

# ***Feedback in Action: A review of practice in English schools (2020)***

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This document provides a summary, you can find the full version of the review here:

[https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/public/files/Evaluation/EEF\\_Feedback\\_Practice\\_Review.pdf](https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/public/files/Evaluation/EEF_Feedback_Practice_Review.pdf)

A mixed methods review of feedback practices in primary, secondary and Further Education (FE) settings in England was undertaken by the University of Oxford (on behalf of the EEF) and published in July 2020. This involved a medium-scale survey of 391 teachers across 307 schools, a documentary analysis of school feedback policies, and qualitative interviews with 32 teachers in 8 institutions.

## ***Survey findings***

A survey was deployed across primary and secondary schools in England to gain perspectives from teachers on feedback practices and policies at each stage of education. The survey sample was made up of teachers across a range of experience levels and teaching phases from a diverse set of schools across the country. Some of the main findings are discussed below.

When asked about the forms of feedback used in the previous fortnight, ‘spoken feedback’ was the most used method across both primary and secondary settings, with 97% of primary and 96% of secondary respondents using this method. In both cases this was followed closely by written feedback (87% of primary, 88% of secondary), then whole class feedback based on marking work (86% for primary, and 83% for secondary). However, written feedback was used more for those teaching certain subjects at secondary level, including English, art, drama, PE, music, computing, and technology.

The majority of primary and secondary teacher respondents expressed that they vary the medium of feedback depending on the pupil. This was felt to be appropriate to address the pupils’ needs, confidence, focus, and anxiety levels. As discussed in recommendation 3 of the ‘Teacher feedback to improve pupil learning’ guidance report, pupil level factors, including motivation, self-confidence, trust in the teacher, and working memory capacity can influence how feedback is received. Varying the medium of feedback may therefore be beneficial, varying the approach to suit the pupil. Responses from the survey revealed that teachers vary their feedback by placing a higher emphasis on spoken feedback, using codes and symbols, and giving a greater level of precision and more structured feedback for certain pupils to make it easier for them to apply it to their work. In particular, teachers identified pupils with SEND and EAL as those for whom they would adapt the medium of feedback.

The survey also found that across primary and secondary settings, teachers felt that pupils not having an understanding of how to apply feedback was a barrier to them using feedback to make progress (64% of primary teacher respondents, 69% of secondary teacher respondents). A lack of motivation was also cited as a primary reason why pupils don’t act on feedback (69% of secondary respondents, 47% of primary respondents). Although they reported that they allowed time for pupils to respond to feedback, 59% of primary respondents felt that pupils did not use feedback due to a lack of time, whereas this was reported as a barrier by 44% of secondary respondents. As outlined in recommendation 3 of the guidance report, teachers can plan for how feedback will be received and used by pupils in order to ensure that it moves learning forward (and the guidance report offers suggestions of strategies that can support this).

Teachers in primary and secondary settings reported their school feedback policies specified an expected frequency of marking (68% of primary respondents, 78% of secondary respondents). Policies were also explicit about what written feedback should look like for pupils (76% of primary, 64% of secondary respondents reported that their policies specified this). These findings suggest that some school feedback policies may be over specifying the frequency and method of feedback required. Further discussion and advice on how to improve feedback policies may be found in recommendation 6 of the guidance report.

In primary and secondary settings teachers stated that feedback was primarily given for pupils. However, teachers also reported providing pupil feedback for other audiences, such as for the benefit of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) (31% of primary and 20% of secondary respondents). At primary level, a higher number of respondents reported that the feedback they gave was for the benefit of Ofsted compared to for parents (24% for Ofsted, 19% for parents). At secondary level, it was the reverse, with 13% responding that feedback was given for parents, and 12% for Ofsted.

## ***Analysis of school feedback policies***

This review of school practices searched for the feedback policies from 40 randomly sampled schools (20 primary schools; 20 secondary schools). Insights from these policy documents include:

- 12 policies included the word ‘assessment’ or ‘marking’ in the title, with only 7 including the word ‘feedback’ in the policy title.
- The length of feedback policies varied from half a page to 19 pages (the average length was 7 pages).
- 7 of the policies referred to an ‘evidence base’, though none of the policies referred to a lack of evidence for specific practices.
- 1 secondary school and 1 primary school explicitly referred to methods that aimed to make written feedback more manageable.
- Common feedback practices cited include:
  - Whole class feedback (4 primary schools; 2 secondary schools)
  - Live marking (7 primary schools; 4 secondary schools)
  - Marking codes (7 primary schools; 2 secondary schools)
  - Feedback conversations (4 primary schools; 5 secondary schools)

Further discussion and advice on designing an effective feedback policy can be found in recommendation 6 of the ‘Teacher feedback to improve pupil learning’ guidance report, including how to use the ‘Alphabet model’ to guide this process.

## ***Interview findings***

Eight case study schools (four secondary, three primary and one FE college) were recruited to take part in interviews about their feedback practices. In each school a member of senior leadership with responsibility for feedback policy and practice in the school were interviewed, as well as at least two additional members of staff from different phases (primary) or subjects (secondary and FE). A total of 32 teachers took part in interviews across the eight case studies. Interviews were semi-structured and explored teachers’ practices, their views around feedback, and how schools monitored feedback practices. Key insights from the interviews include:

- Teachers recognised the benefits of verbal feedback, particularly because it tends to be highly valued by pupils. It was felt that a combination of written and verbal feedback was helpful in creating understanding, strengthening relationships, and maximising the value of the feedback. As the ‘Teacher feedback to improve pupil learning’ guidance report explains, ensuring that the principles of effective feedback are followed is more important than the method opted for; however, evidently, teachers in the review of practice identified that verbal feedback provides opportunities to fulfil these principles, particularly as it may be more easily understood by pupils.
- In those schools where policies had been revamped in order to reduce workload via reducing regular extensive written feedback, time previously dedicated to written feedback had been repurposed to focus on planning next steps learning, and ‘closing the feedback loop’.
- Many schools had mechanisms in place to ensure written feedback was responded to when it was given.
- While schools monitor feedback in a number of ways, a number of interviewees mentioned that teachers feeling trusted was important, that monitoring should not be the driver of policy.
- Practical subjects often need flexibility in terms of how school-wide policies apply to them: most teachers in these subjects feel that they have that flexibility, or that policies which have reduced written marking to once or twice per half term are sufficiently flexible for them.