



How can attainment ladders support the feedback process for both teachers and pupils in a secondary school setting?



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Staff and pupils at Morriston Comprehensive school, an 11-18 school in Swansea, explored the use of formative assessment strategies. Their particular focus was developing effective feedback strategies so as to streamline teacher workload. Research recognises the importance of effective feedback to pupils, and their active involvement in the learning process as crucial. Teachers in Morriston wanted to see how the use of attainment ladders supported pupils in seeing their present position in relation to the learning goal of a lesson, and whether they gave guidance on the way to close the gap between the two.

‘The most powerful educational tool for raising achievement and preparing children to be lifelong learners, in any context, is formative assessment’ (Clarke, 2017:3)

Aims

The school wanted to explore the impact of attainment ladders on teacher workload and pupils’ engagement with their own learning. They wanted to see whether the ladders supported pupils’ understanding of desired goals, gave them the tools to improve their work, and supported teachers by reducing marking time.

What did learners say?

At the start of the study, pupils reported a clear understanding of the assessment system and their active role in it. They were, perhaps, less sure about the necessary steps needed to act upon targets and some expressed a preference for teacher-directed feedback rather than peer feedback.

By the end of the study, pupils reported having a clearer idea of how they could make changes their work and improve it.

Teachers felt that they had successfully moved towards more whole-class modelling of shared targets – and pupils felt this was useful as part of a repertoire of feedback mechanisms used in the school.

One of the pupils involved in the project said ‘I feel I have more idea now about how to improve my work; what sorts of things I can do to get better’. This sentiment was echoed amongst the group, with others commenting ‘I know more about what I can do – especially after the teacher has shown us how to do it. I feel more like I can use that then myself’.

What did teachers think?

Before the study, teachers reported that they typically spent a considerable number of hours marking every week. Some were unsure whether the hours put in to marking were reflected in a concomitant improvement. The school had an existing and well-understood assessment system, which was understood by pupils and staff.

During the study teachers expressed interest in exploring how to provide more explicit guidance on how to develop key aspects of pupils’ work in a manageable way.

After the study, teachers felt they were making more use of modelling and exemplification, including reverse modelling – where pupils co-construct with their teacher a ‘good’ example from a weak one –when addressing common targets in the work.

As noted by one of the teachers involved, ‘Marking is always going to be time consuming, but addressing some common elements as a whole class, providing strategies and so on, saves time in terms of addressing that particular aspect in one fell swoop’.

What was particularly memorable?

Book scrutiny revealed that over the course of the study, the marking in books became more focused. Teachers were able to identify precise skills needing development and set appropriate targets to meet these. There was increased evidence of pupil engagement with personal targets, and in the best examples there was dialogue between pupils and teachers evidenced through responses to comments made. The ladders helped pupils visualize their journey towards a target. This was, in the main through the teachers’ skillful use of the ladders in setting targets and focusing pupils’ attention. Teachers began to use whole-class modelling of common development needs so as to provide models and, importantly, reduce the time spent on individual feedback. This also helped by way of ensuring the ‘what’ and ‘how’ of target-setting were explored. Pupils seemed to feel that they had more idea of what a good piece of work looked like and how to develop their own skills.

‘Feedback is information given to the learner and/or teacher about the learner’s performance relative to the learning goals which then redirects or refocuses actions to achieve the goal’ (Sutton Trust report (2011).



What were the main challenges?

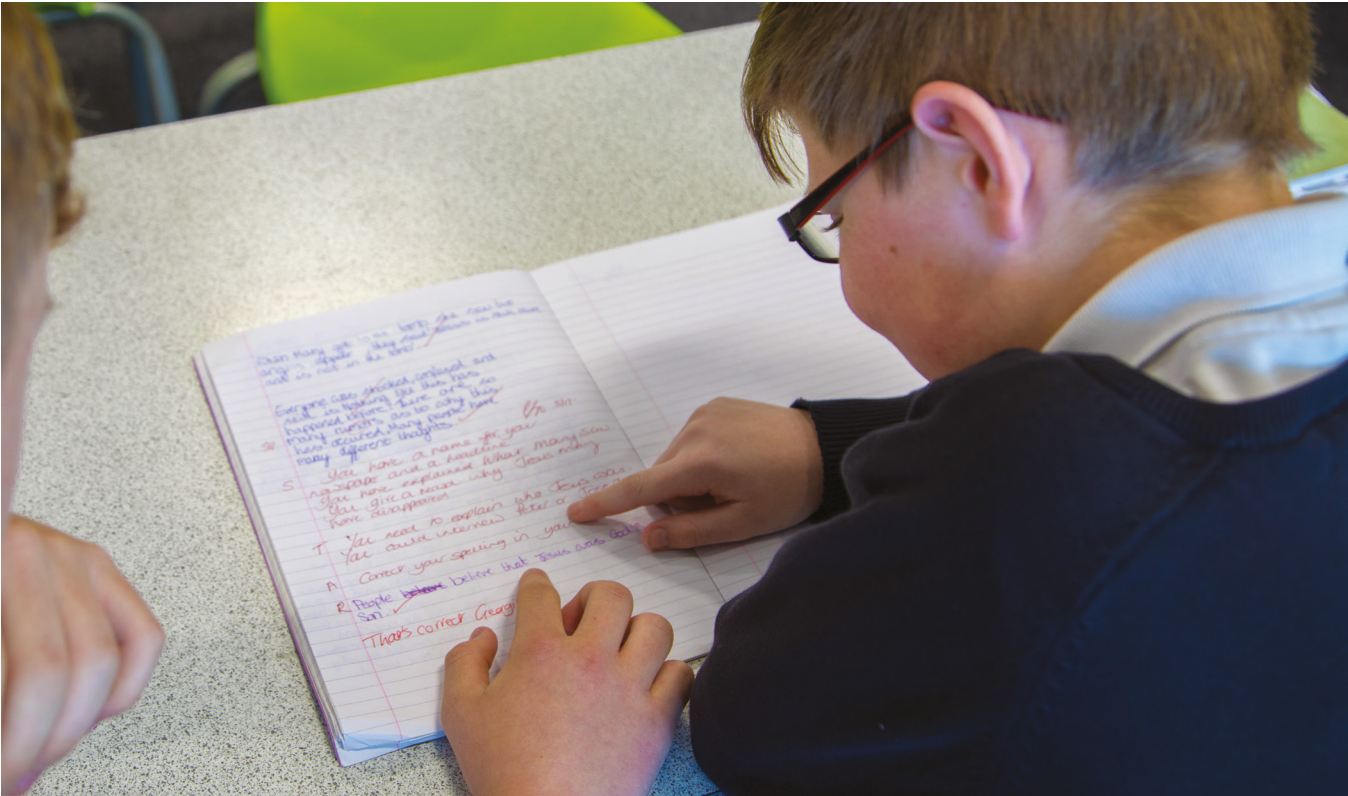
Time challenges and co-ordination of staff timetables were the main challenge for this project, but the school leaders and teachers worked to overcome this successfully.

Key facts

Morriston Comprehensive is an 11-18 situated in the East of Swansea.

There are nearly 945 pupils on roll, of which about 21% are entitled to free school meals.

This project involved three teaching staff and pupils from one year 8 class.





## Summary

Although there is a need for teachers to demonstrate some written marking of work, research indicates that the most effective feedback is that which is given immediately, and which makes 'invisible' processes visible. The importance of demonstrating to pupils how they can improve their work is an important part of effective feedback. Formative feedback is only formative if it results in change. This project, which is ongoing, focuses in on how that change can be made.

As noted earlier, in Morrision Comprehensive, moving from detailed written comments in favour of shared, modelled feedback using attainment ladders to inform the development focus has the potential to decrease teacher workload and help children feel that they better understood how to improve their work. The increased familiarity with the assessment systems in place in the school has seen pupils and teachers alike report a more common, shared understanding of how to improve work – particularly so when improvements are explained or shared by the teacher as part of the process.

There was some clear evidence presented in books and files where pupil's progress was developed through their response to feedback.

## Recommendations

- Whole class modelling can provide valuable guidance to pupils about how to effect change in their work.
- This can result in less teacher time being used up on repeated targets and more on developing whole-class understanding of how to meet common targets.
- The use of an agreed, shared assessment policy and set of practices can make pupils feel more included in the assessment process and can shift perspective regarding how to improve work.

## References

Clarke, S. (2017) *Outstanding Formative Assessment: Culture and Practice* London: Hodder Education

Sutton Trust (2011) Teaching and Learning Toolkit accessed from <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/resources/teaching-learning-toolkit>

**Hear from the teachers and pupils by following this link:**

[Link to video](#)

[Link to video](#)

[Link to video](#)

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