

National Association for Primary Education

Effective Marking

Appraising Young Children's Work

Marking is an important part of the process of education. If the marking is for a summative purpose then the aim must be to achieve the most accurate and objective result which can be added to more subjective and interpretive records of the child's progress. If the purpose is formative then the objective must be to produce a sensitive and penetrating analysis which is of value to both child and teacher.

Summative marking is best undertaken independently of the child's teacher. In this way objectivity is ensured. The professionalism of teachers should include a willingness to undertake the marking of the work of children from other classes in the school or from other schools. Organisations which design summative tests should accept the need for tests to challenge the understanding of the tested skill and its application in other contexts rather than testing only the rote learning of a skill or technique. It is essential that tests should be standardised for the age of the child tested. National summative testing of primary pupils which puts forward an "expected" level to be met by all children of a school year should be reformed to include age standardisation.

Formative marking must always be considered a preliminary to face to face interaction by teacher and child. There is little or no formative value in marking work without the child present and then returning the marked work to the child in primary school expecting that they will infer how to progress from the annotations or marks made by the teacher. The most that happens is that the child takes pleasure in seeing the teacher's gold star or words of praise --- but the formative impact is minimal. The impact in such circumstances on the child who is finding learning difficult and who has received many corrections and low marks is wholly negative. There is a reinforcement of failure.

Ideally, marking should always be undertaken alongside the child. Marking should be selective and confined to one or two, three at the most, salient points which, when understood and accepted by the child, can in the course of time result in improvement. It is counterproductive to identify more errors. If marking is carried out without the child present this should always be followed by personal interaction which will provide the opportunity for teaching the individual which is essential to the achievement of progress.

Effective marking should be accepted and implemented throughout a school. Parents and governors should be fully informed with regard to the school's policy.

