary school in the North West. He's received regular CPD throughout the year, which has explained the positive impact that feedback may have on pupil attainment. Saïd has also observed the feedback that experienced teachers in his school offer, reviewed what he did last year, and tried out a range of new written and verbal feedback techniques (such as coded marking, one-to-one conversations, and whole-class feedback discussions).

Saïd reflects that he is disappointed in the progress made by his class in response to these new feedback methods. Despite all his hard work, he is unsure if it really paid off. In particular, pupils' writing attainment, and their ability to write short stories, had shown little improvement despite his focus on multiple new feedback strategies targeted at writing development.

**Saïd asks himself two questions:**

- ***Did my pupils have a strong enough understanding of the knowledge, skills, and concepts to begin with, before I offered them feedback?*** They may not have initially understood how to structure a story, design a sentence structure, or how to use punctuation effectively. If so, the feedback may have had too much work to do.
- ***Did I effectively assess my pupils' understanding to target my feedback at their specific learning gaps?*** Much of the feedback offered was the same to all pupils, encouraging them to offer more description of their settings and characters along with proof-reading for spelling errors. These may not have been what all pupils were missing.

Saïd realises that to give effective feedback he must first lay the foundations.



Providing feedback to pupils is often associated with a positive impact on pupil attainment. However, the impact of feedback varies and—in some cases—it can even hamper pupil progress.<sup>16</sup> Very careful thought is therefore required from teachers when using feedback to ensure that it moves learning forward,<sup>17</sup> and this thinking should begin well before feedback is provided. To offer effective feedback, teachers must first lay the foundations.

Specifically, they need to provide high quality instruction, including the use of two formative assessment strategies. Good initial instruction will reduce the work

that feedback needs to do while formative assessment strategies are required to:

1. set learning intentions (which feedback will aim towards); and
2. assess learning gaps (which feedback will address).

For this recommendation, we draw from work on feedback theory,<sup>18</sup> expert panel guidance, and specific studies found in the review commissioned to inform this guidance.



## Providing high quality instruction

As John Hattie and Helen Timperley noted in their review of feedback, by its very definition, 'Feedback can only build on something; it is of little use when there is no initial learning or surface information. Feedback is what happens second' (2007).<sup>19</sup> The first task of the teacher, before feedback is delivered, is to provide effective instruction. Feedback alone is unlikely to provide pupils with a full understanding of the knowledge, skills, and concepts required and so initial teaching is crucial. Without it, feedback may be left with too much work to do.

Of course, the characteristics of effective instruction vary by phase and subject; these are discussed in several subject and phase-specific EEF guidance reports including four focused on improving literacy across different phases (covering the early years and Key Stages 1 to 4), two on maths (covering the early years to Key Stage 3), and guidance on improving secondary science. However, we can outline some general principles.

In delivering effective teaching, teachers:

- build on pupils' prior knowledge and experience;
- avoid overloading pupils' working memory by breaking down complex material into smaller steps;
- encourage the retention of learning by using repetition, practice, and retrieval of critical knowledge and skills;
- deliver a carefully-sequenced curriculum which teaches essential concepts, knowledge, skills, and principles;
- use powerful analogies, illustrations, examples, explanations, comparisons, and demonstrations;
- are aware of common misconceptions and prepare strategies to counter them;
- plan effective lessons, making good use of modelling, explanations, and scaffolds to support learning;
- adapt teaching in a responsive way to support struggling and excelling learners while maintaining high expectations for all (Early Career Framework);<sup>20</sup> and
- provide pupils with tools and strategies to plan, monitor, and evaluate their learning.<sup>21</sup>

## Formative assessment

Another key component of effective initial instruction that should be emphasised here—and is required before feedback is given—is the use of two formative assessment strategies. Since it was popularised by Paul Black and Dylan William in 1998, the term ‘formative assessment’ has been defined in different ways, resulting in different applications in the classroom. Most simply, it means providing teaching that is *adaptive* to pupils’ needs and using evidence about learning to adjust instruction to ensure that learning moves forward. In terms of what this looks like in the classroom, this may be summarised in five strategies as seen in **Figure 2**.<sup>22</sup>

These strategies were delivered as part of the EEF’s Promising Project—Embedding Formative Assessment, which was shown to improve pupil attainment in a highly secure randomised controlled trial (see **Research in Focus 1**).<sup>23</sup>

Recommendations two to six in this guidance report focus very much on the third strategy here—‘providing feedback that moves learning forward’—while other EEF resources address strategies four and five.<sup>24</sup> However, before providing feedback, teachers must implement the first two strategies: ‘clarifying, sharing, and understanding learning intentions and success criteria’ and ‘eliciting evidence of learning’.

**Figure 2: The five key strategies of formative assessment (William, 2018)**

	Where the learner is going	Where the learner is right now	How to get there
<b>Teacher</b>	1. Clarifying, sharing and understanding learning intentions and success criteria.	2. Eliciting evidence of learning.	3. Providing feedback that moves forward.
<b>Peer</b>		4. Activating learners as instructional resources for one another.	
<b>Learner</b>		5. Activating learners as owners of their own learning.	

## What *might* sharing learning intentions look like in the classroom?

First, teachers need to have a clear idea of what the learning intention is and should share this with pupils. As Royce Sadler remarked, ‘the teacher must possess a concept of quality appropriate to the task’<sup>25</sup>, and this is what their feedback will direct pupils towards.

There is limited evidence supporting specific techniques that teachers can use to set and share learning intentions. However, we can draw from suggestions for practice. Dylan Wiliam offers several<sup>26</sup> and these techniques were deployed in Embedding Formative Assessment (Dylan Wiliam and Siobhan Leahy):

- **Strengths and weaknesses discussion:** share with pupils anonymised examples of other children’s work, without informing them which you think is high or low quality; discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the work and use this discussion to construct a rubric for successful work in that area.
- **Model work:** share excellent examples of previous pupils’ work; discuss with the class what makes this work high quality. You may wish to focus on particular elements of the model answers.
- **‘What not to write’:** discuss with the class a list of ‘what not to write’. This could follow a presentation to the class of an incorrect pupil response to a task; these are sometimes referred to as ‘non-examples’.
- **Design questions:** this could be a strategy for KS2–5 pupils where, closely guided by the teacher, they design a question (and accompanying answer) for a topic they are learning.
- **‘Choose-Swap-Choose’:** a strategy where a teacher asks pupils to do the same thing multiple times, before working with a partner to identify which attempt was most successful. For instance, in KS1 a teacher may ask pupils to write the letter ‘d’ ten times. Each student could then circle which is their best attempt before swapping with a partner and discussing whether they agree with their choice. This provides an opportunity to discuss the quality of work and this technique could be used across subjects and phases.

Establishing and sharing the learning intention provides the teacher and pupil with a shared understanding of the ‘concept of quality’ that they are aiming for. Feedback can then be used to move pupils towards this concept.

## What *might* ‘eliciting evidence of learning’ look like in the classroom?

To provide high quality feedback, a teacher also needs to implement the second formative assessment strategy: assess where a pupil’s learning gaps are for a given task or skill. Only then can they provide feedback that targets these weaknesses.<sup>27</sup> This will require effective formative assessment of pupils’ understanding using carefully designed tasks, activities, and questioning to reveal pupil thinking before providing feedback on this thinking.

Once again, there may be limited evidence for the use of specific strategies, however, there are examples of techniques informed by evidence that may be useful, many of which were used in Embedding Formative Assessment.<sup>28</sup> These strategies are not new and are used as part of many teachers’ daily practice:

- Effective questioning;
- All student response systems; and<sup>30</sup>
- Carefully designed tasks.<sup>31</sup>

**Effective questioning:**<sup>29</sup> This enables teachers to assess pupil understanding, interpreting pupils’ responses to questions to determine what feedback to provide. Teachers should ensure they are asking all pupils for responses and consider using techniques such as ‘no hands up’. They should provide sufficient ‘wait time’ for pupils to respond and carefully frame questions so that they reveal more about a pupil’s thinking. Additionally, a teacher should listen closely to a pupil’s response, paying attention not only to whether they get the correct answer but, rather, try to interpret

how a pupil is thinking and what this reveals about their understanding. This will inform the feedback the teacher then gives.

**All student response systems:**<sup>30</sup> These aim to assess the whole class’ understanding of a topic, which may then inform the feedback offered. For quick checks, consider using practical approaches such as mini-whiteboards, true or false (or red and green) cards, or thumbs up or down. ‘Hinge point questions’ also offer a potentially useful technique: these are multiple choice questions where each incorrect answer demonstrates a pupil error in understanding. Ideally, answers will be very quick to assess in the lesson, so a teacher can use these questions mid-lesson, to assess where to go next and what feedback to offer.<sup>31</sup> At the end of a lesson, pupil exit passes may be useful where pupils respond to questions on an exit pass before handing them in.

**Carefully designed tasks:** Whatever task is being undertaken, teachers should design ‘tasks with feedback in mind’,<sup>32</sup> so that the tasks provide evidence to the teacher on what a pupil is thinking. Whether pupils are responding to a series of questions or writing an extended piece of work, whether they are engaging in practical tasks or conducting a discussion, whatever the task, the teacher should ask themselves, ‘Will the task reveal what the pupil is thinking, and can I use this to give feedback?’ If not, they may need to redesign the task. See **Box 1** for an example from the teaching of apostrophes in English.

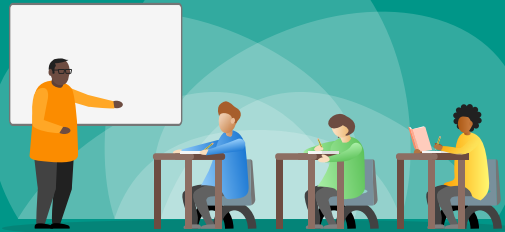
### Box 1—Teaching apostrophes in English

In English, when teaching apostrophes, rather than asking pupils a broad question like, ‘When should an apostrophe be used?’, the teacher may ask:

*Add apostrophes to these phrases as necessary:*

1. *Hes very unhappy.*
2. *My dogs are unhappy.*
3. *Its on its way.*
4. *The ladies cars.*

This will better reveal what specific misconceptions and learning gaps pupils have and will inform what feedback is required.<sup>33</sup> Teachers would go onto carefully monitor pupils’ use of apostrophes in their own writing.



## Research in focus 1



### Embedding Formative Assessment (EFA) (2018)

*Dr Stefan Speckesser, Johnny Runge, Francesca Foliano, Dr Matthew Burnsall, Nathan Hudson-Sharp, Dr Heather Rolfe and Dr Jake Anders*



Developed by Dylan Wiliam and Siobhan Leahy in partnership with the Schools, Students, and Teachers network (SSAT), Embedding Formative Assessment is a professional development programme that aims to improve pupil outcomes by embedding the use of five formative assessment strategies across a school:

- clarifying, sharing, and understanding learning intentions;
- eliciting evidence of learning;
- providing feedback that moves learning forward;
- activating learners as learning resources for one another; and
- activating learners as owners of their own learning.

Many of the strategies suggested in this recommendation are deployed in the programme.

Schools receive detailed resource packs to run monthly teacher-led workshops on formative assessment, known as Teacher Learning Communities, over two years and teachers conduct peer observations focusing on the use of formative assessment strategies. Ongoing leadership support and training for effective implementation of the programme is also provided by SSAT.

The EEF tested the impact of the programme in a randomised controlled trial in 140 secondary schools. Students in the Embedding Formative Assessment schools made the equivalent of two additional months' progress in their Attainment 8 GCSE score, and this result had a very high security rating. Analyses based on a smaller sample of pupils (and therefore less secure) found that pupils eligible for free school meals in schools that received the programme made one additional months' progress in their Attainment 8 score while the additional progress made by children in the lowest third for prior attainment was greater than that made by children in the highest third.<sup>34</sup>

## 2 Deliver appropriately timed feedback that focuses on moving learning forward



Lucy is year 2 teacher in a primary school in the Midlands. She has been told that feedback can be impactful, but also recognises the importance of high-quality instruction and effective formative assessment before providing feedback to children. She commits time to ensuring she delivers well planned, effective lessons, and carefully crafts her tasks and questioning to elicit a better understanding of where pupils' learning gaps are for a given task.

However, despite having a good sense of what pupils' weaknesses are, Lucy is unconvinced that her feedback is moving pupil learning forward. She is currently providing very regular feedback to pupils (so much so that it sometimes becomes a burden), and her feedback focuses on praising pupils and their talents. She regularly tells a pupil, for instance, that she is 'a natural mathematician', but this doesn't seem to be improving the pupil's performance.

### Lucy wonders:

- **When exactly should I be providing feedback to pupils?** Do I have to provide really regular, immediate feedback?
- **What should my feedback focus on?** Should I comment on particular aspects of the work or the abilities of the pupil?

Lucy realises that she needs to offer more appropriately timed feedback, which provides specific information that can move learning forward.



Once effective initial instruction has been delivered—and following the establishment of the learning intention and formative assessment of pupils' understanding—teachers should then provide appropriately timed feedback, which focuses specifically on the task, subject, and/or pupils' self-regulation strategies. This recommendation draws from the review of evidence that informs this guidance, alongside previous reviews, feedback theory, reflections from practice, and our expert panel, to offer broad principles on *when* to provide feedback and *what* to focus on.

*“Research investigating the relationship of feedback timing and learning/performance reveals inconsistent findings”*

Valerie Shute (2008).<sup>35</sup>

## Delivering appropriately timed feedback

The evidence regarding the timing and frequency of effective feedback is inconclusive.<sup>36</sup> On the one hand, immediate feedback may be effective as it could prevent misconceptions from forming early on. However, delayed feedback could also be beneficial as it may force pupils to fully engage with the work before being given an answer.<sup>37</sup> In turn, this may lead to them working hard to retrieve information they've already learned, which could help pupils to remember more of the learning.<sup>38</sup>

The review that informs this guidance found that feedback interventions delivered immediately after learning, delivered up to a week after, and delivered during learning are all associated with similarly sized positive effects on attainment.<sup>39</sup> No studies were found where feedback was given over a week after the learning.

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## What *might* appropriately timed feedback look like in the classroom?

Given this ambiguity in the evidence, there is not one clear answer for when feedback should be provided. It may therefore be inappropriate for schools to mandate exactly when feedback is given. 69% percent of primary and 76% of secondary teachers surveyed by the review of practice stated that their school feedback policies explicitly specified the frequency of written feedback required.<sup>40</sup> This level of specificity is likely unwarranted (see **Recommendation 6** for further

discussion of school feedback policies). Rather, it is likely to be more productive to leave decisions on the timing of feedback to classroom teachers, recognising the crucial role that teacher judgement plays in delivering feedback at the appropriate moment.

To guide this judgement, teachers should consider three things: the **task**, the **pupil**, and the **class**. (see **Table 1** overleaf).

**Table 1: Appropriately timed feedback**

The task <sup>41</sup>	The pupil	The class
		
<p>The timing of feedback may need to be adjusted depending on the task that pupils are undertaking. Some tasks may give feedback themselves so immediate feedback may not be necessary.</p> <p>For instance, mistakes may arise quickly and obviously in music or art if a pupil can clearly hear or see an error arising. The same may be true for PE, where a pupil attempts an exercise and quickly sees that it doesn't achieve the required results. Missteps may also become self-evident in maths or science if upon completing a task, a pupil has not produced the answer they expected.</p> <p>The specific task itself may also have been designed to give immediate feedback—for example, a computer-aided quiz that informs pupils of right or wrong answers. Or perhaps the teacher has revealed answers in advance and has asked pupils to show their workings to get there. In these instances, a teacher will not need to provide immediate feedback as the task itself provides it.</p> <p>However, other tasks may not reveal errors, gaps in knowledge, or misconceptions so swiftly: when writing an essay or conducting a science practical, for example, students may be less likely to recognise the source of their errors early on. Failure to correct these could lead to these misconceptions enduring and hampering later understanding so teachers may opt to intervene earlier.</p>	<p>Some pupils may benefit from more immediate feedback whereas others could improve as a result of delaying feedback.<sup>42</sup></p> <p>A teacher can monitor pupils' progress in tasks, assessing which pupils may be struggling unproductively (who may require a hint or a steer in the right direction or may want some immediate feedback in order to feel more supported) and which pupils may be progressing well. Providing feedback to pupils already working well may distract them or even deprive them of the opportunity to learn and get to the answer themselves.<sup>43</sup></p> <p>A pupil may well fall between these groups and a teacher may then look to provide scaffolded feedback,<sup>44</sup> varying the amount of feedback depending on the pupil to ensure that they are not given the full answer but given enough guidance to usefully progress.</p> <p>As Dylan Wiliam explains:</p> <p><i>'Most teachers have had the experience of giving a student a new task only for the student to ask for help immediately. When the teacher asks, "What can't you do?" a common reply is, "I can't do any of it." In such circumstances, the student's reaction may stem from anxiety about the unfamiliar nature of the task and it is often possible to support the student by saying something like, "Copy out that table, and I'll be back in five minutes to help you fill it in." This is usually all the support the student needs. Copying out the table forces the student to look in detail at how the table is laid out and this busy-work can provide time for the student to make sense of the task itself.'</i><sup>45</sup></p>	<p>Upon setting a task, a teacher may notice early on that a particular misconception has arisen across a large proportion of the class. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When teaching the positioning of numbers on a marked number line, a Year 1 teacher realises that many children do not understand the model sufficiently and are confused about why numbers are placed on marks rather than in intervals.</li> <li>• Following a reading of <i>Romeo and Juliet</i> and setting a task for pupils, a Year 8 English teacher realises that many pupils are confusing which characters belong to the Capulets and which to the Montague family.</li> <li>• When teaching GCSE geography, the teacher notes that half the class have misunderstood the definition of 'low income', 'medium income' and 'high income' countries.</li> </ul> <p>Teachers often catch these misconceptions early on and, if widespread enough, may opt to provide immediate whole-class feedback or re-teach that particular area of content.</p>



These suggestions offer a prompt of what to consider when thinking about when to give feedback. Given the ambiguity in the evidence, they serve to underline the crucial importance of in-the-moment teacher judgement—a key component of a teacher’s professional skill—over policies that predetermine feedback frequency based on arbitrary time periods (such as once a week).

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*Given the ambiguity in the evidence, the timing of feedback should be left to the careful judgement of the classroom teacher.*

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### **Focusing feedback on moving learning forward<sup>46</sup>**

Compared to the timing of feedback, the evidence on what to focus feedback on may offer a clearer message. Feedback should focus on moving *learning* forward, targeting the specific learning gap identified by the teacher, and ensuring that a pupil improves. Specifically, high quality feedback can focus on the **task** (its outcome and advice on how to improve when doing that specific type of task), the **subject** (and the underlying processes within that subject), and **self-regulation** strategies (how pupils plan, monitor, and evaluate their work).<sup>47</sup> See **Table 2** for further definitions and examples.

Feedback that focuses on a pupil’s personal characteristics is less likely to be effective.<sup>48</sup> This may be because feedback about a person (rather than about the specifics of a task, their understanding of a subject, or their use of self regulation) may not provide enough information to close a learning gap and move learning forward. In addition, it could distract the learner away from learning, becoming self-conscious and focusing instead on the impact the feedback has had on their self-esteem. For example, calling a pupil a ‘natural mathematician’ will not provide any additional information that they can use to improve their performance in maths and it could even distract them away from learning.

**Table 2: What *might* the content of effective feedback look like in the classroom?**

Effective feedback should focus on moving *learning* forward, targeting the task, subject, and self-regulation strategies. The examples given here also demonstrate that pupils need to be given opportunities to act on feedback; further guidance on this is given in **Recommendation 3**. These messages may be delivered via written or verbal feedback (and the method of delivery is likely to be less important than the content).

	Feedback more likely to move learning forward			Less likely
	Task	Subject	Self-regulation strategies	Personal
	 <p><i>Feedback focused on improving a specific piece of work or specific type of task. It can comment on whether an answer is correct or incorrect, can give a grade, and will offer specific advice on how to improve learning.</i></p>	 <p><i>Feedback targets the underlying processes in a task, which are used across a subject. The feedback can, therefore, be applied in other subject tasks.</i></p>	 <p><i>Feedback is focused on the learner's own self-regulation. It is usually provided as prompts and cues—and aims to improve the learner's own ability to plan, monitor, and evaluate their learning.</i></p>	 <p><i>About the person. It may imply that pupils have an innate ability (or lack of) and is often very general and lacking in information.</i></p>
<b>KS1 examples</b>	In maths, pupils have been asked to order objects from lightest to heaviest. The teacher explains to one child: 'You're nearly there, but two of these are the wrong way around. Can you use the balance scales again and see which object is really the heaviest?'	In English, a pupil is struggling with letter formation. The teacher discusses this with them: 'Let's just look at how you are writing your 'd's. Can you see you have started at the top and gone down and done a loop? Remember we start writing a 'd' by doing a letter 'c' shape. Let's try that again.'	In art, pupils are painting self-portraits. The teacher is helping children to practice completing activities in a given time. He explains: 'At the end of today I'm going to put the portraits up for our exhibition, so we need to think about finishing in the next 15 minutes—do you think you'll be able to finish? If you haven't started on your eyes, make a start now.'	'Great work—you're brilliant at maths!'
<b>KS2 examples</b>	In science, a class is identifying the components of a circuit. The teacher notes that they are missing some key features.  'Many of you are identifying the bulbs and wires in this circuit. Can you also label the switches and cells?'	In history, pupils are having a class debate on whether Boudica was a hero. The teacher notes that not enough historical terminology is being used and explains: 'Historians use appropriate historical terminology. In every point you each make, I want you to use a specialist term we've learned, such as "rebellion" or "Iceni tribe".'	In maths, pupils have been set a problem to solve. One child does not know where to start. The teacher prompts them to review and plan: 'Look at our display of strategies that we've use to solve problems we've tackled in the past. I think one of those could help you to solve this problem.'	'This is ok, but you are better than this!'



	Feedback more likely to move learning forward			Less likely
	Task	Subject	Self-regulation strategies	Personal
<b>KS3 examples</b>	In computing, pupils have been asked to complete a series of sums where they add together two binary numbers. The teacher reviews the work and informs each pupil how many they have got correct. She asks them to revisit the questions, work out which are incorrect, and correct them.	A maths teacher notes that many pupils are not ordering their operations correctly, which they need to do across the subject. She selects an example problem to complete as a whole class before asking pupils: 'Find the problems from the last lesson where you incorrectly ordered your operations and correct them.'	Pupils in PE are trying a shot put. One throws a personal best but her following effort only reaches half the distance. The teacher asks her: 'Why do you think that attempt was less successful? What should you do differently next time?' The pupil identifies that she was holding the shot put in the base of her middle fingers for her better attempt, rather than her palm. She is asked to try again and monitor the difference.	<i>'You're a gifted historian—superb effort as always!'</i>
<b>KS4 examples</b>	In English literature, a teacher has read pupil essays on <i>An Inspector Calls</i> and reflected that many pupils are not including enough evidence to support their points. She shows pupils an example of a former pupil's work featuring a paragraph lacking in evidence, and another paragraph with sufficient evidence. She feeds back: 'Review these paragraphs. Can you notice the difference? Now, revisit your work, and add in evidence where you think it is necessary.'	A German teacher is reflecting on the oral mock exam that pupils have just undertaken. Some pupils failed to use the correct grammatical gender when speaking, which is required across the subject. He feeds back to some pupils:  'You need to use <i>der</i> , <i>die</i> , or <i>das</i> in the correct places. For the first ten minutes of this lesson, practice speaking about your part time job with your partner and correct each other when you use the incorrect <i>der</i> , <i>die</i> or <i>das</i> .'	A geography class are approaching their exams. They created individual revision plans at the start of term but, having just marked pupil mock papers, the teacher suspects that some pupils may only be revising the topics they are already strong in. She feeds back to one pupil who is struggling: 'Review which questions you struggled on in the mock exam. Amend your revision plan to give more priority to your areas of weakness.'	<i>'This is poor work—I expect better from a student of your standard'</i>
<b>KS5 examples</b>	A health and social care class are discussing the factors that contribute to disease. The teacher notes that only genetic factors are being identified and feeds back: 'The discussion is showing a rich understanding of the genetic factors, but what about environmental factors? Can you name some environmental causes of disease?'	A politics teacher is giving feedback on pupil essays on the strength of select committees in U.K. politics. Pupils were asked to include 'well-substantiated conclusions', a key skill in politics, but one pupil's essay featured a conclusion that did not match the argument in the rest of their essay. The teacher feeds back: 'Your conclusion is unsubstantiated and does not match the rest of your essay. Re-examine your argument and redraft your conclusion.'	A psychology student has submitted an essay which is of a much poorer quality than their previous attempt. The teacher asks them to consider: 'Thinking about your preparation, and with reference to the assessment objectives, what three things did you do differently this time which has resulted in a poorer outcome?' Once these are identified, the pupil will be asked to remedy these shortcomings in a redrafted essay.	<i>'Fantastic work—you're a born Chemist'</i>

As some of these examples demonstrate, it can often be challenging to clearly demarcate the difference between feedback at the task, subject, and self-regulation level. However, teachers and leaders do not need to be overly concerned by this. These types illustrate the sort of feedback that may be effective,

and the lines between them may be blurred. The key distinction to make is to ensure that feedback is directed towards the task, subject, and/or self-regulation—it is less likely to be effective if it provides a general comment about the pupil's characteristics.

## Grading, praise, and effort

Debates remain over whether to provide a grade on pupil work, whether to use praise, and whether to comment on effort.

On grading, there is evidence which suggests that grades alone may not improve pupil performance and that they are better replaced by comments.<sup>49</sup> However, more recent studies have demonstrated mixed results following the provision of comments instead of grades.<sup>50</sup> Perhaps giving a grade alone could still provide information to progress learning providing preparatory work has been done to ensure that the learner already knows what that grade means and what improvements they need to make on specific types of task—and in that subject generally—to reach the next grade. Careful planning may also be needed to ensure that pupils are not disheartened or distracted by the grade (see **Recommendation 3** for more discussion of how pupils *receive* feedback). If these conditions are not in place, and if this preparation has not been done, a comment that replaces or accompanies a grade may be preferable to a grade alone.

Praise is another area that has been contested. While pupils may like praise, some reviews have suggested that it may be ineffective in improving pupil progress—it may distract the learner away from the learning towards a focus on their self esteem.<sup>51</sup> If praise is to be given, it may be more effective to praise pupils for a specific task, subject, or self-regulatory achievement (rather than more general praise and comments such as ‘great work!’). For instance, a drama teacher saying, ‘Fantastic work there on your characterisation of that character. Your use of body language and facial expressions was brilliant!’, may well be more effective than ‘well done, great acting!’. The former provides more information. A teacher may also opt to provide praise in the classroom for purposes other than feedback on learning. For example, praise can be used to reinforce positive behaviour and keep pupils on task, as explained by the EEF’s [Improving Behaviour in Schools](#) guidance report.<sup>52</sup> Specific and focused

praise may also be given when pupils demonstrate the use of social and emotional skills in order to support their social and emotional development (as detailed by the EEF’s [Improving Social and Emotional Learning in Primary Schools](#) guidance report).<sup>53</sup>

Effort is a similarly challenging area to offer clear guidance to teachers. Some teachers comment on the effort that pupils have put into an activity when providing feedback. There is limited evidence on the impact of these comments or effort scores. They may well be time-consuming to administer while it may also be tricky for a teacher to ascertain precisely how much effort a pupil has put into a task. However, if a teacher chooses to comment on effort, it may be useful to link the comment to actions students can take to improve at the task, the subject, or their self-regulation rather than a comment on a pupil’s general effort. For instance, rather than saying ‘you haven’t tried hard enough’, a maths teacher may say, ‘I really think you could improve your answer to question 2 if you spent a little more time on it’ (task), ‘your graphs would be perfect if you just think a little bit more about how you have labelled your axes’ (subject) or ‘make sure you give yourself time at the end of your work session to review your working and ensure you’re correct’ (self-regulation).

Despite these complexities, we are left with a clear message for what to focus feedback on:

*Regardless of whether a teacher chooses to give grades, offer praise, or comment on effort, the feedback they give on learning is more likely to be effective at improving pupil attainment if it includes a focus on the task, subject, and/or self-regulation strategies. It is less likely to be effective if it focuses on a learner’s personal characteristics or provides a general or vague comment.*

## Research in focus 2



### **‘They don’t give us our marks’: the role of formative feedback in student progress**

*Emma Smith and Stephen Gorard, 2005* <sup>54</sup>

Academics from the University of York conducted an evaluation of a change in feedback practice in one Welsh secondary school. The school divided Year 7 into four mixed-attainment teaching groups. The aim was for one of these groups to be given enhanced formative feedback comments on their work for one year, but no marks or grades. The other three groups were given marks and grades with minimal comments.

Following the intervention, the groups that received marks, grades, and minimal comments had superior outcomes for English, maths, and Welsh. There was no clear difference in science attainment. The evaluation concluded that aiming to provide enhanced formative feedback for a year (while removing marks and grades) did not improve results.

However, rather than providing a clear answer on the arbitrary ‘grades or marks versus comments’ debate, this study may further support our recommendation to focus feedback on the learning, on the specific learning gaps identified, and on the task, subject, and self-regulatory strategies. This is because it would appear from pupil interviews in the evaluation that the ‘enhanced formative comments’ were not delivered effectively and did not provide enough information to progress learning. As one pupil remarked, ‘Miss, I’d like to know my marks because comments don’t tell us much.’ Students explained that they received comments such as ‘try harder next time’, ‘try and improve’, or just ‘very good’ and, broadly, the feedback provided appears to have been ‘poorly understood by the students and did little to enhance the learning process’.

It is unsurprising, therefore, that pupils in the ‘marks and grades with minimal comments’ group made more progress as their feedback appears to have included more information than their peers in the ‘enhanced formative feedback’ group. One useful lesson this provides is not to focus on debates regarding grades or comments, effort or praise; instead, teachers should be intent on providing feedback that specifically targets the learning gaps pupils have, whether they be related to the task, subject, or self-regulation.

# 3 Plan for how pupils will receive and use feedback



Amelia is a high attaining Year 10 pupil in a school in the South West who is very confident in history. She was delighted with the essay she submitted on the strengths and weaknesses of the Weimar constitution. Having spent a long time planning and writing her response, she was convinced she would receive very positive feedback.

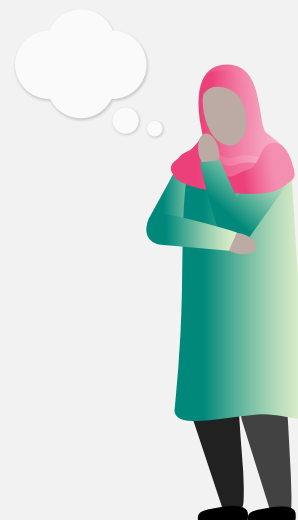
Amelia's teacher provided useful and purposeful feedback, focusing on the task (pointing out that Amelia could have explained more about the impact of proportional representation on the German parliament), subject (providing tips on how to construct an argument), and self-regulation (suggesting that Amelia could read back over her essay at the end to monitor and correct errors). The teacher pointed to specific high quality elements of Amelia's essay, while also giving suggestions for improvement.

Amelia is disheartened by the feedback and it knocks her confidence. She had expected that her essay would be perfect and, therefore, wouldn't need any further changes. The next lesson then focuses on a different topic so she has no opportunity to act on the feedback and improve her work.

## Amelia's teacher wonders:

- **How can I ensure I provide feedback while considering Amelia's response to it?** I want to give constructive and useful information, but don't want to knock her confidence and reduce her motivation.
- **How can I ensure that Amelia has the time and opportunity to use the feedback offered?**

The teacher realises that she needs to pay careful attention to how Amelia receives feedback while also ensuring that students are given the opportunity to act on the feedback provided.



In addition to delivering high-quality initial instruction (including formative assessment), carefully judging the appropriate timing, and crafting the most impactful content, when providing effective feedback teachers also need to pay close attention to how pupils receive feedback and what they do with it after. As Stiggins, Arter, Chappuis and Chappuis remark, the most important decisions taken in classrooms are not taken by teachers but rather by learners.<sup>55</sup>

A variety of pupil-level factors, such as pupil motivation, self-confidence, trust in the teacher, and capacity to manage information, are all likely to impact the

effectiveness of the feedback provided. Moreover, careful planning is required to provide time and opportunities for pupils to use the feedback given.

Unfortunately, we lack a clear idea of exactly what influences the receipt of feedback and which specific methods can support the use of it. However, drawing from studies found by the review underpinning this guidance, the expertise of our panel, and reflections from the review of practice, we can suggest some pupil-level factors likely to influence the effectiveness of feedback and offer ideas on how to plan activities that enable pupils to make use of feedback.

## Receiving feedback

A variety of factors may influence whether pupils seek and welcome feedback—and are then able to use it effectively—and these may affect pupils differently. Careful consideration is therefore needed when offering feedback to pupils; a ‘one-size fits all’ approach may not be so impactful. Teachers surveyed in the review of practice already recognised this challenge: 80% of primary and 71% of secondary teachers surveyed vary their expression of feedback depending on the pupil.<sup>56</sup>

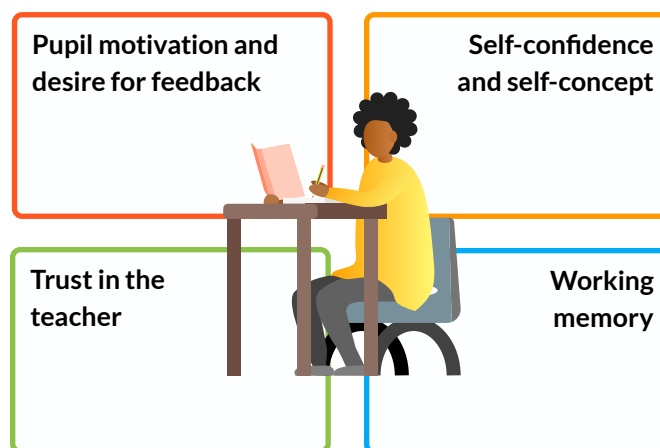
Factors that may influence a pupil's use of feedback include:

- Pupil motivation and desire for feedback;
- Self-confidence and self-concept;
- Trust in the teacher; and
- Working memory.

**Pupil motivation and desire for feedback:** 69% of secondary and 47% of primary teachers surveyed by the review of practice identified a lack of pupil motivation as a reason why pupils may not use feedback. A further 49% across both groups stated that pupils declaring ‘I’ve done this piece of work, it’s over’ prevented pupil use of feedback.<sup>57</sup> Evidently, teachers recognise that pupils need to seek and welcome feedback for it to be effective and that different pupils may be motivated by different types of feedback. Whereas one pupil may be motivated by feedback targeted at improving their learning and skills, another may be more interested in feedback that directly addresses how they can perform better in tests.<sup>58</sup>

**Self-confidence and self-concept:** Pupil levels of self-confidence in their academic performance and their ‘self-concept’ (what they believe they can achieve) may impact whether they use the feedback provided, particularly when the feedback given contradicts their view of themselves. If learners believe they are very capable, and then receive constructive feedback which suggests that they need to make changes and improvements, this may agitate and distract them from the learning (as is the case of Amelia).<sup>59</sup> Indeed, 21% of primary and 33% of secondary teachers surveyed in the practice review identified being ‘disheartened by feedback’ as a reason why pupils may not use it.

Figure 3: Factors that may influence a pupil's use of feedback



**Trust in the teacher:** If pupils do not trust their teacher, they may be unlikely to use the feedback provided. If they do not think their teacher is acting in good faith, they may believe that suggestions for improvement are unfair criticisms and reject them. Indeed, 9% of primary and 19% of secondary teachers surveyed in the review of practice suggested that a lack of respect for the source of feedback stops pupils from using it. However, if they do trust their teacher, and believe that feedback is being provided because the teacher has high expectations of them and wants them to improve, the feedback is more likely to be effective.<sup>60</sup>

**‘Working memory’:** This is where information that is being actively processed is held but its capacity is limited and can be overloaded.<sup>61</sup> Teachers may therefore need to consider how the feedback they provide interacts with a pupil's working memory, being careful not to overload it.<sup>62</sup> Different pupils will have different capacities and so teachers may need to adapt and provide simpler, clearer feedback to some pupils.

## How *might* a teacher prepare pupils for receiving feedback?

More research is needed if we are to fully understand how students receive feedback, what some researchers call 'recipience processes'<sup>64</sup>—pupil-level factors that affect whether a pupil wants to, and is capable of, using the feedback provided. Until then we can suggest some ideas for how a teacher might prepare pupils for receiving feedback that take into account these potential factors.

- **Discussing the purpose of feedback.** Conducting discussions with the class, or with particular individuals, on why feedback is being given may support pupil motivation and desire to receive feedback. The key is to emphasise that feedback is provided not to be critical but because the teacher has high standards and fully believes pupils can meet them.<sup>65</sup>
- **Modelling the use of feedback.** Pupils may be more likely to welcome and use feedback if this is modelled to them by their peers. If a peer expresses a willingness to receive feedback and recognises that feedback is not designed to be critical of them but offered to improve their learning, a pupil is more likely to use feedback to improve their own learning.<sup>66</sup> Teachers may, therefore, look to explore ways of modelling the effective use of feedback. For example, could whole-class discussions focus on a learner who has improved their work because of feedback? Additionally, could the effective use of feedback be celebrated when it happens in the classroom?
- **Providing clear, concise, and focused feedback.** Sometimes less is more. Providing clear and concise feedback (which still features task, subject, and/or self-regulation advice) may support teachers in offering feedback that does not 'overload' pupils.<sup>67</sup>
- **Ensuring pupils understand the feedback given.** Of course, careful thought should be given to the language and content used in feedback to ensure that pupils understand what the teacher is saying. If providing written feedback, teacher handwriting also needs to be clear enough for pupils to comprehend.<sup>68</sup>

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*“Giving feedback to learners does not “magically” improve their skills or boost their grades without those learners acting.”*

**Naomi E. Winstone, Robert A. Nash, Michael Parker & James Rowntree, 2017** <sup>63</sup>

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Whichever strategy a teacher opts to use, they should monitor whether their feedback is being used by pupils. If not, the approach will need to be adapted to ensure that pupils are welcoming and acting on the information provided.



## Planning time and opportunities to use feedback

As Dylan Wiliam has explained, effective feedback needs to be used as a windscreen, rather than a rear-view mirror. In other words, it should be a 'recipe for future action'. It is crucial that pupils are given the time and opportunity to use the feedback given so that it moves learning forward. Rather than just commenting on work that has been finished, it needs to impact the future work that a pupil will undertake.

Wiliam remarks that this 'is inherent in the origin of the term feedback—a term borrowed from engineering ...the important feature of feedback as it is used in engineering is that it forms part of a feedback loop'. After identifying a learning gap with effective formative assessment, feedback is then offered to close this gap. Only when that feedback is *used* by the pupil is the learning gap, and therefore the feedback loop, closed.<sup>69</sup>

Teachers in English schools recognise this and already aim to provide opportunities for learners to use and act upon feedback: 86% of primary and 87% of secondary teachers surveyed in the review of practice described having a specific mechanism in place to allow pupils to use feedback in lesson. Specific activities undertaken during this time include correcting errors, redoing work, or discussing feedback. However, despite this, 59% of primary and 44% of secondary teachers surveyed still stated that 'a lack of time' prevented pupils from effectively using feedback. Being mindful of these time constraints, teachers should consider: Are there short, powerful activities, that could be deployed to enable pupils to act on feedback?<sup>71</sup>

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*“Formative feedback might be likened to “a good murder” in that effective and useful feedback depends on three things: (a) motive (the student needs it), (b) opportunity (the student receives it in time to use it), and (c) means (the student is able and willing to use it).”*

**Valerie Shute (2008)** <sup>70</sup>

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## What *might* effective post-feedback activities look like in the classroom?

- **Detective activities.** As explained by William: ‘The most important thing is to make the way students respond to feedback a direct task, rather than just presenting feedback. So, the way I describe it is to make feedback into detective work. For example, rather than saying to students, “If you swap these two paragraphs around the story would be better”, you would say, “I think it would be better if two of these paragraphs were reversed. Find out which two you think I’m talking about”.’<sup>72</sup> A teacher may also put dots in the margin where there may be errors and ask pupils to find and correct them (which could be further scaffolded for some students if they replace the dot with codes which identify the type of correction needed, such as ‘e’ for ‘include more evidence’). Another example, which could be more useful for maths or science teachers, is informing pupils that a certain number of their responses are correct but not informing them which ones; they then need to figure this out for themselves.<sup>73</sup> These ‘detective’ activities require careful planning to ensure that they are tailored to pupils’ level of understanding.
- **Class discussion of feedback.** Providing opportunities for the class to collectively discuss the feedback provided may improve pupil use of feedback and their subsequent attainment.<sup>74</sup> Teachers could, therefore, use a class discussion to explore, explain, and clarify feedback before pupils use it in their next activity.
- **‘Three questions’.** In this strategy, a teacher poses three focused questions at the end of a written piece of work. The pupils then respond to these.<sup>76</sup> Teachers should ensure that questions are meaningful and focused and they will be different for different students.
- **Correcting errors and editing work.** Teachers may ask pupils to make specific corrections and edits to previous work. A checklist of common errors, with appropriate modelling of use by the teacher, may helpfully steer this approach.
- **Completing similar problems with feedback in mind.** This technique is very compatible with practical subjects such as PE, music, and art where pupils can instantly repeat performances but it can also be used across the curriculum. A maths teacher, for instance, could set a pupil another problem which requires them to use the feedback provided.<sup>77</sup>
- **Redrafting work.** (see Ash Grove case study)

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*“The important point is that the feedback is focused, is more work for the recipient than the donor, and causes thinking rather than an emotional reaction.”*

Dylan William (2018) <sup>75</sup>

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## Using feedback to inform next year's teaching

Using feedback to inform future teaching and learning may not only be confined to a teacher's current class. Indeed, all teachers interviewed in the review of practice explained that they use the feedback they provide to inform how they teach the topic next year.<sup>79</sup> By identifying the feedback that they regularly need

to give, this informs them of the learning gaps and misconceptions that often arise. In turn, this can be used to adapt the initial instruction provided to pupils next time the teacher teaches this topic, improving the quality of initial teaching.

### Case study: Ash Grove Primary School—Redrafting via one-to-one verbal conferencing <sup>78</sup>



In Ash Grove Primary School in Macclesfield, and across the Aspire Educational Trust, teachers have introduced one-to-one pupil conferences where teachers provide one-to-one verbal feedback part way through the writing process before pupils redraft work. This enables them to do two things:

- manage the emotional response to feedback; and
- ensure that feedback is used as a 'recipe for future action'.

After being set a task, pupils draft a piece of writing, fully aware that this piece will only be a draft. They are comfortable editing sections and deleting parts as they go. They then discuss the piece with their teacher in a short one-to-one conference during a lesson (while other pupils work independently). After a feedback conversation on how to take their writing forward, students redraft their response as a final version.

Teachers at Ash Grove suggest one of the key considerations required to effectively deliver this approach is being able to set valuable work which students can do independently, rather than time fillers, while conferencing happens. It is also important to note that this type of feedback is not given on all pieces of work all the time—it offers one method that ensures pupils use the feedback.

Ash Grove pupils have commented on how much it makes them feel their work is valued, and teachers prefer the approach to deep, time-intensive written feedback on all drafts. The conversation process means they can tailor feedback to individuals, particularly in terms of handling emotional reactions to feedback, while the process provides feedback at an opportune time for pupils to then use it to produce a high-quality final piece of work.

# REFLECTION

## Reflecting on the first three recommendations

Recommendations 1, 2, and 3 explain what effective feedback practice is likely to look like. They provide the core principles that should inform a teacher's feedback to pupils and following them is more important than using a particular method of feedback delivery (such as written or verbal).

Therefore, before we discuss methods of feedback delivery, we invite both classroom teachers and senior leaders to reflect on these principles:

- *To what extent do these principles reflect your current practice?*
- *What are the challenges that you may face in implementing these principles? How might you overcome these?*

## 1 Lay the foundations for effective feedback



**2** Deliver appropriately timed feedback that focuses on moving learning forward

**3** Plan for how pupils will receive and use feedback

## 4 Carefully consider how to use purposeful, and time-efficient, written feedback



Elena is a secondary school geography teacher at a school in the South East who teaches several classes totalling around 180 pupils. Outside of teaching her lessons, she spends at least six hours a week providing written feedback—usually completed in her evenings and weekends. Elena isn't convinced that the hours she is putting in are resulting in pupil progress and the heavy feedback workload is affecting her wellbeing.

Elena's school feedback policy stipulates that there should be 'teacher marking, in green pen, on a frequent basis (after every other lesson)', which provides a brief comment about the work. However, given the time constraints, Elena rarely has time to fully engage with pupil work. While she has managed to get some 'green pen' into her books after every other lesson, these are usually vague comments such as 'Brilliant work!', that Elena recognises aren't likely to have much impact on her pupils' learning.

Elena wishes that she had more time for planning lessons and making careful adaptations to the curriculum so that she can capitalise on her pupils' strengths as geographers and to identify areas for improvement. She would also like to spend less time on light-touch, general written feedback and instead provide purposeful written feedback, which addresses specific learning gaps and aims to move learning forward.

### Elena wonders:

- *How can I offer purposeful written feedback?*
- *What alternative approaches—such as 'live marking' or the use of 'marking codes'—could be more time efficient?*

Elena realises that she has to balance the opportunity cost of written feedback, deploying a broader repertoire of approaches, whilst ensuring that any feedback she does give reflects the principles of effective feedback. Additionally, she hopes her school feedback policy could be amended to reflect this.



Written feedback—whether that is written comments, marks, scores, or a combination of these—has traditionally been at the heart of school feedback practices and has been viewed more broadly as a fundamental aspect of teaching. In many cases, written 'marking' has often been conflated with 'feedback' and may indeed have unhelpfully supplanted other forms of feedback. For instance, the review of practice revealed that in a sample of 22 school feedback policies, only seven included the term 'feedback' in the title compared with 12 that included 'marking' or 'assessment'.<sup>80</sup>

However, more recently it has been recognised that written feedback can be heavily time intensive for teachers—that it comes with significant 'opportunity costs'.<sup>82</sup> As the Early Career Framework states, 'written marking is only one form of feedback'<sup>83</sup> and schools should carefully consider how written feedback is delivered and how it sits alongside verbal feedback (**Recommendation 5**). This will allow them to monitor the opportunity cost experienced by committed teachers such as Elena.

The review underpinning this guidance did find that written feedback interventions (which include comments, marks, or scores) are associated with improved pupil attainment when compared to no feedback or usual practice. There was no specific evidence on the use of certain techniques (such as 'live marking' or 'marking codes') but written feedback can be useful if delivered effectively.<sup>84</sup>

**However, crucially, rather than focusing on the method by which feedback is delivered, schools and teachers should ensure that all feedback fulfils the principles of effective feedback outlined in Recommendations 1 to 3.** If written feedback does this, it may well prove effective; however, such practices should be closely monitored for their impact on teacher workload and schools should continue to consider the role that verbal feedback can also play. The choice of method (written or verbal) should also be left to the classroom teacher, who can better judge what is appropriate (see **Recommendation 6** for more discussion of what school feedback policies should specify).

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*'Marking should serve a single purpose – to advance pupil progress and outcomes. Teachers should be clear about what they are trying to achieve and the best way of achieving it. Crucially, the most important person in deciding what is appropriate is the teacher.'*

**Eliminating unnecessary workload around marking, the Report of the Independent Teacher Workload Review Group (2016), chaired by Dawn Copping.<sup>81</sup>**

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## Are teachers spending too much time providing written feedback?

Teachers spend a significant proportion of their time giving written feedback on pupils' work. In both 2013 and 2018, Key Stage 3 teachers, for instance, spent 6.3 hours per week on written feedback.<sup>85</sup> Unsurprisingly, 65% of secondary teachers and 58% of primary teachers reported that their 'marking workload' was 'too much' in 2018,<sup>86</sup> and surveys indicate that written feedback has a particularly problematic impact on teacher wellbeing.<sup>87</sup>

Perhaps due to this workload and the stresses associated with written feedback, 81% of primary and 63% of secondary teachers surveyed in the review of practice noted 'recent' changes in feedback policies, the most common including a reduction in the frequency of feedback expected and a shift away from written feedback on individual books and towards whole-class and verbal feedback.<sup>89</sup> However, in some schools extensive written feedback remains a burden for teachers and the time teachers spend on it does not appear to have reduced substantially.

In addition to considering the relative impact on teacher wellbeing, extensive written feedback may have a significant opportunity cost when it comes to what meaningful work teachers could be undertaking instead. As such, school leaders should consider: what other tasks will a teacher need to sacrifice to provide feedback? Is the cost to other areas—reducing planning time, for example—worth the time spent on written feedback? How can I provide enough time for teachers to provide impactful feedback, some of which may be written?

*When asked by Teacher Tapp in November 2019, 'If a genie could fund one thing for every teacher in the country, what would it be?', more teachers requested a marking assistant who could mark for them for two hours a week (21%), than a £1,000 pay rise (16%).<sup>88</sup>*

## What *might* effective and time-efficient written feedback look like in the classroom?

Although the impact on workload needs to be monitored, written feedback, if delivered effectively, can support pupil progress. So, what *might* high-quality, workload-conscious written feedback look like?

First and foremost, in order to be effective, written feedback likely needs to reflect the principles of effective feedback explained in **Recommendations 1 to 3**. As such, it will be preceded by effective instruction (including considered formative assessment), will be timed appropriately, will focus on the task, subject, and/or self-regulation (reflecting the examples in **Table 2, Recommendation 2**), and there will be careful consideration of how pupils receive and then use feedback.

Beyond these broad principles, we lack evidence on specific strategies and methods for delivering written feedback that may be impactful (both for improving pupil attainment and reducing teacher workload). Drawing from our expert panel, the experience of practitioners, and our interpretation of the theoretical literature, we suggest that the following strategies could prove useful (alongside other strategies that schools may devise themselves):

- **Live marking** (see Charles Dickens Primary School case study). ‘Live marking’—where marking is given during rather than after the lesson—can be enacted in a variety of ways so that it proves an efficient approach. It may be undertaken with individual pupils during typical class teaching (careful consideration of the learning and focus of all pupils during this time is important) or it may be modelled to the whole class collectively using tools such as a visualiser (see the case study in **Recommendation 5** for more on this tool). This method may well save teachers time although teachers should still ensure that the feedback given is thoughtful and purposeful (rather than just adding the teacher’s pen to books for the sake of it) and that pupils are provided with opportunities to use it. The approach may also allow for additional verbal interaction with pupils, which may support the understanding of feedback.

- **Coded marking**. Using the shared understanding of the ‘concept of quality’ that teachers have devised for a task (**Recommendation 1**), a teacher can design (or develop in consultation with their pupils) a number of codes which they can use to mark pupil work. Indeed, 84% of primary teachers and 58% of secondary teachers surveyed in the review of practice stated that their school feedback policies recommended the use of written marking codes.<sup>90</sup> For example, for Amelia’s aforementioned history essay (**Recommendation 3**), her teacher could devise coded marking focused on the learning intentions of the task. These codes could be in the form of letters that correlate to aspects of a high-quality essay:

- **R**: Does this answer **refer** to the question?
- **E**: Does this offer clear **evidence** to substantiate your argument?
- **C**: Does this address the **causes** and **consequences** of key events?
- **A**: Does this **analyse** and present both sides of the argument?
- **P**: How can you **proofread** this to make your point more clearly?

The teacher could add these codes in the margin where these elements are present—or lacking—and may then prompt Amelia to make specific corrections or redraft the essay using the codes as prompts. If these codes were used over a number of tasks, Amelia may be asked to review previous work to compare and evaluate her performance on particular skills. Amelia could even use the codes herself to plan, monitor, and review her own work providing they have been fully explained and understood.





- **'Thinking like the teacher'**. The quality of written feedback may be constrained by the quality of planning, editing, and reflection exhibited in pupils' written work. Before the teacher expends significant effort on targeted written feedback, pupils could spend time pre-empting teacher comments and editing and revising their work (with scaffolds and modelling used where appropriate). This is likely to make the opportunity cost of written feedback more of an opportunity for meaningful learning.
- **Written comments.** It is worth noting that written comments can be effective and should not be rejected by teachers because of the opportunity cost associated. Indeed, they may offer an invaluable opportunity to provide task, subject, and self-regulation feedback. The key is to carefully consider when they are offered, ensure they include useful information (see **Recommendation 2**), and carefully monitor the time being spent on them. A teacher may not need to give them all the time, for every task, and if they are taking the time to provide them, they should ensure that this time is not wasted, ensuring that pupils are then given ample opportunity to use and act on the feedback (**Recommendation 3**).

### Case study: Charles Dickens Primary School—Live Marking <sup>91</sup>



Charles Dickens Primary School in Southwark adapted its feedback policy in 2016 to reduce the burden of some of its written feedback. Its new policy featured live marking.

Live marking involves the teacher moving around the room, reviewing work, and giving instant feedback, and only writing in books as required. At Charles Dickens, it operates as part of a range of strategies, including deep feedback conversations, to prevent feedback becoming solely concerned with surface features such as spelling and punctuation errors. It may be important to pick these out, but feedback also needs to focus on other elements of the task and subject in addition to supporting pupils' self-regulation.

Teachers at Charles Dickens Primary School report feeling more confident about knowing the progression of their pupils, what needs re-teaching, which pupils need support, and when they can move on with their instruction. Another reported benefit was that because the live marking was accompanied by spoken feedback, students may have received it better; teachers commented that their pupils better understood what the feedback meant and were able to act on it rather than struggling with the intended meaning of the teachers' written feedback.

The shift to giving feedback on work during lessons also meant that at the end of the school day, teachers could spend time planning effective instruction.

# 5 Carefully consider how to use purposeful verbal feedback



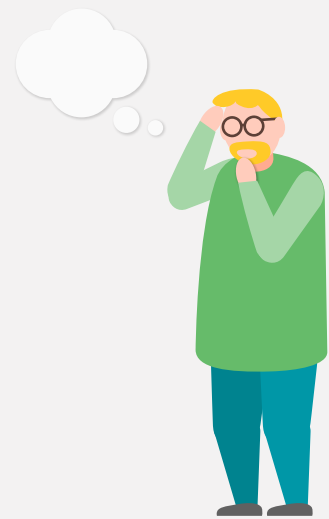
Declan is a Year 4 teacher at a primary school in Yorkshire. His school has recently transitioned from a feedback policy which mandated mainly written methods of feedback to one where teaching staff are encouraged to use more verbal feedback, including whole-class verbal feedback.

Declan is delighted. The burden of written feedback caused by the previous feedback policy was sizable, thereby preventing him from providing thoughtful and purposeful feedback to all pupils. However, having tried whole-class feedback a few times, he is concerned that his feedback may be too generic and that pupils may not be using it.

### Declan wonders:

- ***Is my whole-class feedback moving learning forward? Is it targeted enough at the learning gaps my pupils have?***
- ***How could I improve my whole-class feedback to have a better chance of my pupils making progress? Is this adequately serving the needs of struggling pupils?***

Declan recognises that even though he is now giving more verbal feedback, this still requires effective initial formative assessment (to identify which gaps need filling) and then focused feedback which addresses the task, subject and pupils' self-regulation strategies. Verbal feedback may take less time but it should still be as pedagogically rich.



Verbal feedback is an integral aspect of effective instruction that can be delivered in a variety of different ways. It can be pre-planned and highly structured, such as whole-class feedback or a structured one-to-one discussion; alternatively, it can be instantaneous and spontaneous, such as quick prompt task advice (*'you could do with more detail in that answer'*). It can be directed to an individual pupil or a specific group with shared learning needs. On the other hand, it could be offered to a whole class. It can accompany written feedback, whether that be comments, marks, or grades, or it can stand alone.

Regardless of how it is delivered, it is crucial to note that verbal feedback is not simply an 'easy' alternative to written feedback. While it may offer a time-efficient alternative to some forms of written feedback, careful thought and consideration is still required when delivering it.

The review that informs this guidance found that verbal feedback interventions were associated with a positive impact on pupil attainment when compared to no feedback or usual practice. No evidence was found on the use of specific techniques (such as whole-class feedback or one-to-one verbal discussions);<sup>93</sup> however, as with written feedback, verbal feedback can be impactful if delivered effectively.

**The central message, as with written feedback, is to ensure that any verbal feedback given adheres to the principles of Recommendations 1 to 3.**

**The principles of effective feedback are more important than the methods of delivery and the choice of method should be left to the teacher.**

Before it is provided, effective instruction should be deployed, feedback should be timed appropriately, it should focus on moving learning forward, and teachers should plan for how pupils receive and use it.

The review of practice revealed several perceived advantages of verbal feedback which may support the delivery of feedback in line with these principles. For instance, the conversational aspect of teacher feedback could support pupils in using the feedback. One secondary school teacher observed: 'When you have a conversation with them, they take it more seriously than when they just read it on a sheet, I find. And you can also clarify whether they actually understand what you mean by their target because sometimes they don't.' This also returns to the importance of how pupils receive feedback (**Recommendation 3**) and is a reflection shared by many teachers.

As the review of practice concludes:

*'Spoken feedback is valued by teachers because it is consistent with their views of good feedback, namely that it ... is possible to tune spoken feedback to the student based on their understanding in the moment, that it focuses on next steps, and that it avoids some of the problems associated with written marking in terms of communication ... It is further valued because of its connection to the personal relationship between student and teacher'*

(Velda Elliott, et al., 2020).<sup>94</sup>

### Case study: The Grove Primary School: providing whole-class feedback via visualisers<sup>99</sup>



At the Grove School in Wiltshire teachers deploy whole-class feedback with the aid of visualisers. Instead of discussing pupils' work individually with each of them, teachers use visualisers to share and collectively discuss examples of work.

To prepare, teachers read books but rarely write in them. They then use a handwritten sheet of comments which summarises the strengths and targets for the entire class, naming a number of students, before moving onto a small number of examples from books that exemplify some of those strengths and weaknesses, using the visualiser to further highlight these to the class.

In the younger classes, the teacher guides the students to pick the good points out of these examples. An 'even better if' example is also shared from the class, but usually anonymously. Before showing it to the class, the teacher may choose to check this is OK with the pupil, and explain why this is a positive activity, as their work will help the rest of the children to improve. Following a whole-class discussion about the examples, the class might then switch to paired talk to identify (for example) where full stops should go. After eliciting improvements from the class, the teacher and the children all work together to model an improved version of the answer via the visualiser.

In an older class, a greater range of work might be shared with strengths and targets identified by the same pupils who are considered mature enough to be able to share their weaknesses as well as their strengths. Pupils' emotional responses to this feedback are carefully managed as the feedback is carefully framed.

The school has an established culture of all learning together so that pupils do not feel threatened by the use of their work to model together; it is framed as 'helping the others', which echoes the collaborative approach of whole-class feedback.

Teachers reported that the whole-class feedback approach was quicker than offering extensive written feedback on all work for them but it was still pedagogically rich. It made them (and the pupils) think more deeply about the work because of the need to talk about it in class and do something with it. It also, they reported, shifted the mindset about 'finished' work; a piece of writing would become part of a longer process including editing and learning from each other to constantly improve.

## What *might* effective verbal feedback look like in the classroom?

As discussed, effective verbal feedback is likely to need to reflect the principles of effective feedback explained in **Recommendations 1 to 3** (and will mirror the examples offered in **Table 2, Recommendation 2**).

Beyond these broad principles, we suggest here some methods that *might* be useful:

- **Targeting verbal feedback at the learning intentions.** Using verbal feedback that explicitly uses the language set out in your initial learning intentions and directs pupils' attention back towards this could support more structured and focused verbal feedback. For instance, you may have designed a 'pre-flight checklist' at the outset of a task as a class. This checklist may have set out the success criteria for the task, ensuring that all were clear about the learning intentions. Your verbal feedback, whether at an individual or whole-class level, could refer specifically to this, providing a targeted and focused discussion.<sup>95</sup>
- **'Action points'.** Pupils may find it challenging to process detailed verbal feedback. As such, encouraging pupils to write down (or record in a recording device) and summarise the actions or goals resulting from a detailed verbal conversation may overcome the often transitory nature of verbal feedback (mitigating 'I forgot what you said, Miss!'). It is crucial that opportunities are then provided for pupils to act on this feedback and close the feedback loop.
- **Verbal feedback using a visualiser.** Pupils may find verbal feedback to be too abstract and separate from the task. By offering feedback whilst showing previously completed or currently ongoing work via a visualiser, the teacher can both maintain focused feedback on the task whilst also using the example to model and discuss learning intentions (see the Grove School case study).
- **Video or audio recording.** The global Covid-19 pandemic, which led to sustained partial school closures, led to teachers adapting and using new digital modes of feedback, which they may continue to use.<sup>96</sup> For example, some applications offered teachers the digital means to record verbal feedback for pupils. This could be used to provide pupils feedback that they could replay, which could perhaps support their retention of it. However, as we state in our [Using Digital Technology to Improve Learning](#) guidance report, 'as with all uses of technology, success will ultimately be determined by the quality of the pedagogy underpinning a programme's design'.<sup>97</sup> Put simply, it is the quality of feedback that trumps the mode of feedback. Using technology to record feedback may prove both an efficient and effective approach, however, the key consideration is to ensure that it fulfils the principles of effective feedback (**Recommendations 1 to 3**). See the Sandringham School case study for an example of the use of audio recorded feedback in art.

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*Verbal feedback is considered by schools 'across the board ... to be a constant, and a vital part of teaching and learning'.*

Velda Elliott et al. (2020)<sup>92</sup>

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Following the move to more verbal feedback practices, some schools and teachers opt to use verbal feedback stamps to evidence this practice. Indeed, 56% of primary teachers reported using them in their teaching back in November 2019.<sup>98</sup> Schools should

carefully consider why they are using such methods, which are unlikely to improve pupil outcomes. We should ask critical questions: who are these stamps for? What is their purpose? This is further discussed in the final recommendation.

### Case study: Sandringham School—one to one tutorials in secondary art<sup>100</sup>

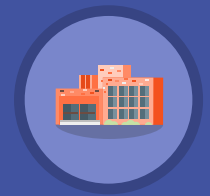


In secondary art lessons at Sandringham School in St Albans students often work on thematic projects across several lessons. To provide useful and focused feedback, which pupils may then use to improve their learning, Sandringham's art teachers use one-to-one tutorials during lessons to talk through pupils' ideas and support them in developing their portfolios. These tutorials are recorded electronically and shared with the student.

Tutorials aim to enable and support students to take a creative and personal response to the set theme. They also allow the teacher to share examples of relevant work from students in other classes to illustrate what the students might aim for. This includes sharing work produced by older students.

The teachers find that tutorials help the feedback to be personalised and appropriately timed, enabling the students to adapt what they are working on at the time rather than waiting until the work is submitted. The electronic record also supports students in continuing to use the feedback beyond the session.

# 6 Design a school feedback policy that prioritises and exemplifies the principles of effective feedback



Antonia is the headteacher of an all-through school in the North East of England. Addressing feedback has been a long-term challenge for teachers in the school, with colleagues looking to be more effective and efficient with their feedback, so she reads the new guidance report, *Teacher Feedback to Improve Pupil Learning*, with great interest.

Teachers have made some positive changes to a varied diet of feedback in the last school year. However, some approaches to feedback—such as always offering extensive written feedback once a week for all pupils in Key Stage 2—still appear a somewhat arbitrary legacy of practices associated with a previous leadership regime.

**Antonia wants to ensure the feedback policy of the school is rooted in evidence-informed principles. She wonders:**

- *What changes should we make to the feedback policy?*
- *How can we embed effective practice across the whole school and all key stages?*
- *How can we ensure pupils, parents, and teachers understand the changes and understand their value for pupils' learning?*

Antonia recognises the crucial importance of implementation along with the need for close attention to supporting teachers with professional development and wrap-around support so that they can make sustained habit changes.



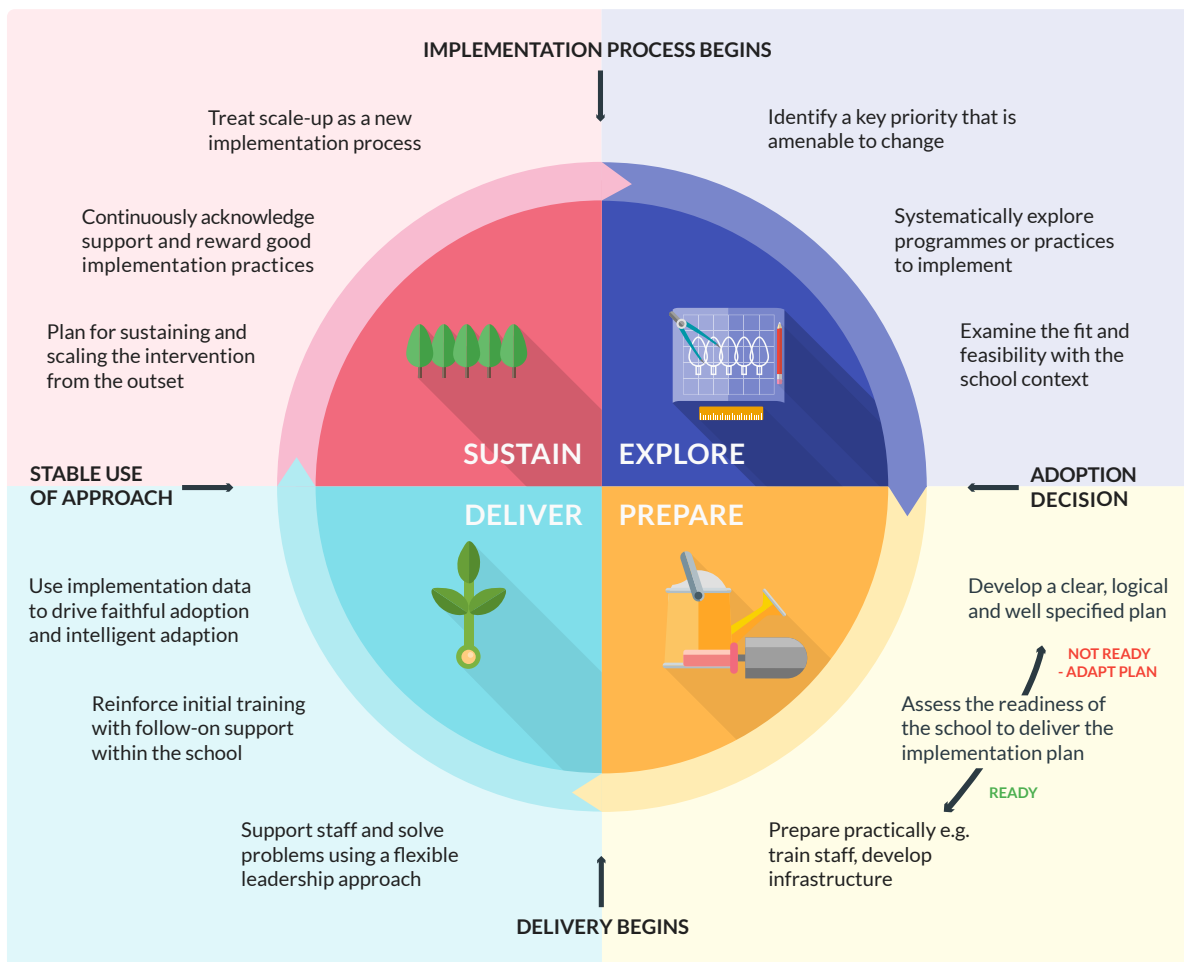
Feedback is part of the complex fabric of high-quality teaching that teachers work hard to implement successfully in their classrooms. As the available ‘tangled web’<sup>102</sup> of research evidence on feedback indicates, the range of impacts can be wide, which is a likely indicator of the difficulty in translating the principles of effective feedback into successful and sustained classroom practices.<sup>103</sup> As such, attempting to implement and enact the recommendations from this guidance report will require careful consideration.

Successful implementation of new teaching approaches is necessarily a carefully staged process

and not an event.<sup>104</sup> Indeed, teachers may have to align any proposed new feedback practices ‘with hundreds of existing practices’.<sup>105</sup> As a result, changes to even small daily practices are likely to be effortful for teachers and can even come into conflict with hard won and crystallised habits.

The implementation process from [Putting Evidence to Work: A School's Guide to Implementation](#) guidance report (**Figure 4**) can be a helpful starting point to consider the staged process for teachers to develop their feedback practices in the classroom.

**Figure 4: Implementation Process Diagram**



*“It doesn’t matter how great an educational idea or intervention is in principle; what really matters is how it manifests itself in the day-to-day work of people in schools.”*

**‘Putting Evidence to Work: A School’s Guide to Implementation’**  
Guidance report <sup>101</sup>



The best available evidence on effective implementation indicates that the development of new feedback strategies requires effective professional development.<sup>106</sup> This is necessary to develop both a thorough grasp of the feedback principles underpinning new approaches and for all colleagues to be able to apply the resultant strategies in practice.

Effective professional development is likely to be part of a targeted yet multi-stranded package of implementation strategies. An important driver to support teachers and steer practice is the school feedback policy—one that provides a formal set of

expectations for how feedback should be delivered. Indeed, 96% of primary and 91% of secondary teachers surveyed in the review of practice stated that they ‘mostly’ followed their school feedback policy and they believed that their colleagues did too.<sup>107</sup>

The application of an implementation strategy such as developing a new whole-school feedback policy is unlikely to be sufficient in successfully supporting change in isolation but it can prove a helpful starting point and can then be aligned with effective professional development.

### Research in focus 3:



#### Anglican Schools Partnership: Effective Feedback

*Evaluated for the EEF by Stephen Gorard, Beng Huat See and Nadia Siddiqui<sup>114</sup>*

This EEF pilot project focused on improving teachers’ understanding and use of effective feedback. Participating teachers tried to incorporate evidence-informed feedback into their lessons to help pupils understand their learning goals and develop strategies to reach them.

The project employed a cyclical action research design through which teachers reviewed academic literature on effective feedback before developing ways to apply it in the classroom. It was delivered over one school year and involved nine treatment and five comparator schools in the London Borough of Bexley. All pupils in Years 2 to 6 took part in the study.

The pilot evaluation concluded that **while effective feedback had shown promise in previous studies, improving feedback consistently is challenging**. Teachers often struggled to interpret, understand, and apply findings from academic research, and they likely required more resources and examples to support their practice.

The Anglican Schools Partnership evaluation reveals that it can be difficult to communicate and implement effective feedback. To support change, it may be useful to include clear exemplification in feedback policies while also supporting teachers with high-quality professional development.



## Box 2: Insights from Feedback in Action: A Review of Practice in English Schools <sup>108</sup>

The Feedback in Action review of school feedback practices (Elliott et al., 2020) searched for the feedback policies from 40 randomly sampled schools (20 primary and 20 secondary); 22 of these were available online (11 from primary schools; 11 from secondary schools). Insights from these policy documents include:

- Twelve policies included the word ‘assessment’ or ‘marking’ in the title; only seven included the word ‘feedback’ in the policy title.
- The length of feedback policies varied from half a page to 19 pages (the average length was seven pages).
- Seven of the policies referred to an ‘evidence base’, though none of the policies referred to a lack of evidence for specific practices.
- One secondary school and one primary school explicitly referred to methods that aimed to make written feedback more manageable.
- Common feedback practices cited include:
  - whole-class feedback (four primary schools; two secondary schools);
  - live marking (seven primary schools; four secondary schools);
  - marking codes (seven primary schools; two secondary schools); and
  - feedback conversations (four primary schools; five secondary schools).

Surveys and interviews with teachers were also undertaken as part of the review of practice. Several reflections were shared with regards to school feedback policies, including positive reflections. For instance, in line with **Recommendation 3**, 81% of primary and 74% of secondary teachers stated that their feedback policies encouraged them to provide opportunities to use feedback. Others reflected that their feedback policies are deployed to support purposeful and manageable practice: ‘The policy is designed for teachers to use best judgement about how and why they feedback; it discourages written feedback unless it is purposeful’, reflected one primary teacher.

## What *might* an effective feedback policy look like?—‘The Alphabet model’ (A–F)



The following insights can guide school leaders, such as Antonia, to work with colleagues to make constructive changes to feedback policies to support changes in practice:

**A**void the over-specification of the wrong things. You will want to specify a good conception of what effective feedback is likely to look like (see **Recommendations 1 to 3**). However, you still need to allow for teachers to exercise their evidence-informed professional judgement on elements such as timing and method (written or verbal). The key is to balance what you need to specify (principles of effective feedback) with what you do not (a specific frequency, a method, or surface level features of feedback such as colour of the pen used for written feedback or the use of ‘verbal feedback stamps’ simply to provide an accountable record of verbal feedback with no real purpose associated with improving learning).

**B**e clear on your purpose. Effective feedback should be focused on enhancing the learning of pupils, not to make judgements about a teachers’ performance or to match parents’ expectations (in the review of practice, 31% of primary and 20% of secondary teachers reported that they provided feedback to satisfy the SLT).<sup>110</sup>

**C**osts associated with feedback practices need to be carefully considered. School leaders need to recognise the opportunity costs that attend feedback—particularly written feedback. Where possible, time-efficient methods should be suggested—to mitigate teacher workload—as long as these are not detrimental to pupils’ learning. As discussed, the exact methods used should be decided by the teacher, but a policy could offer suggestions for how to make methods more manageable.

**D**emonstrate helpful worked examples of effective feedback practices. Ensuring teacher autonomy to exercise their evidence-informed professional judgment is likely to prove valuable, alongside providing examples of what effective practice looks like. In the EEF’s Anglican Schools Partnership: Effective Feedback pilot study, which focused on supporting teachers to enact effective feedback, a ‘number of teachers suggested that the inclusion of examples of the different types of feedback and modelling of feedback styles would have improved the training’.<sup>111</sup> Examples of potentially effective practices may be found in **Recommendations 1 to 3**, particularly **Table 2** in **Recommendation 2**.

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“The driver for feedback should not be the means of checking it”

Secondary teacher, interviewed in the Review of Practice (Velda Elliott et al., 2020).<sup>109</sup>

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### **E**xpectation management—of pupils, parents, and teachers—matters.

- **Pupils** value feedback on their learning. As such, you will need to communicate any changes in your practice so that they understand the ‘why’ of any new approach to feedback. One secondary school in the review of practice described how—when it implemented an approach to reduce the provision of extensive written feedback with a combination of book sampling and verbal feedback—a series of assemblies for all year groups were held to communicate the change.<sup>112</sup>
- **Parents** can also put value on feedback for their child’s learning. Often, written feedback in books is one of the few overt ways a parent can find out whether teachers are engaging with the learning of their child, and so any absence of written feedback can elicit negative inferences about attending to the efforts of, and paying attention to, their child. As such, carefully orchestrated communications with parents could be beneficial—along with pupils—to communicate any substantive changes to feedback practices (perhaps especially if they remove more ‘visible’ approaches to feedback).

- **Teachers** can align their feedback practices with the very ideals of their professionalism. For example, the review of practice described how several participants indicated they experienced the ‘psychological safety of having extensive written feedback, or a record of verbal feedback’. Additionally, a teacher from one of the primary schools said, ‘There’s quite a nice feeling you get from working, which is a totally kind of false one really, of working through a pile of books and marking them, needing to be working hard doing that.’<sup>113</sup> It is clear that teachers are likely to require both practical support and psychological safety to change their feedback habits. A feedback policy that explicitly secures teachers’ beliefs that they can exercise their autonomy and professional judgement is likely to offer teachers a helpful aid.

**F**ocus on the foundations of learning. Feedback does not exist in isolation; it must be rooted in the firm foundations of effective instruction. Any school feedback policy should therefore be sensitive to the characteristics of effective instruction and how they may vary by phase and subject. This takes us back to **Recommendation 1**, ensuring that the foundations are laid for effective feedback.

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# NOTES


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