

# Spend less time marking



If assessing children's work is beginning to dominate your weekends, it could be time to find a more efficient way of providing pupils with meaningful feedback, suggests **David Dunn**...

**H**ow many times have you looked at the ever-burgeoning pile of books balanced precariously on the edge of your desk and wished you'd started them sooner? Or just left them and watched them grow and grow, putting off the day when you have to deal with them? You are faced with huge demands on your time when it comes to marking and assessing children's work. Just have a look at these simple, rough calculations that prove the point.

Let's assume that you teach one lesson of English and one lesson of maths every day and let's also assume that you have 30 children in your class. That equates to 60 books each night. If you spend only two minutes per book, that's two hours every night; 10 hours per week. And that's without any other subject marking. As you can see, that pile of marking grows very, very quickly and will soon have you dreading the (inevitable) time over the weekend it will take for you to catch up.

It doesn't need me to point out that two minutes per book is no time at all if you are doing any sort of detailed marking that doesn't just involve a tick and a smiley face stamp. (You know you've got one hidden away somewhere, even if you don't want to admit it!) It also doesn't need me to point out that this kind of marking load is unsustainable – especially when you look at what written feedback should aim to do, i.e.:

- enable the celebration of achievements in the work produced
- identify the next steps for learning
- provide information that will enable learners, and others, to monitor progress against standards and personal targets

**As you can see, that pile of marking grows quickly**



# Marking that matters

## TRY THESE EXAMPLES OF WRITTEN FEEDBACK TO HELP CHILDREN REFLECT ON THEIR WORK...

- ✓ 'Can you please explain how . . . why . . . ?'
- ✓ 'It was fantastic the way you used (your target/learning objective/one of the success criteria). Why did you choose that?'
- ✓ 'I was pleased with the way that you . . . ?'
- ✓ 'I can see that you can . . . Now I would like you to . . . ?'
- ✓ 'Can you describe how you came to this conclusion?'
- ✓ 'What are you most proud of in this piece of work and why?'
- ✓ 'If you could do one thing differently next time what would it be and why?'

If we accept that these three points are important then there is no way that we're going to do them justice by spending just two minutes on each book. So we have to think about how we can manage to give the most useful feedback possible to the children, in the form of marking, and still not go mad through hours spent with a pen in hand. Therefore, we have to mark smarter. Obviously you have to follow your school's marking policy, but it should be possible to implement some of the suggestions below.

### 1 Mark every third piece

Rolling marking is a way of making sure you give detailed feedback to the children whilst keeping your sanity. You do not need to mark every single piece of work in detail; keep a record and mark every third piece in detail, whilst marking the others in a more efficient way. Put all of the pupils on a different marking cycle so you are marking

after every lesson, but not every pupil's piece of work. Those who don't have detailed marking can work with others in peer-marking or assessment.

### 2 Use peer-marking

This is similar to peer-assessment in that children mark each other's work against a set of criteria. This is not something that can be done overnight; the children will need to be taught how to 'peer mark' and shown what they need to be looking for. This is something that I've found works best after you have modelled what you expect. You can do this with a piece of fictitious work shown on the interactive whiteboard/overhead projector. Make sure you use the vocabulary that you would want the children to use – and give them plenty of examples to practice on. For older children, a 4:1 ratio works well here: four positive features against one feature for improvement. Obviously you can tailor these expectations for your class.

### 3 Hunt for success

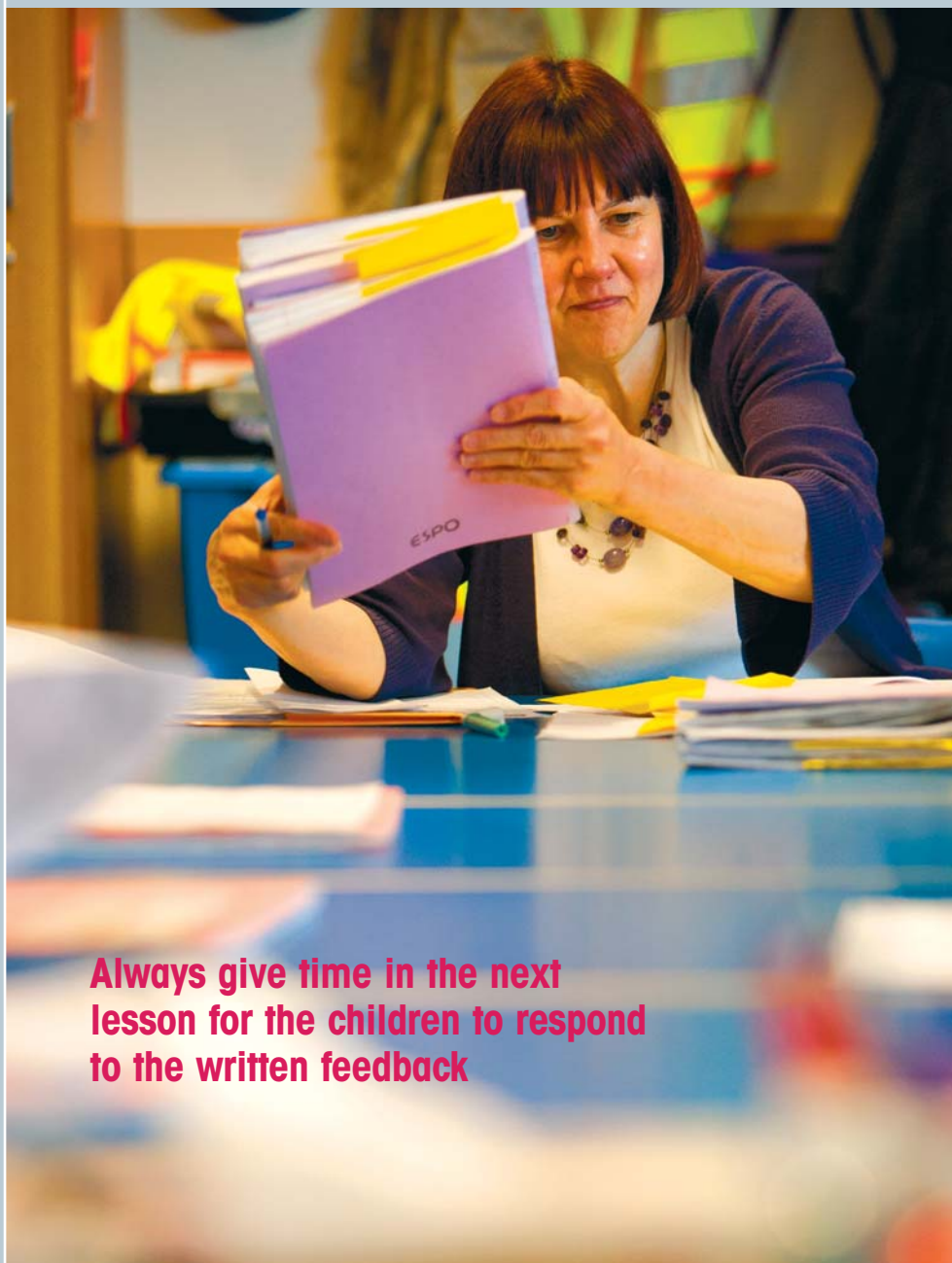
You can try this activity in tandem with peer-marking, or as a standalone activity. You provide the success criteria and the children, in pairs, hunt through their work to see if they can find evidence of these. The success criteria need to be explicit; ensure children are actually looking for evidence of success, not evidence of failure. Again, the language for this activity needs to be taught and modelled. Once your children have mastered this technique you could extend and challenge them by asking them to identify next steps for their learning.

### 4 Give children time

When you are marking a piece of work in detail, it is important to make sure all the advice you have given is used. Always give time in the next lesson for the children to respond to the written feedback. Make this an integral part of your lesson; don't worry that it takes up a few minutes at the start – it is extremely worthwhile and will further the children's learning and understanding no end. It also gives the children a focus at the beginning of every lesson, offering them reflective thinking time.

Remember that you want the children to be able to use your marking to develop their learning; by asking questions you can ensure that you do just that, and by giving them the time to regularly comment and extend on what you've written you are giving them the very best opportunity to extend their learning. It also helps you to know that all that time you have spent slaving over books hasn't been for nothing.

Next time we're looking in more detail at how peer assessment can help you to further embed AfL within your classroom. See you then!



**Always give time in the next lesson for the children to respond to the written feedback**