FLASH Marking

This is a school-developed approach in which teachers give skills-based feedback rather than grades in KS4 English. All of the skills required to access the top band of GCSE English and English Literature performance have been translated into short codes that teachers use when marking work. These codes are also used in lessons to teach the skills and by students to make peer- and self-marking faster, focused and more useful.

Students use the codes to understand the skills they are good at and those they need to improve, and teachers track strengths and weaknesses across their classes, which helps them to tailor lessons towards the skills that students are finding difficult. Subject leads can also see which teachers are good and less good at developing certain skills, meaning that peer support and CPD can be appropriately directed at the teacher level.

This project is being led by Meols Cop High School, who developed the approach. Two teachers per school (the English subject lead and one other English teacher) will be trained in the approach over three training sessions. In between training sessions, these teachers will be expected to cascade the learning to the other English teachers within their schools.

Why are we funding it?

The EEF review of marking (2016) suggests that specific, actionable, skills-based feedback is more useful for students and also that grading has a long-term negative impact on some pupils. For example, a study conducted by King’s College, London found that pupils were less likely to act on feedback if grades were awarded alongside comments.

As a result of the marking review, EEF committed to spending £2 million to build the evidence base around teachers’ marking. This is the second grant awarded with that funding, with the other project being Digital Feedback in Primary Maths.

Meols Cop High School has already piloted the approach with subject leaders of English from local secondary schools; this showed that the approach was feasible and could be transferred to other schools.

How are we evaluating it?

The intervention will be evaluated by a team from Durham University as an efficacy trial. Efficacy trials aim to test whether an intervention can work under ideal conditions (e.g. when being delivered by the intervention’s original developer). The evaluation will be a two-armed RCT with 100 schools, 50 implementing FLASH Marking and 50 acting as a business-as-usual control group, who will conduct their marking as they would normally.

All English teachers within a department will be trained in the approach, but the evaluation will focus on pupils who start to use the codes in Year 10 and continue to use them for the two years prior to the GCSE English and English Literature exams, which will be the primary outcomes for the evaluation. There will be an in-depth process evaluation alongside the impact evaluation to understand implementation and necessary conditions to success.
When will the evaluation report be due?

The evaluation report will be published in Spring 2022.